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<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/74v1t8x2>

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Publication Date

2015-09-01

DOI

10.1016/j.compcom.2015.06.004

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Glenn Gould and the Rhetorics of Sound

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Abstract

Given the increased attention to working with sound in multimodal and multimedia compositions, this essay summarizes current pedagogical research and scholarly conversations and then argues for more attention to the work of Canadian pianist and recording artist Glenn Gould, who was amongst the foremost artists of his time in critically thinking about and productively expanding the possibilities of sound recording and manipulation. Gould's own voice is a key feature of many of his recordings, and his brilliant radio documentaries serve as challenging models for what contemporary compositionists might do with sound and voice in the teaching of multimodal composing. Indeed, Gould anticipated so much contemporary media production, particularly a "do-it-yourself" aesthetic, from which we can still learn. Moreover, as Gould was primarily a musician and sound artist, his insights into and practice with working with sound and voice treat both sound and voice as their own material media; they are not, for Gould, metaphors and stand-ins for textual meaning making and, as such, his work might inform a multimodal compositional pedagogy that takes seriously the particular affordances of sound and voice. Attention to such work might help us consider what can be done with sound and voice in the production of multimedia "texts" where sound and voice act beyond the textual—not just as metaphors for textual meaning making, but as materialities with their own particular rhetorical and affective affordances and dimensions.

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As a teen, I loved the radio. My afternoons were often filled with NPR reports, or Karl Haas talking about classical music, or local radio personalities debating various issues. At night, I would frequently fall asleep listening to dramatizations of famous books and stories, thrilling, for instance, to a broadcast of the BBC's *Lord of the Rings* or Walter Miller's *Canticle for Liebowitz*, rendered by actors whose voices I remember to this day as inviting, compelling, and chilling. My sister and I would try our hands at our own "radio shows," making "mixtapes" that combined music, reportage, and our own particular kind of adolescent humor. More ambitiously, I once embarked on creating a radio documentary of the history of "classical music"; I didn't get very far, but I remember those early compositional efforts as an important creative outlet, one that informs my thinking about the teaching of multimedia to this day.

Indeed, my early adventures in sound and voice recording were probably not unique, and contemporary versions of them have become commonplace amongst those with access to digital technologies that allow for easy text, sound, and video recording, remixing, and dissemination. Scholars within my field of rhetoric and composition studies have recognized the powerful shifts in technologies of communication and meaning making occurring throughout the globe; for instance, the [New London Group \(1996\)](#) coined the term *multiliteracies* to describe "the multiplicity of communications channels and media, and the increasing saliency of cultural and linguistic diversity." Educationally, the teaching of multiliteracies has become a crucial and vital component of literacy training, and one that all of us in humanistic education should take seriously.¹

More specifically, contemporary sound studies attunes our attention now to the importance of considering sound—affectively, rhetorically, and materially—as a significant component of meaning making and experience. For instance, drawing from critical theory, performance studies, film and media, amongst other disciplines, a recent collection of essays from [2010, *Vocal Aesthetics in Digital Arts and Media*](#), adds substantially to discussions about how to approach and understand sound, conceptually and aesthetically, as mediated technologically and digitally. Under the editorial guidance of [Norie Neumark, Ross Gibson, and Theo van Leeuwen \(2010\)](#) contributors focused primarily on *voice* as a conceptually vexing yet productive category, one that we need to consider not just as a trope or figure but as material substance through which we can think and reconsider aesthetic practice, particularly given increased abilities to remix sounds and voices digitally and technologically disseminate a variety of aesthetic and cultural sound "texts." More writers, theorists, and artists are considering voice not just as the imminently deconstructable figure of meaningful presence but also as a material possibility for complex meaning making in digital spaces. And indeed, [Neumark \(2010\)](#) argued in her essay, "Doing Things with Voices: Performativity and Voice," that a "specter is haunting digital media—the specter of authenticity" (p. 93). Examining multiple examples of the use of voices in different kinds of performance pieces, ranging from installations to machinima, Neumark argued ultimately that, while we might at times romanticize, even fetishize *authenticity*, privileging the experience of live embodied voices, we may be missing a more complex use of voices in the creation of meaningful possibilities for communication:

If we listen to the voices as performative, we can hear an embodiment that the voice brings forth in the making—rather than expressing some pre-given essential body. We hear, too, in these voices a desire for intimacy and intensity that the digital paradoxically enables. These performative voices from media and media art speak an intensity and intimacy that is neither nostalgic nor essential, but that happens in the making and listening to the work. (Neumark, 2010, p.114)

Such attention to the sound of the voice exceeds the notion of voice as in textually active or passive voices or stylistic tones, and considers rather the theoretical—and material—complexity of sounds and voices. Moreover, thinking about sound *digitally* focuses attention on the possibilities of *recorded* and *manipulated* sound, opening up ways to re-conceive vocal intensities and intimacies. In terms of multimodality, we are now listening to the role of sound in writing, and listening to writing as a media as never before.

Taking the necessity of working pedagogically with multimodality and multimedia as a given, what I want to do in this essay is turn a critical ear to the particular ways in which sound and voice are picked up, used, and considered in the teaching of digital literacy and multimodal compositions. Composition studies, as a discipline, has devoted increasing attention to pedagogies engaging not just multimodality generally but sound specifically, so I situate my pedagogical considerations in conversation with the burgeoning work in that field. With that said, I also note that such work is often not always cognizant of the *histories* of sound composition. A key but overlooked figure in this regard, and one whose work I will explore at length later in this essay, is Canadian pianist and media artist Glenn Gould, who was amongst the foremost artists of his time in critically thinking about and productively expanding the possibilities of sound recording and manipulation. Gould's own voice is a key feature of many of his recordings, and his brilliant radio documentaries serve as challenging models for what contemporary compositionists might do with sound and the voice in the teaching of multimodal composing. In our rush to embrace “new” media, we sometimes forget the work of those who have gone before, who can challenge us with robust histories of multimedia production. Gould anticipated so much contemporary media production, particularly a “do-it-yourself” aesthetic, from which we can still learn. Moreover, as Gould was primarily a musician and sound artist, his insights into and practice working with sound and voice treat both sound and voice as their own material media; they are not, for Gould, metaphors and stand-ins for textual meaning making and, as such, his work might inform a multimodal compositional pedagogy that takes seriously the particular affordances of sound and voice. Attention to such work might help us consider what can be done with sound and voice in the production of multimedia texts where sound and voice act *beyond* the textual—not just as metaphors for textual meaning making, but as materialities with their own particular rhetorical and affective affordances and dimensions.

¹ Numerous books, collections, and articles speak powerfully to the many ways in which our notions of *composition*, *writing*, and the *textual* are increasingly multimediated. Preparation of students for literate participation in media rich public spheres—both outside and even *inside* the academy—demand greater attention to the convergences of textual, visual, and aural compositional practices and possibilities. Many scholars argue for how the teaching of (and with) multimodality can enliven and enhance students' engagement with more “traditional” print-based texts, such as the long essay. Consider, for instance, Jason Palmeri's (2012) *Remixing Composition: A History of Multimodal Writing Pedagogy*, for an historical view of multimodal pedagogies in composition studies.

1. Composing (with) sound

Before considering what the work of Glenn Gould has to teach us about composing with sound and voice, I'd like first to listen for gaps in the current scholarly conversation about teaching with sound—gaps that we might fill or to which we might add additional voices, such as Gould's. Recent work in composition studies has turned much critical attention to sound and the voice, particularly in the creation of *sound essays* or in greater attention to the *soundtracks* of the composition of Websites, PowerPoint presentations, and other multimedia.² Cynthia L. Selfe (2009), in her provocative and challenging essay “The Movement of Air, the Breath of Meaning: Aurality and Multimodal Composing,” made the strongest case yet for thinking about and working with sound and voice in the teaching of multimedia and multimodal literacies. For Selfe, work with sound and voice recordings seemed a natural—and necessary—extension of the technological turn in literacy education to embrace new communications and authoring tools and to teach an array of multimodal communication practices; as Selfe (2009) put it:

Composition classrooms can provide a context not only for *talking about* different literacies, but also for *practicing* different literacies, learning to create texts that combine a range of modalities as communicative resources: exploring their affordances, the special capabilities they offer to authors; identifying what audiences expect of texts that deploy different modalities and how they respond to such texts. (p. 643)

Selfe is in good company. As early as 1960, in an article for *College English*, Walter Ong wrote provocatively about being “Wired for Sound: Teaching, Communications, and Technological Culture.” Ong wrote tellingly that, “[i]n their whole trend, modern developments in communication, while they have not slighted the visual, have given more play to the oral-aural, which a purely typographical culture had reduced to a record minimum in human life” (p. 248). For Ong, the increasing presence of sound “heightens the personalist element in culture” (1960, p. 248), and he prognosticated huge changes in what it would mean to communicate in the future, as well as how we would understand communication and how we might teach it. In retrospect, Ong's pronouncements sound odd: on one hand, we can hear the wisdom of what he said in that our culture *is* as oral-aural as it is visual; on the other hand, we, particularly in composition studies, have seemed to privilege the arts and rhetorics of visual communication over sound, often metaphorizing voice as a textual problem. More interestingly, Ong seemed to want to differentiate between oral-aural and the typographical, attuning us to how the oral-aural might communicate *beyond* or *in addition to* textual modalities. Jack Selzer and Sharon Crowley (1999) supported such a call to think capaciously about extra-textual modalities of communication. In their collection *Rhetorical Bodies*, Selzer argued that “[l]anguage and rhetoric have a persistent material aspect that demands acknowledgement, and material realities often (if not always) contain a rhetorical dimension that deserves attention: for language is not the only medium or material that speaks” (Selzer & Crowley, 1999, p. 8).

Despite such an early call, attention paid to oral-aural rhetorics and modalities of meaning-making got a slow start in composition studies.³ A major turning point, marking the beginning of serious sustained attention to sound and voice, came with the 2006 publication of a special issue of *Computers and Composition* on “Sound in/as Composition Space.” The collection of essays, many by younger scholars relatively new to the field, sought vital connections amongst the various literacy practices—textual, visual, and oral-aural—that many were increasingly called upon to use in sophisticated fashion in their daily lives. Notable along these lines is Jody Shipka's (2006) essay, “Sound Engineering: Toward a Theory of Multimodal Soundness,” in which she described her multimodal/multimedia composition:

what these courses take as usual work has to do with presenting students with ongoing opportunities to demonstrate their increasing rhetorical awareness and communicative flexibility and to articulate both why and how the goals they set and the rhetorical, material, and methodological choices they make in service of those goals allow them to accomplish something that the adoption of other goals or choices might not have afforded. (p.359)

² For clarity's sake, I am going to bracket out attention to *voice* as a metaphor and other considerations of textual tonalities and stylistic sonorities—as important as that work has been—so that we can be more attentive to how compositionists have used and considered sound and voice materially.

³ Some dissertations signaled a desire to pick up on Ong's call for greater attention to the oral-aural. Scott Halbritter's (2004) dissertation, “Sound arguments: Aural rhetoric in multimedia composition,” sought to expose “the visual bias of most new media discussions in the field of rhetoric and composition by examining the importance of the aural, particularly through new media philosophies.” Similarly, Joyce Mosher's (2007) dissertation, “Sound practices: Transforming college literature and composition courses through aurality and orality,” picked up on Ong's work to promote “classrooms whose structure and learning activities value the oral equally with the written, and the aural equally with silent reading.” And an online, text, W. Keith Duffy's (2005) “A Pedagogy of Composing: The Rhetoric of Electronic Music in the Writing Class,” described innovative assignments in which students could construct arguments, “expressing their positions on controversial issues in writing *and* sound,” and noted how “music, much like writing, can be a rhetorical construct and serve rhetorical ends.”

Indeed, rhetorical flexibility seems a key component in the pedagogies advanced throughout the collection. In “Sound Matters: Notes Toward the Analysis and Design of Sound in Multimodal Webtexts,” Heidi McKee (2006) argued for thinking about *designing* sound elements in relation to other components of complex, multimodal texts; and in “Speaking on the Record: A Theory of Composition,” Tara Rosenberger Shankar (2006) argued that “limiting composition to what students can write is to discount what many of them know” (p. 391).

While often bracing and provocative, such calls for working with sound and voice—that is, for expanding the rhetorical and “literacy” palettes of our students, not to mention ourselves—would occasionally conflate sound and textuality or hierarchize them in potentially troubling ways. For instance, Shankar (2006) suggested at one point that spoken language was ephemeral but written language was “permanent” (p. 379) and, at another point, that our overall goal in working with sound should be “elevating the status of speech to a writerly media” (p. 380). While infrequent, such privileging of textualities isn’t surprising, given that composition has traditionally foregrounded the production of alphanumeric texts as its primary goal, if not reason for existence as a scholarly and pedagogical discipline. But the privileging of print sounds its notes even when scholars are attempting to speak more clearly about what makes sound and voice different from textual meaning making. Bump Halbritter’s (2006) article on “Musical Rhetoric in Integrated-Media Composition” spoke eloquently about paying attention to music and the need to develop composing practices that foreground “integrated media” (p. 318). And yet, he often treated music more as text than as sound experience, essentially asking what music signifies and how its signifying properties could aid and abet students’ forwarding of particular theses. Writing about the use of music in the film *The Big Chill*, he noted:

The sentence is a maxim, and as a maxim (a general truth) it presents a rather unarguable claim: not the stuff of strong theses. However, the song, situated within the film, filters/narrows/interprets the sentence to create a thesis statement by way of ironic juxtaposition, something the sentence, on its own, cannot accomplish. (2004, p. 325)

While Halbritter attempted to pinpoint what the musical thesis did that was separate from a written thesis, such discussion of music still seems a rather writerly way of making music talk and mean discursively and argumentatively. Pieces in the web-based companion volume to this special issue in *Computers and Composition Online* played out comparable arguments and textual biases, many of the articles showcasing student work in which, for instance, students created videos about their identities with accompanying soundtracks.

Following up on this work in 2009, Selfe’s “The Movement of Air, the Breath of Meaning: Aurality and Multimodal Composing” usefully summarized composition’s past engagement with sound, argued stridently for compositionists to work directly with sound in the teaching of multimedia composing practices, and provoked intensely heated debate about the proper goals and aims of composition as a discipline. Selfe (2009) has long staked out a commitment to multimodal composition and the teaching of multimedia literacies, and her goals and critique were clear; as she forcefully put it, “[s]ound, although it remains of central importance both to students and to the population at large, is often undervalued as a compositional mode” (p. 617). That undervaluing comes at a high cost since, as Selfe argued, the

almost exclusive dominance of print literacy [in our field] works against the interests of individuals whose cultures and communities have managed to maintain a value on multiple modalities of expression, multiple and hybrid ways of knowing, communicating, and establishing identity. (p. 618)

Selfe controversially, and perhaps reductively, identified people of color as those potentially coming from communities valuing “multiple modalities of expression, multiple and hybrid ways of knowing”; but her larger point was that *all* students, to participate robustly in contemporary public life, needed to develop “expertise with *all available means* of persuasion and expression” (2009, p. 618). Fortunately, we live and work at a time when new digital programs make it possible

for teachers and students to *compose with audio* in ways that they could not do previously: recording and layering environmental and artificial sounds to create a textured sonic context and collection of detail; weaving vocal interview and commentary sources together to provide multiple perspectives on a subject; adding music, silence, and audio effects to ways of changing emphasis, tone, pace, delivery and content. (Selfe, 2009, p. 638)

And in engaging such “sonic context,” we “expand the field of play for students with different learning styles and differing ways of reflecting on the world; we provide the opportunity for them to study, think critically about, and work with new communicative modes” (Selfe, 2009, p. 644). A failure to embrace “new communicative modes” will severely handicap many students’ success:

As faculty, when we limit our understanding of composing and our teaching of composition to a single modality, when we focus on print alone as the communicative venue for our assignments and for students' responses to those assignments, we ensure that instruction is less accessible to a wide range of learners, and we constrain students' ability to succeed by offering them an unnecessarily narrow choice of semiotic and rhetorical resources. (Selfe, 2009, p. 644)

Ironically, perhaps Selfe's tone—her insistent, passionate voice—led to some negative reaction. Douglas Hesse's (2010) response in the following issue of *CCC* maintained that, “[a]t stake [in Selfe's claims] are fundamental boundaries of our curricular landscape and our sense of its stakeholders, interests, and purposes” (p. 605).

Hesse's objections aside, Selfe's (2009) powerful argument rested on a recognition that we are essentially “ignor[ing] the history of rhetoric” (p. 618) in paying scant attention to orality and aurality, particularly as ancient rhetorical arts relied so much on a combination of studied oral performance and careful attention to the use and positioning of the body in the delivery of orations. Selfe rehearsed the history of recitation and public speaking in over one hundred years of composition instruction, and ultimately concluded that:

although writing assignments in the twentieth century sometimes focused on topics that touched on aurality and oral performances—popular music, for example—students were expected to *write* their analyses of songs, to focus on *written* lyrics, or to use music as a prompt for *written* composition. In scholarly arenas, scholars studied the history of rhetoric but considered orality and the canon of delivery . . . to be of interest primarily as a historical artifact. (2009, p. 627)

Even more compellingly, she argued that composition's attention to voice had been less about actual voices than their mimicry in textual production; reviewing the literature on voice, she maintained that “[w]hat these works on composition had in common . . . was less an understanding of embodied, physical human *voice* than a persistent use of the metaphorical language that remediated voice *as a characteristic of written prose*” (2009, p. 630).

Selfe (2009) provided some samples from student work, originally housed on her website, that she believed fleshed out the claims she made for the studied use of sound and voice in multimedia compositions. The four accompanying pieces were *sound essays*: “The Legacy of Music” layered a narrative about the importance of music in a family with snippets of song and instruments playing in the background; “Literacy = Identity: Can You See Me?” offered a poem with a jazz accompaniment to evoke images of being young and black and piecing together an identity based on literate performance; “Yelling Boy” consisted of the single voice of a graduate teaching assistant reflecting on a confrontation with a troublesome student; and “Lord of the Machines: Reading the Human Computer Relationship,” by far the longest piece, presented a robotic voice, interlaced with music, pop culture references, and computer sound effects, talking about the increasing saturation of contemporary culture with digital technologies. In the first, second, and fourth sound essays, layering was an important rhetorical affordance in that it allowed the individual voice to be augmented with additional sounds—mostly music but frequently other media artifacts and references, particularly in “Lord of the Machines.” But in every case this layering was used to *foreground* a voice, which was often telling us, particularly in “Yelling Boy,” a generally very linear, pretty thesis-driven story, with music or pop culture sound clips serving as background or examples. The end result was often a striking little essay-ette, but one that mostly “told” an essay or poem with musical accompaniment.

The samples are compelling, but one wonders if more could be done with the voices themselves, or if ambient and musical sounds could be foregrounded as opposed to accompanying a writerly thesis. “Lord of the Machines” moved in this direction, particularly with its augmentation of the speaker's voice. Curiously, though, Selfe (n.d.) noted:

[i]t is worth focusing on a few key elements in the introduction and first five minutes of this eleven-and-a-half minute audio essay—just in case readers are tempted to dismiss this piece as a fun little distraction from the serious rhetorical work of composing.

Selfe highlighted the narratively-driven argumentative beginning of the piece—perhaps because she knew that her audience, composition instructors, would be most comfortable with this focus and less so with the piece's more experimental work with sound and voice.

This focus on a voice telling a story isn't ultimately surprising given some of Selfe's (2009) underlying assumptions about the use of sound and voice in the composition classroom. While her essay made some initially provocative claims, her argument was, in my mind, often undercut by scant attention paid to the *materiality* of the sounds and voices she wanted to incorporate into—and use to transform—composition curricula. A repeated refrain throughout Selfe's essay was her call to work with sound so that students could better “identify their own communicative needs and to represent their own identities” (2009, p. 618). Identity appeared again and again as an important marker of what sound and voice could help make “real” and relevant in composing processes. And yet “identities” seem so *writerly*,

not particularly grounded in specific material or embodied realities. Speaking only about identities discursively elides the specificity of embodied experiences and somatic contexts—contexts through and out of which particular sounds and voices are made, heard, and understood. Moreover, for Selfe, identities often seem *a priori*, existing before the articulation of specific sounds and voices. What might happen if we consider sound and voice, not as the annunciation of pre-existing identities, speaking in particular “expressive” ways, but as part of a process of the invention of identity, or as embodied experiences that produce, complicate, and perhaps even deconstruct identity and its performances?

I offer my critique as a way to create a different soundspace, one in which we might begin to hear how working with sound and voice might exceed the textual or perform rhetorical work that the textual does not—or cannot. Some scholars, writing in a special issue of *Currents in Electronic Literacy* on “Writing with Sound,” (2011) expressed a desire to think about such soundspaces. For instance, Diane Davis (2011), in her introduction to the special issue, considered techno and rave music for its potentially extra-textual properties, noting the following:

Dance/trance music isn’t out to induce reflection (and so rarely prompts the dreaded drink-n-dials that, for example, rock ballads can); instead, it’s out to entrain, to engender a kind of rhythmic sync-up, hic et nunc, between music and body. Rave music, with or without its chemical partner (XTC), is out to move the body of the listener, to turn the listener into a dancer, situating the DJ as a kind of techno-shaman whose spinning magic moves the crowd to action and attitude through underground channels, beneath the reach of cognitive scanners. A kind of persuasion devoid of argument. . . S/he aims not to discover or make meaning but to produce an effect through affect, to produce an affective effect, that will move an audience to a particular behavior and mood. The DJ is a rhetor who reads, who writes, who performs, and who persuades without recourse to constative or referential modes of communication.

Davis here attempted to think sound and voice both alongside and beyond the textual, in ways that theorized the particular affordances—rhetorically and somatically—of sound and voice. Her call for such work was made clear in a later piece in the same issue, Geoffrey Sirc and Steph Ceraso’s (2011) “Digital Lyrical,” in which the authors claimed right away that, “[d]espite the recent attention that rhet/comp has been giving to sound and music in the 2000s, we often treat composing with sound merely as another form of composing with alphabetic text.” Sirc and Ceraso then articulated, even more forcefully than Selfe, why composing with sound and voice is significant for composition studies—not as a modality for the expression of identities and theses, but as a way of thinking, feeling, and experiencing non-writerly:

Exploring the embodied, affective dimensions of sound is most obviously relevant to rhet/comp because in the digital age, our involvement in experiencing and producing texts is more complex and much richer than discourse alone. We are not just producing texts; we are creating increasingly interactive, immersive environments that we don’t have a fully developed language to describe or understand yet. Because of its relationship to embodiment and affect, composing with sound provides a productive starting point for explorations of non-discursivity in rhet/comp. This is not to say that we should privilege aural modes of communication; rather, we need to pay attention to how all of the material and affective elements are orchestrated in a given text/environment/performance. (2011)

Sirc and Ceraso’s call to compose with sound *because of “its relationship to embodiment and affect”* seems precisely the missing piece in Selfe’s otherwise challenging claims for paying attention to sound and voice. If so, then composing with sound and voice might allow us more robust ways to understand relations amongst rhetorical discursivity, somatic experiences, emotional persuasion, and the complex knowledges of embodied identities.

But, of course, how? What would such pedagogies look like? And how might we develop productive ways to talk about the kinds of communicative and experiential “environments that we don’t have a fully developed language to describe or understand yet”? I turn now to the work of Glenn Gould for some provisional answers to such questions.

2. Technologizing sound

Canadian pianist Glenn Gould (1932–1982) was one of the 20th century’s most important pianists and performing artists. A specialist in the keyboard works of J. S. Bach, Gould left a lucrative and highly successful performing career in his 30s to focus his energies on studio recording, which led him eventually to work in radio, including the production of numerous radio programs and some startlingly original radio documentaries. Indeed, as a recording artist from the 1950s to early 1980s, Gould was amongst the most forward thinking and experimental classically trained musicians to take advantage of a wide range of possibilities of recording technologies. Gould recognized that recording would not only make available a wide repertoire of music, but would also challenge and change how people experienced music. Gould also wrote prolifically about his theories of music and recording and was amongst the first important

20th-century advocates for “do-it-yourself” creation (although he didn’t use that term). Gould very much believed that sound technologies would allow the “average” listener to create his own soundscapes, and that the recording and playback technologies were leveling the otherwise hierarchized field of performer and listener. Given the ease with which contemporary technologies allow us to remix media, I argue that Gould’s early theorizing and experimentation deserve our attention.⁴

And indeed, such experimentations were not simply about creating individualized pleasureable soundscapes, a bourgeois pastiche of musical styles. Critic and theorist Edward Said (2008) wrote extensively about Gould as performer and musician, arguing that Gould’s work with sound and voice embodied in his performances and recordings was itself a powerful form of critical thinking. For Said, part of Gould’s “critical” approach stemmed from his working with *music*, which, even though it can be discursively suggestive, works somatically and emotionally. Said noted, in particular, Gould’s interest in the music of Bach, the master of the fugue and polyphonic or multi-voiced compositions. Said (2008) argued in “Glen Gould, the Virtuoso as Intellectual” that Gould was attracted to a composer such as Bach because he was

a composer whose thinking compositions provided an opportunity for the thinking, intellectual virtuoso to try to interpret and invent or revise and rethink in his own way, each performance becoming an occasion for decisions in terms of tempo, timbre, rhythm, color, tone, phrasing, voice leading, and inflection that never mindlessly or automatically repeat earlier such decisions but instead go to great lengths to communicate a sense of reinvention, of reworking Bach’s own contrapuntal style. (p. 275)

The multi-vocality of Bach’s writing prompted Gould to re-imagine again and again how one “text” could be rendered multiply. Witness Gould’s 1955 recording of Bach’s “Goldberg Variations” and, at the end of his life, his re-recording of the same piece in the early 1980s—resulting in two conceptually divergent performances of the same piece of music. Said pointed out that the possibilities of *recording* are what allowed Gould to pursue his critical approach to sound and the play of multiple voices:

the very act of performance itself had to be taken out of the concert hall, where it was limited to the implacable chronological sequence and set program of the recital order and planted in the studio where the essential “take-twoness” of recording technique—one of Gould’s favorite terms—could be submitted to the art of invention—repeated inventions, repeated takes—in the fullest rhetorical sense of “invention.” (p. 275–6)

Gould realized that, because the same pieces of music could be recorded again and again, the possibilities for interpretation and creation of new sounds using the same source material became immense. And in this regard, Gould eagerly embraced technological innovations to produce unique and even provocative interpretations. In particular, Gould mastered the art of tape splicing, in which he would mix and match different “takes” of the same piece of music so that he could create the sounds and interpretations he wanted. Gould (1984d) knew that such splicing, not just to correct mistakes but to alter the texture of the recording and sound experience, was often, as he put it, labeled “dishonest and dehumanizing” by purists (p. 337). But he suggested instead that “one cannot ever splice style—one can only splice segments which relate to a conviction about style” (1984d, p. 338). And he vigorously pursued his convictions throughout his recording career, maintaining that such editing allowed him to move his recordings from mere documentation to aesthetic recreations and musical experiences in their own right. In “Glenn Gould as a Radio Composer,” music critic Richard Kostelanetz (1988) put Gould’s arguments this way:

By such careful and unsentimental self-editing Gould discovered that he could make on audiotape an interpretation that not only had fewer errors than anything he could do live but it could also be more original, more inspired and more thoughtful—in short, better in almost every way that a single musical interpretation can be better. (p. 559)

⁴ My turn to Gould, as noted, is in part an historical turn to correct the fetishization of the *new* in *new media* that makes the incorporation of multimedia into the composition classroom seem a particularly avant-garde gesture, even revolutionary. Turning attention to the long history of media—and in this case, sound production—will not only more appropriately inform our use of sound and voice but will allow us access to a range of rhetorical affordances, as well how particular affordances we take for granted have come into play. In this regard, I take a cue from Thomas Rickerts and Michael Salvo’s (2006) piece from the special “Sound” issue of *Computers and Composition*, entitled “The Distributed *Gesamtkunstwerk*: Sound, Worlding, and New Media Culture,” in which the authors took their own historical turn and examined the work of Richard Wagner, Jimi Hendrix, Brian Eno, and the band Yes, noting that “[m]usicians have been at the forefront of the new media revolution” (p. 298). Gould himself easily belongs in this mix, particularly since he understood the value of sound recordings as archives while also attempting to push the limits of what is recordable.

Or as Gould himself maintained, “[t]he only excuse for recording a work is to do it differently” (as cited in [Kostelanetz, 1988](#), p. 559); that is, according to Kostelanetz, Gould didn’t believe that “a record should be a documentation and only a documentation, rather than, as it was for Gould, a contrived re-creation” (1988, p. 559).

We can hear a prime example of such splicing and sound creation in Gould’s recording of Jean Sibelius’ *Kyllikki*, a suite for solo piano. The final movement contained a middle section which was audibly different from the two outer sections. [Ken Bazzana \(1997\)](#) described how Gould recorded the piece at different times, placing the microphones at different distances from the piano, and then spliced the sections together, so that in the middle section of this movement, we hear the music as though from a distance (pp. 250–1). Aesthetically, the effect was impressive in that the middle section, a haunting melody, was already in contrast to the spritely outer movements; [Gould’s \(1984d\)](#) splicing intensified the hauntedness of the melody—an effect he could not have created in a live performance. For Gould, as he put it, such splicing allowed him—and the listener—to “uncover new facets, or new combinations of facets” in music (1984d, p. 344). Gould recognized that he could not produce such soundscapes alone, and he argued presciently that the “functions of the performer and of the tape editor begin to overlap” (1984d, p. 339); more tellingly, he suggested that it “would be impossible for the listener to establish at which point the authority of the performer gave way to that of the producer and the tape editor” (1984d, p. 339), and indeed Gould sought to prove this point at length in another article, “The Grass Is Always Greener in the Outtakes: An Experiment in Listening” ([1984b](#)), which offered multiple examples from his recording repertoire.

In “Glenn Gould, the Vanishing Performer and the Ambivalence of the Studio,” [Tim Hecker \(2008\)](#) recognized that Gould’s innovations were breaking down how people experienced music, and that, as Gould maintained, “recording [innovations in general] will forever alter our notions about what is appropriate to the performance of music” (1984d, p. 337). In particular, according to Hecker, Gould wanted to “liberate listeners from the burden of the cult of the author in artistic creation by ceding creative interpretation to those listeners and affecting the diminution or even erasure of the artist-as-genius” (2008, p. 79). This approach, combined with Gould’s recognition that he had to work with sound editors more intimately and collaboratively than not, led Gould to theorize further how to breakdown the relationship between artist and listener. He intuited that “new participation areas will proliferate and that many more hands will be required to achieve the execution of a particular environmental experience” ([Gould, 1984d](#), p. 352). But he also banked on, in Hecker’s (2008) view, a “more profound hope that the listener might become involved in the creative act itself” (p. 79). And indeed, programs such as Gargeband and iMovie, to name just two, allow people now to mix and match their own and others’ recorded material, such that the “listener” is often *very* active in the creative process, moving from consumer to prosumer of many media, not just sound.

We can see such prosumer work in action with [Selfe’s \(2009\)](#) student’s sound essay “Lord of the Machines,” in which Daniel Keller both altered his voice and spliced in numerous “sound clips” to help him build an argument about our cultural saturation with media technologies. This impressive essay posed pressing questions about what it means to be human as we “depend more on machines.” But curiously, beyond the “mechanization” of the narrative voice, the splicing was used only to provide examples to an over-riding, thesis-driven narrative. While certainly effective, the piece seemed limited by the genre of the *essay*, and not yet experimenting with sound manipulation as Gould did. Of course, “Lords of the Machine” *was* offered to us as an “essay,” while Gould worked with music, which isn’t generally thesis-driven. Such leads to a question, however: What would an *essay* or narrative piece be like that not only presented us with narrative but also manipulated sound in the way that Gould did in his musical splicing? Interestingly, Gould himself presented some intriguing possibilities for approaching this question—and for working directly with sound and the voice—to flesh out, as it were, the possibilities of sound recording. In particular, Gould’s work, both as a musician and then as a documentarian, offers a way of considering sound and voices *materially*, as embodied experiences and annunciations that speak meaningfully, if not always with clear-cut theses in mind.

3. The sound of Gould’s voice

In an influential essay, “The Prospects of Recording,” originally published in *High Fidelity* in 1966, Gould argued that “today’s listeners have come to associate musical performance with sounds possessed of characteristics which two generations ago were neither available to the profession nor wanted by the public—characteristics such as analytic clarity, immediacy, and indeed almost tactile proximity” (p. 333). Curiously, Gould suggested here that recorded sounds, due to their increased clarity and immediacy of stereo, might come to seem just as embodied as live performance—with “almost tactile proximity.” As such, Gould sought to trouble the notion that recordings were at a remove from the bodies of the performers playing or creating them, and that recorded music offered only a cerebral or detached listening experience.

In fact, one can hear Gould, the embodied performer, in most of his recordings. Most notable in Gould’s recordings of solo piano music is the curious presence of his own voice. While playing the piano, Gould would frequently

gesticulate and hum along with the music, sometimes creating counter-melodies or filling in (in his mind) missing harmonies. Music critic Otto Friedrich wrote numerous reviews of Gould performances and frequently mentioned the “distraction” of experiencing the pianist gesticulate and hum while playing. Such vocalizations marked Gould’s *recordings* as distinct from his contemporaries and were quite controversial. You can hear an example of Gould’s “singing” in this clip on YouTube, consisting of extracts from “The Art of Piano” documentary with Gould playing J.S. Bach’s Partita #2 [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qB76jxBq_gQ]. See, in particular, the string of comments in the accompanying message board that vacillate between lauding and condemning Gould’s vocal “theatrics.” And indeed, many dismissed Gould’s vocalizations as simply dramatic ego display, an unwanted calling attention to the performer himself. But what’s fascinating to me about Gould’s vocalizations is that, as a master recording artist, he could have had them edited out, but chose not to. Is this simply, as some contend, ego at play?

Some scholars think not and suggest that Gould’s recorded vocalizations are an important intervention in the dominant practices of sound recording in the mid-20th century. Paul Sanden (2009), in “Hearing Glenn Gould’s Body: Corporeal Liveness in Recorded Music,” noted that “Gould’s physical actions have been cause for much concern and criticism; his body has...been portrayed as an obstacle for his mind to overcome” (p. 12). This split between mind and body, Sanden contended, informs much of the criticism—and uniqueness—of Gould’s contributions to the recorded piano repertoire. At the time Gould was recording, dominant recording practices sought to foreground the *music*, creating archives of the great works of classical musical production. Such archives were to testify to the grandeur and power of the European art music tradition and its composers, and while different interpretations and even the personalities of artists were hardly ignored, many critics felt that *too* much personality distracted from the beauty of the music. More theoretically, Sanden argued that the “reduction of music to its mathematical properties presents an entirely knowable music, in line with the wider appeals to order and reason so prevalent during the European Enlightenment” (2009, p. 10), and, in many way, continuing through the 20th century. As Sanden put it, “[t]his ideological binarism leads to an understanding of music as a collection of works, ideas, and interpretations (products of the mind), but not of actions, tactile sounds, and physical gestures (experiences of the body)” (2009, p. 9).

Gould’s recorded vocalizations, in contrast, remind us constantly that we are listening to a particular performer at a particular time making a very particular recording. Sanden (2009) noted that “[t]he liveness of Gould’s sounding body in these recordings, audible *because of* mediatization, draws attention to the significance of Gould’s *performances* and not merely that of his interpretations” (p. 20). This corporeal “liveness” is all the more intriguing when we reflect on the fact that Gould labored in the recording studio to create “perfect” recordings, frequently spending hours all night long splicing together different “takes” from different recordings to create the interpretation that he most had in mind. And that sense of perfection *included* Gould’s bodily presence. Indeed, as Sanden noted, “one can constantly hear not just abstract musical structures (disembodied notes), but also many of the incidental sounds—the noise—involved in Gould’s act of sounding out those structures on the piano and with his voice” (2009, p. 20). Gould never edited these “incidental sounds” out, especially his voice. Consequently, we might argue that, even as he sought to edit through splicing to make the recordings “perfect,” so the audible presence of the body was not, by his logic, an imperfection. This corporeal “liveness” serves as a stark reminder of embodiment in an age of increasing digitization and socialization at a distance:

In Gould’s case, his particular engagement with recording technology affords us greater access to the qualities of corporeal liveness apparent in his performances...In an era of potentially de-socializing technological practices (internet shopping, automated bank tellers, anonymous on-line communications, etc.), such a reminder seems increasingly important. (2009, p. 27)

Along such lines, I too would argue that, in his recordings and vocalizations, Gould was giving us a sense of his own embodied agency, a reminder that his performances and interpretations were not just abstract music; rather, they were particular performances, crafted by a particular engagement with music and an instrument.

How might Gould’s aesthetic choice to include his vocalizations in his recordings speak to us in the teaching of sound essays? In *The Sounds of Feminist Theory*, Ruth Salvaggio (1999) asked a question that I think Gould would have appreciated:

And what, I would ask, of the ear? Or the way sound—heard, felt, imagined—can carry meaning along the skin, through tissue and the live wires of nerves, rebounding through brain and body? How might thought be a product of sound, and how might sound stir up rhythms, vibrations, and meanings in critical writing? (p.63)

Salvaggio believed that sound and voice can return us to the thought of the body, such that:

the sonorous effects of writing move well beyond what can be *heard* in language and thought. Sound stimulates other sensory modes of expression and response. Heard messages are tactile, reverberating in ear, mouth, mind. Words become kinetic, moving on and beyond the page. Thought resembles less the stable and staid intellect,

more the rhythms of a breathing body. (1999, p. 66)

Comparably, Gould's voice reminds us of how not just minds but *bodies* are actively engaged in the making of meaning, *and* that such meaning making is located in particular embodied moments and material contexts. As such, vocalization as Gould used it can ground meaning making and knowledge production in particular contexts as opposed to reifying a sense of knowledge and meaning as abstract, disembodied universal truths.

We can see the pedagogical implications of this reminder of embodied knowledge production if we take a closer look at [Selfe's \(2009\)](#) student's sound essay "Yelling Boy," in which a graduate teaching assistant recounts an uncomfortable interaction with one of her students. Of Selfe's four sound essays, this teaching reflection was perhaps starkest in its simplicity: hers is one voice, dramatizing and reliving the incident. While she ventriloquized the student, reduced to "yelling boy," the narration tried to give us a sense of drama and interaction, a meeting of different people, with deeply felt experiences and reactions—his of frustration, hers of intimidation—such that the teacher achieved a kind of reflection, a recognition of the importance of listening to students, no matter how frustrating. But a curious irony of this sound essay was that the narrator, the teaching assistant, recounted her story in nearly a monotone; only her impersonation of the "yelling boy" prompted her to dramatically alter the pitch and tone of her voice. In conveying what she learned from her experience with "yelling boy," she seemed the calm, cool, and collected intellectual trying to deal with a frustrated and physically intimidating student. She curiously seemed disembodied, even as she wanted to tell us of her frustration, even intimidation. Certainly, I don't want to critique her handling of this particular situation. But her performance of it in this sound recording oddly left out *her embodied* experience while giving all of the agency and heft of embodiment to the "yelling boy." As an emerging academic, of course, she was being trained in such "objectivity," such dispassionate reflection, such intellectualization. But she clearly learned *through the body* in this experience; her emotional and somatic responses were key to her reflection, but she only *told* us this: we never heard it in her vocalization, or the creaking of the chair she might have sat upon nervously. How much more rhetorically powerful might this sound essay have been if we had heard some of the frustration and intimidation in *her* voice, as opposed to just hearing her mimic the "yelling boy," a move that potentially even reduced his subjectivity, agency, and embodiment to authenticate her learning?

In contrast, through Gould, I hear how bodies sound as agents through voices in their interpretation of events, moments, experiences; such surely is one of the more powerful rhetorical affordances of sound recording. Indeed, [Michelle Comstock and Mary Hocks \(2006\)](#) wrote in "Voice in the Cultural Soundscape: Sonic Literacy in Composition Studies" that "[w]hen students begin to hear their own voices and the voices of others in different ways and contexts, they develop a stronger, more embodied sense of the power of language, of literacy, and of communication in general." Crafting opportunities for students to hear their voices in those "different ways and contexts" might offer them a chance to be more attentive to the many ways the body thinks, to how voices are embodied, to the knowledges and insights embodiment might give us. We can hear the possibilities of such embodiment in Gould's radio documentaries, to which I now turn.

4. Documenting fugal voices

Gould's radio documentaries, which he produced and which aired from the mid 1960s through the 1970s, are amongst the musician's most interesting works—true sound compositions that are simultaneously entertaining, educational, and exquisite sound experiences. Indeed, critic Deborah [Weigel \(2011\)](#), writing in *Words and Music: Camus, Beckett, Cage, Gould*, argued that "Gould's radio documentaries represent some of his most significant contributions to twentieth-century artistic production" (p. 109). Amongst the most famous of [Gould's \(1992\)](#) documentaries are his "Solitude Trilogy," consisting of three hour-long pieces about places and communities characterized by physical or spiritual isolation. They include "The Idea of North" (1967) about the Canadian arctic; "The Latecomers" (1969), about remote fishing communities in Newfoundland; and "The Quiet in the Land" (1977), about a Mennonite community in Manitoba.

"The Idea of North" was perhaps the most famous of the pieces, particularly as it represented Gould's truly experimental style. Thematically, the piece was an exploration of what it was like to live in the extreme environment of the Canadian arctic. Gould traveled north and interviewed several Canadians who had migrated north and asked them to tell him their stories. The effect was less argumentative than concept building, with the interviewees offering vastly divergent thoughts on their own lives and what living in the far north means to them. For instance, several interviewees talked about their move north as a move toward greater independence; while others found the move resulting in a greater need for developing interdependence as they tried to survive and flourish in an inhospitable climate. Through such stories, Gould also explored issues of racism and sexism, and interviewees offered a rich discussion of "whiteness" in relation to, and sometimes conflict with, the native Eskimo cultures of the Canadian north. Throughout, though,

Gould's interweaving of his interviewee's voices and other ambient sounds—trains rolling north and arctic winds, for instance—seemed to stress the contradictions of the north as a place of isolation *and* interconnection, a space in which one encounters both one's aloneness and relative smallness and also one's deep connectedness to the earth and to others. According to Gould, writing in "'The Idea of North': An Introduction," the "idea of the north began to serve as a foil for other ideas and values that seemed to me depressingly urban oriented and spiritually limited thereby" (1984c, p. 391). At the same time, Gould refrained from propounding a particular thesis and claimed instead that he ultimately wanted to create "a documentary which thinks of itself as a drama" (1984c, p. 392). As such, he "cast" his documentary with different—and divergent—characters, who would each offer their own unique view of living in the north: "We wanted an enthusiast, a cynic, a government budget-watcher, as well as someone who could represent that limitless expectation and limitless capacity for disillusionment which inevitably affects the questing spirit of those who go north seeking their future" (1984c, p. 392). What Gould ultimately did with these voices is what is most stunning about "The Idea of North" as a radio documentary. Indeed, Gould uniquely captured and offered us a sense of the multiple ways of understanding the north through what he called *contrapuntal radio*, his use of overlapping voices to create a "fugal" set of voices that simultaneously resonated with and at times contradicted one another. You can hear a stunning version of this multi-part vocal fugue in this clip, taken from the movie about Gould's life, *Thirty-Two Short Films about Glenn Gould*: [<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W6Hrl7-nDVNorth.avi>]

Gould's process for creating such a soundscape is itself fascinating. He wrote that each individual was "interviewed separately" (Gould, 1967, p. 393), and then, almost by accident, because the production was running too long and Gould had to shorten the program, Gould opted to have the separate voices overlap one another, such that "whichever dreamlike juxtapositions came about were achieved through some careful after-the-fact work with the razor blade on tape and not through any direct confrontation among our characters" (Gould, 1967, p. 393). Such was not Gould's original plan, however. In "Radio as Music: Glenn Gould in Conversation with John Jessop," (1984a) Gould said that his original conception was very linear, wanting five separate voices telling their individual stories, but the problem with length forced him and his producing team to re-conceive their approach. As Gould put it, "I had no idea what techniques were going to be involved when I started out" (1984a, p. 375), resulting in a "pretty inauspicious birth for 'contrapuntal radio'" (1984a, p. 376). But what a birth. According to Richard Kostelanetz, one of the spectacular affects of this fugal "speech-trio, which takes a full four minutes, is that in a highly compressed form it introduces many of the themes that are repeated in more conventional ways later in the work" (1988, p. 562). Specifically, Gould managed to interweave senses of isolation and interconnectedness, as each voice was obviously speaking about its own reality, while overlapping "overtones," such as the repeated word "north," created a sense of shared experience or community. Gould realized that he was creating something unique, and theorized that these overtones—his word—"were manufactured by the razor blade" (1984a, p. 377), through a process of editing. Kostelanetz suggested that Gould's manipulation of voices in the "fugal" portions of "The Idea of North" arose out of Gould's work as a musician, out of his ability and willingness to manipulate sound:

Gould characterized this opening fugue as "contrapuntal radio." That musical term refers to the simultaneous articulation of two or more separate melodies, and ears sensitive to music can hear how the word *north*, spoken at times by each voice, becomes a repeated percussive motif. Another quality particular to this opening trio is that, unlike the rest of the piece, it cannot be visualized—there is no physical scene or circumstance in which all three voices can be placed. That means that this speech trio exists only as sound, much as music exists only as sound. (p. 562–3)

Working with voices as sounds, then, allowed Gould, as he put it, to break down "distinctions between drama and documentary [which] were quite often, it seemed to me, happily and successfully set aside" (1984a, p. 374).

The result was somewhat controversial. According to Gould at the time, "[n]othing upsets a producer more than trying to mingle perspectives" (1984a, p. 381). But this breakdown of a dominant perspective is precisely what Gould strove for. On one hand, Gould envisioned for his radio documentaries "an integrated unit of some kind in which the texture, the tapestry, of the words themselves would differentiate the characters and create dramalike conjunctions within the documentary" (1984a, p. 375). On the other hand, however, he wanted to "create a structure in which one could feel free to have different approaches and responses to the same problems emerge simultaneously" (p. 376). Creating fugal sections in "The Idea of North" resulted, for Gould, in a "deliberate lack of linear contact, though they were saying things which were related to one subject. And this detachment was abetted by the totally different sound perspectives for each speech" (1967, p. 379).

Gould realized, though, that he was going to be taxing the abilities of his listeners to understand the program, particularly during its fugal sections, which, as he put it "test, in a sense, the degree to which one can listen simultaneously to more than one conversation or vocal impression" (1967, p. 393). But Gould believed that people did not fully take

advantage of their abilities to hold multiple voices in attention at one time:

I do believe most of us are capable of a much more substantial information intake than we give ourselves credit for, [and] I would like to think that these scenes can be listened to in very much the same way that you'd attend the *Falstaff* fugue. (1967, p. 393)

This “musical” kind of listening is crucial to Gould’s sense of what his radio documentaries could accomplish, particularly in breaking down dominant perspectives. In “Listening, Nordicity, Community: Glenn Gould’s ‘The Idea of North,’” Kevin McNelly (1996) discussed, for instance, how the Canadian Native people were represented throughout the program; on one hand, interviewees depicted them as possessing “a truthful sense of place” that the migrant southerners didn’t have but desperately sought; on the other hand, nascent racism emerged in some participants’ views. Gould’s overlapping voices steadily chip away at both the “romantic myth” and the racist understanding. Gould refrained from resolving the problem of the depiction of Natives, and the vocal juxtaposition, Gould’s “penchant for cutting antithetical voices across one another in an open ‘conversation,’” created both a “musical” effect and complex statement about the importance of listening to one another and of being attentive to divergent perspectives. As McNelly (1996) put it, for Gould “listening is a means of participating, directly, crucially, in the multiple streams of human presence in the world” (para. 2). For McNelly, the resulting ethos of Gould’s radio documentaries was a breaking down of a “totalitarian ideal”—one that Gould saw as the

enforcing of a coherence through the tyranny of a single melodic line, as all other musical parts subordinate themselves to support a single musical thread or point of view. Gould’s own counterpoint, however, particularly as it is realized in the radio documentaries, is pluralistic rather than tyrannical; no single, voice is given absolute control or prominence. (McNelly, 1996, para. 33)

Such vocal pluralism seems at the heart of much contemporary theorizing about voice and its relation to identity. Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) had long ago noted the polyvocality of many texts, such as the novels of Dostoyevsky, in which numerous “voices” contributed to story, as opposed to one controlling voice suggestive of a coherent and stable identity. Julia Kristeva (1984) famously extended Bakhtin’s polyvocality into intertextuality, noting the resonances of voices not just within but across texts. More recently, Judith Butler (2005) has extended polyvocality and intertextuality to the construction of identity itself, noting in *Giving an Account of Oneself* that “no one survives to tell his or her story without first being inaugurated into language by being called upon, offered some stories, brought into the discursive world of the story” (2005, p. 63). We are all born into the webs of language and narration out of which, sometimes by force, we tell our own stories. Our voices, however somatically unique, are filled with the words, sounds, utterances, and even gasps, shouts, and cries of others. As Butler put it,

When the “I” seeks to give an account of itself, it can start with itself, but it will find that this self is already implicated in a social temporality that exceeds its own capacities for narration; indeed, when the “I” seeks to give an account of itself, an account that must include the conditions of its own emergence, it must, as a matter of necessity, become a social theorist. (2005, pp. 7–8)

Gould’s work in *The Idea of North* beautifully captured the “social temporality” that exceeded any one particular voice’s articulation of truth. As each voice attempted to give an account of itself in the north, it inevitably butted up against, overlapped, and was in turn overlapped by accounts that theorized the social in increasingly multiple and nuanced ways.

At the same time, it’s hard to forget that these were voices in extreme cold; you could almost hear them shiver. Their embodiment was palpable in the grain of the voices themselves. In her introduction to the collection *Vocal Aesthetics in Digital Arts and Media*, Norie Neumark (2010) unpacked some of the (historical, philosophical, and theoretical) complexities of thinking about voice, specifically the *grain* of the voice, as not just a marker of identity but of *embodied* identity. Moving quickly from Plato to Derrida, Neumark seemed frustrated with the ways philosophers and thinkers have traditionally understood “voice,” as the sonorous plentitude of meaningfulness, and wanted instead to recover a sense of voices as embodied. Think, for instance, of Butler’s social temporalities that exceed any one voice’s ability to capture and express identity. But those voices, those identities, were also embodied, themselves material articulations. Describing the relationship amongst identity, voice, and body is tricky, particularly in examining technologized voices, since, as Neumark (2010) pointed out, “[t]he embodiment/disembodiment question in relation to voice has long haunted sound and radio theory and practice” (p. xviii). How can recorded voices ever seem anything other than traces, citations, and iterations forever replicating differences that undermine the fantasy of embodied full presence? To address such a question, Neumark called on the work of Adriana Caverero, particularly as the Italian philosopher wanted us to listen not for the totalizing fullness of voice but rather for the radical multiplicities and alterities of unique voices. Such vocal alterities—which Neumark gestured toward in the sheer number of different voices, particularly of voices at the margins

of intelligibility, such as voice “at its ground zero of breath; cracked, broken, and bent voices; and voice screaming at its limits”—all “point to the complex and varied relations of voice to body and of bodily voice to signification and intersubjectivity: they make sensible the way in which the sonorous and signifying aspects of voice supplement and disturb each other, and they make evident the aesthetic and affective potentials of voice” (2010, p. xxiv). I hear *The Idea of North* an attempt to “make sensible” through sound both the supplementing and disturbing dimensions of voices and identities. Gould’s remixing of voices into vocal fugues renders the radical multiplicities and alterities of unique voices. The variedness of the voices, increasingly overlapping and becoming cracked, broken, and bent, thicken in ways that gesture to their embodiedness even as they are necessarily recorded traces. Neumark (2010) noted how “[t]he fundamental paradoxes of voice—embodied and moving between bodies, sonorous and signifying—have become even more complex as voice, always/already culturally (and politically) mediated, is remediated and remixed in networked and digital culture” (p. xxix). Gould’s work powerfully performed just such a paradox, remixing voices simultaneously “embodied and moving between bodies, sonorous and signifying.”

Such an approach—a pluralistic fugal creation of multiple voices—might complicate a more thesis-driven or monovocal approach to teaching sound essays. For instance, in Selfe’s students’ sound essays, we rarely hear the overlay of voices that deepens and complicates Gould’s work. In each case, one voice dominated the essays, producing a narrative or, in one case, poetic line, with a particular vision and conceptual orientation. Additional voices, either sung or spoken, were used as examples or ambient background. In contrast, Gould used very little—five voices, train sounds, a little bit of music—but created dense sound effects that produced a set of complex conversations about his subject. Contemporary low-cost media production technologies, such as GarageBand and iMovie, allow for precisely this kind of layering—a layering that seems to me a particular, and particularly useful, rhetorical affordance of the sound essay in complicating views and troubling a linearity of idea development. Moreover, I am most intrigued by Gould’s stumbling, his willingness to experiment with the available technologies to create different kinds of effects. He may have begun with a preconception about what a documentary is, but constraints of time forced him to experiment and create different kinds of sound—and conceptual—effects. More to the point, Gould’s orientation as a musician is perhaps what most prompted him to work with the voices he had recorded *as sound*—not just as discursive statements propounding particular views. Those views are not forgotten, hardly; but the example Gould offered is one in which the voices and their attendant views were put into productive conversation *simultaneously* to create a soundscape that requires *active listening*—a listening in which those who hear a piece such as “The Idea of North” must themselves be attentive to resonances and dissonances in what they are hearing—and what such might ultimately mean or suggest.

5. Critical voices, critically DIY

I have argued so far that attending to Glenn Gould’s recording artistry prompts us to re-imagine how we might use and work with sound as compositional material. With Selfe’s work as a starting point, we can use Gould’s examples to consider sound, and the voice in particular, as materially embodied, as technologically malleable, and as potentially fugal. Such considerations enhance and expand our current conceptualization of the rhetorical affordances of sound and voice. But they also require that we think sound and voice differently—not just as purveyors of discursive knowledge, but as components of embodied and material meaning making in their own right. Mary Hocks (2003) already argued that engaging students in multimodal work inevitably “asks teachers not only to incorporate new kinds of texts into our classrooms but new kinds of multimodal compositional processes that ask students to envision and create something that perhaps does not yet exist” (p. 645). While Hocks relied on a metaphor of sight, her point is just as valid for working with *sound*.

Concomitant with Gould’s approach to sound was a “do-it-yourself” (DIY) aesthetic that not only invited new kinds of listening but also new kinds of *playing* with sound. In “Glenn Gould and the New Listener,” Barry Mauer (2010) correctly pointed out that “Gould wanted audiences to treat recordings as primary texts rather than as copies of live events; like Derrida, Gould had questioned the idea that a text is a copy of an ‘original’ experience” (p. 106). Surely, recordings document, but they can also be used as “texts” themselves, open to manipulation and, increasingly, the “splicing” kind of editing that Gould used so frequently in the recording studio. Much like Walter Benjamin, Mauer argued, “Gould . . . hoped that technology could provide more people with the tools to engage in creativity” (2008, p. 107). And indeed, we exist in just such a world, in which students have the opportunity to manipulate, edit, and “splice” a variety of “texts” in the pursuit of different kinds of expression and meaning-making.

Such manipulation can form the basis of a pedagogical approach that takes the materiality of sound seriously as rhetorical possibility in our composition classrooms. Selfe has already modeled for us some of the possibilities of working with sound essays, or the production of audio “texts” that work through ideas with sound clips augmenting discursive thinking or serving as the objects of study and insight generation. I would extend such work to include experimentations with the materiality of sound itself. Having students and faculty keep “sound diaries” is one way

to attune us to the particular and ambient soundscapes through which we move and work. I use my smart phone to record clips all the time—clips including my “voice memos” of ideas I’m pondering but also sounds that strike me as compelling. I often have no idea what I’m going to do with such sounds, but some find their way into various projects. Just the practice of recording, though, focuses attention, even briefly, on how I’m experiencing sounds somatically, even rhetorically.

Jacqueline Rhodes and Jonathan Alexander (2012) provided an example of such sampling and splicing put to rhetorical use in our essay “Experience, Embodiment, Excess: Multimedia[ed] [E]visceration and Installation Rhetoric,” which recounted our mounting of a multimedia installation for the 2008 Watson Conference. We collected and pieced together a soundtrack to accompany a set of flashing images meant to provoke “critical thinking about rhetoric—a provocation, specifically, to re-consider how bodies and rhetorics intertwine in the creation of normative notions of composing selves.” The soundtrack consisted of two files: a recording of the greetings in different languages sent into space on the Voyager space probe played simultaneously with a recording of a set of whispers in different voices, which we called “rumors”—voices of barely audible phrases expressing self-doubt, such as “This feels so weird,” “I really don’t like to write,” and “This place is so alien.” We intended the collision of sounds—the self-assured greetings in different accents and the pained self-reflections and accusations—to reflect (and prompt reflection on) a range of ways in which we compose ourselves for self-presentation and just as often find ourselves un-composed or dis-composed when called to represent ourselves. As Gould showed us, the grain of our voices figures us in nearly ceaseless acts of self-creation and self-fashioning, with vocal cracks and tics revealing the seams in such fashioning. Such sounds need not just be voices articulating words in all of their complexity. I have already asked what would happen to the “Yelling Boy” reflection if it included the voice of the “yelling boy.” The presence of less intentional somatic sounds, such as those produced by fidgeting in one’s seat, the scrape of a chair as it’s moved, the clearing of a throat, would suggest dimensions of affective response and experience that could complement and complicate the otherwise controlled (and controlling) narratorial voice in that clip.

Selfe understood such meaning-making primarily as the expression of identities. Such identity expression need not be the only—and may in fact be the least—productive way to think pedagogically about the use of sound and voice in the composition classroom. For Edward Said (2008), Gould represented “a critical model for a type of art that is rational and pleasurable at the same time, an art that tries to show us its composition as an activity still being undertaken in its performance” (p. 271). Along such lines, I would like to conclude with a brief discussion of a contemporary piece that I think very much follows in the footsteps of Gould’s work and serves as a powerful model for working with sound as a compositional activity, one through which the process of composition *is* the performance. Such might provide a useful pedagogical model for thinking and experiencing sound not just in the service of making meaning but as a mode of embodied inquiry.

Katharine Norman’s “Window” (2012), winner of the New Media Writing Prize, is an “interactive sound essay” that, like *The Idea of North*, played with “sonic collecting”—but in even more radical ways. The piece itself is rather simple, consisting of a pared down interface dominated by images of an open window [<http://www.novamara.com/window/>]. You click on various windows and move dots around to modulate the sounds. You steadily become absorbed in listening to the seemingly random sounds coming through the open window. At times, quotations from John Cage, a noted sound artist himself, focus attention on the process of becoming attentive. The result is a highly meditative soundscape with modest visual accompaniment—a multimodal reflection on paying attention and becoming attuned to surroundings primarily through sound. Even more than the piece itself, Norman’s reflections on its composition reveal the performative nature of working with sound. For months, Norman collected photographs and sounds from outside her window, not thinking of any particular framing idea, but increasingly focusing on the collection of experience itself. She explained:

The hard disk filled up with accumulating files that, silent and unseen, awaited some kind of purpose. At the end of December I confronted a body of materials that had surreptitiously transmuted into a documentary record of a year of ordinary mornings. They were nothing special, nothing to write home about. For me these familiar images reasserted a sense of “being” at home. Scrolling through the images and clicking on the sounds I realized the materials were largely irrelevant to others. For someone else, they meant very little at all. They were not especially beautiful, eye- or ear-catching. In fact, they were rather ordinary stuff. But gradually the subject of study revealed itself - it was not the materials, the sounds and images of a familiar place, but the way in which familiarity arises. The subject was the dynamic construction of place and the human experience of place through the accumulation of sensory perception, repetition, memory and emotion. (2013)

Like the best of Gould’s work, *Window* gestured beyond a controlling thesis to focus attention on the variedness of

attention as it accumulates. In fact, for Norman, perhaps even more so than for Gould, the *lack* of specific focus was important. She wrote, *Window* is an experiment in writing about sound, listening and environment, in a manner that deliberately subverts any sense of direction, focus or conclusion. But it is also a work of art—both scholarly and “playful”, born of indecision and from having no desire to go anywhere special. There was no preordained subject of study. Instead, the subject of study revealed itself during the making of the piece as being ordinary experience - an activity embedded in individuals rather than things - gradually explored through deliberate indirection. (2013)

The process of working with sound becomes the mode of inquiry, allowing Norman to focus her—and our—attention on processes of experience themselves. Surely, some instructors might find the lack of direction here off putting, a leaving behind of argument, persuasion, and research. I think, though, that Norman’s work, like Gould’s, requires critical listening, a heightening of attention to what we offer our attention. Such seems a pressingly needed literacy skill in our media-saturated environments. But moreover, such attentiveness is, as Norman put it, “embedded in individuals rather than things” (2013). We are reminded of ourselves as active agents, as having agency in the focusing of attention. To what are we choosing to pay attention? And how?

To me, such work is certainly both reminiscent of and a powerful extension of Gould’s experiments with sound in his radio documentaries, in which the human voice itself becomes part of a larger soundscape that tells not a single story at a time but multiple interwoven stories, with stresses and crescendos, staccatos and diminuendos, evoked by the editors’ skillful hands to create experiences of pleasure and possibilities for critical thinking. Said, Gould, and Norman all argued for careful listening. The consistent reminders of the materiality of the sounds and voices we hear, and that we strive to listen to, should bring to mind the multiplicity of realities we experience, understand, articulate, and hear.

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