

CHAPTER 41

Glenn Gould, the Virtuoso as Intellectual

ONLY A few figures in the history of music, and only a small handful of performers, have had as rich and complex a reputation outside the musical world as the Canadian pianist, composer, intellectual Glenn Gould, who died of a stroke in 1982 at the age of fifty. The small numbers may have something to do with a growing gap between the world of music itself (excluding “the music business” of course) and the larger cultural environment, a gap that is much wider than, for example, the fairly close proximity of literature to painting, film, photography, and dance. Very likely, today’s literary or general intellectual has little practical knowledge of music as an art, little experience of playing an instrument or studying solfège or theory, and except perhaps for buying records or collecting a few names like Karajan or Callas, any sustained familiarity—whether that concerns being able to relate performance, interpretation, and style to each other, or recognizing the difference between harmonic or rhythmical characteristics in Mozart, Berg, and Messiaen—with the actual practice of music. This gap is the probable result of many factors, including the decreasing prominence of music as a subject in the curriculum of liberal education, the decline of amateur performance (which once included piano or violin lessons as a routine part of growing up), and the difficulty of access to the world of contemporary music. Given all these things then, a few names that have important currency spring to mind: Beethoven of course, Mozart (mostly as a result of Salzburg and *Amadeus*), Rubenstein (partly because of film, partly because of his hands and hair), Liszt and Paganini, Wagner naturally, and more recently Herbert von Karajan, Pierre Boulez, and Leonard Bernstein. There may be a few others, like the three tenors who have mostly to do with opera and publicity, but even such remarkable

musicians as Elliott Carter, Daniel Barenboim, Maurizio Pollini, Harrison Birtwistle, György Ligeti, and Oliver Knussen may seem exceptions that prove the rule rather than central figures in our cultural life.

The point about Gould is that he seems to have entered the general imagination and stayed there until now, almost two decades after his death. He was the subject of an intelligent feature film, for example, and he keeps turning up in essays and fiction in quite unusual ways, as in Joy Williams's "Hawk" and Thomas Bernhard's *The Loser (Der Untergeher)*. Records and videos by and about him still appear and sell, his first record of the Goldberg Variations was recently included in *Gramophone* magazine's list of the century's ten best recordings, and new biographies, studies, and analyses of him as pianist, composer, theoretician are given noticeable attention in the mainstream, as opposed to specialized, media. To most people he almost stands for Bach, more so even than extraordinary performers like Casals, Schweitzer, Landowska, Karl Richter, and Ton Koopman. As we are now commemorating the 250th anniversary of Bach's death, it is worth our while, I think, to explore Gould's connection with Bach, and its pertinence to the matter of virtuosity, asking how Gould's lifelong association with the great contrapuntal genius establishes a unique and interestingly plastic aesthetic space essentially created by Gould himself as intellectual and virtuoso.

What I don't want to lose sight of in these reflections, however, is that first and foremost Gould was always able to communicate a very high degree of pleasure not only in what he did as performer and personality but in the kind of intellectual activity his life and oeuvre seem endlessly capable of stimulating. As we shall see, this is in part a direct function of his unique virtuosity, which I shall try to elucidate, in part also the result of its effects. Unlike the digital wizardry of most others of his class, Gould's virtuosity was not designed simply to impress and ultimately alienate the listener/spectator but rather to draw the audience in by provocation, the dislocation of expectation, and the creation of new kinds of thinking based in large measure on his reading of Bach's music. I adapt the phrase "new kinds of thinking" from Maynard Solomon's reflection on what Beethoven inaugurated in composing the Ninth Symphony; that is, not only a search for order but a search for new modes of apprehension, and even a new system of mythology in Northrop Frye's sense of the term. Gould's distinction as a late twentieth-century phenomenon (his years of activity, including the period after he left the concert platform in 1964, begin in the mid-fifties and end with his death in 1982) was in almost single-handedly inventing a genuinely challenging and complex intellectual content, what I have just called new modes of apprehension, for the activities of the virtuoso per-

former, which I believe he remained all of his adult life. I do not think it is necessary to know all this about what Gould was up to in order to enjoy him, as so many people still do: yet the better one can comprehend the general nature of his overall achievement and mission as an altogether unusual type of intellectual virtuoso, the more interestingly rich that achievement will appear.

Recall that the virtuoso emerges in European musical life as an independent force after and as a result of the exemplary careers of Paganini and Liszt, both of them composers and demonic instrumentalists who played a major role in the mid-nineteenth-century cultural imagination. Their major forerunners, contemporaries, and successors, Mozart, Chopin, Schumann, and even Brahms, had themselves been important performers but always secondarily to their fame as composers. Liszt, though a significant composer, was known principally as an astonishingly compelling figure on the recital platform, to be looked at, admired, and marveled at by a worshipful, sometimes incredulous crowd. The virtuoso after all is a creation of the bourgeoisie and of the new autonomous, secular, and civic performing spaces (concert and recital halls, parks, palaces of art built to accommodate precisely the recently emergent performer and not the composer) that had replaced the churches, courts, and private estates which had once nurtured Mozart, Haydn, Bach, and, in his early years, Beethoven. What Liszt pioneered was the idea of the performer as a specialized object of wonderment for a middle-class paying public.

A great deal of this history is contained in a fascinating compilation of essays about the history of the piano and pianists, *Piano Roles*, edited by James Parakilas. And as I have written elsewhere, the modern concert hall where we go to hear prodigies of technical skill is in effect a sort of precipice, a place of danger and excitement at the edge, where the noncomposing performer is greeted by an audience attending the event as what I have called an extreme occasion, something neither ordinary nor repeatable, a perilous experience full of constant risk and potential disaster albeit in a confined space. At the same time, by the mid-twentieth century the concert experience was refined and specialized at a profound distance from ordinary life, discontinuous with the activity of playing an instrument for personal pleasure and satisfaction, entirely connected to the competitive world of other performers, ticket-sellers, agents, intendants, and impresarios, as well the even more controlling record and media company executives. Gould was both product of and reaction to this world. He could never have attained his degree of eminence had he not had the services of Columbia Records and the Steinway piano corporation at his disposal at crucial moments in his career, to say nothing of the telephone company,

concert house managers, intelligent recording producers and engineers, and medical networks he worked with all of his adult life. But he also had a phenomenal gift that functioned brilliantly in that environment and yet moved beyond it at the same time.

There isn't much point here in going over the characteristics that made Gould the extraordinary eccentric that he was: the low bench, his humming, gesticulating, untoward grimacing and conducting as he played, the strange liberties he took with composers like Mozart whom he disliked, and indeed, the odd choice of repertory that would include the Bach that he made uniquely his, plus composers like Bizet, Wagner, Sibelius, Webern, and Richard Strauss, who were not widely known for using the keyboard as their medium. But there is no way of denying that from the moment Gould's recording of the Goldberg Variations appeared, a genuinely new phase in the history of virtuosity began: he lifted the sheer mastery of playing before the public to an elevation, or call it a side-road or deviation, of an unprecedented kind. What made his appearance a more pronouncedly original event was that he had no known precedents in the history of music. (Busoni comes to mind, but seeing or hearing Gould at work makes any serious comparison with the Italian-German thinker and pianist unthinkable.) Gould belonged to no dynasty of teachers or national schools, and he played repertory (for example, Byrd, Sweelinck, and Gibbons) that had never been thought before as furnishing staples for a piano recital program. Add to this his remarkably fleet, rhythmically tense method of playing well-known pieces, plus his core attachment to fugue and chaconne forms that are perfectly embodied in the sarabande aria and thirty variations of the Goldberg Variations, and, initially at least, you have a totally unanticipated talent aggressively challenging the placid and passive audience that has learned to sit back and wait to be served up a short evening's fare—like diners in a good restaurant.

A few measures of Gould's 1957 recording of the Beethoven Third Piano Concerto with Karajan, or a scene or two from his video performances of fugues, tell us immediately that something beyond concert virtuosity is being attempted here. It should be added that Gould's basic pianist capacities were indeed quite awesome, certainly on a par with Horowitz's, who seems to have been the one pianist Gould considered his (overrated) rival. When it came to rapidity and clarity of execution, a phenomenal gift for double thirds, octaves, sixths, and chromatic sequences, a magnificently sculpted portamento sound that resembled the piano being played like a harpsichord, and amazing power for sheer transparency of line in contrapuntal textures, an unparalleled ability to sight-read, memorize, and play complex contemporary, classical orchestral, and operatic scores on the piano (see for

instance his renderings on Strauss operas, voice parts and all), Gould was easily the technical equal of artists like Michelangeli, Horowitz, Barenboim, Pollini, and Argerich. So one could listen to Gould for some of the same pleasures afforded by the old-fashioned or modern virtuoso, even though there was always something more that he did that made him so thoroughly unusual.

I don't want to recapitulate here the many interesting accounts and analyses of Gould's playing: we have an updated version of Geoffrey Payzant's pioneering study, for instance; we have Peter Ostwald's sensitive psychiatric account of the sadomasochistic component in Gould's performing as well as affective life; we have most recently a fully fledged philosophic and cultural study by Kevin Bazzana, *Glenn Gould: The Performer in the Work*. All of these, along with Otto Friedrich's excellent biography, are fastidiously intelligent and faithful renderings of Gould's practice as something more than a performing virtuoso. What I shall propose, though, is an account of Gould's work that places him in a particular intellectual critical tradition, in which his quite conscious reformulations and restatements of virtuosity reach toward conclusions that are not normally sought out by performers but rather by intellectuals using language only. That is, Gould's work in its entirety—one mustn't forget that he wrote prolifically, produced radio documentaries, and stage-managed his own video recordings—furnishes an example of the virtuoso purposefully going beyond the narrow confines of performance and demonstration constitute an argument about intellectual liberation and critique that is quite impressive, and radically at odds with the aesthetics of performance as understood and accepted by the modern concert audience.

Adorno's studies of the regression of hearing amply showed how impoverished those circumstances were, but in particular he anatomized the kind of *Meisterschaft* and domination associated in contemporary performance practice with the cult of virtuoso musician. Adorno finds this typified in the figure of Toscanini, a conductor, he argues, who was created by a modern corporation to compress, control, streamline musical performance into sound that would grip the listener against his will. I quote the following short extract from "The Mastery of the Maestro" published in *Klangfiguren*:

Behind his confident manner lurks the anxiety that if he relinquishes control for a single second, the listener might tire of the show and flee. This is an institutionalized box office ideal detached from people, which mistakenly sees in itself an unwavering capacity for inspiring the audience. It frustrates any of the dialectic between the parts and the whole that operates in great music and

that is realized in great interpretations. Instead we have an abstract conception of the whole right from the start, almost like the sketch for a painting, which then is, as it were, painted in with a volume of sound whose momentary sensuous splendour overwhelms the listener's ears such that the details are stripped of their own proper impulses. Toscanini's musicality is in a way hostile to time, visual. The bare form of the whole is adorned with isolated stimuli that shape it for the kind of atomistic listening associated more readily with the Culture Industry.

Certainly Gould's desertion of the concert platform in 1964 at the height of his career was, as he said many times, his way of escaping precisely the kind of artificiality and distortion Adorno describes so trenchantly and ironically. At its best, Gould's playing style communicated the opposite of the atomized and desiccated musicality that Adorno ascribes however unfairly to Toscanini, the best of whose Verdi and Beethoven performances had the clarity and lean interconnectedness of Gould's Bach. In any event, Gould eschewed distorted effects that he thought typified the requirements of a stage presence, where one has to catch and retain the attention of listeners in the fifth balcony. So he escaped into the stage altogether. But what was this an escape into, and where did Gould think he was going? And why was Bach's music so specifically central to Gould's intellectual trajectory as virtuoso?

We can begin to answer these questions by looking at an address Gould gave in November 1964 to the graduating class of the University of Toronto. His speech was couched in terms of advice that, I think, really outlined his own program as performing musician. He spoke to the young graduates of the need to realize that music "is the product of the purely artificial construction of systematic thought," the word "artificial" signifying not a negative but a positive thing, "that it does relate to an obverse," and is not at all an "analyzable commodity," but rather that "it is hewn from negation, that it is but very small security against the void of negation that surrounds it." He goes on to say that we must be respectful, take proper account, that is, of how impressive negation is when compared to system, and that only by keeping that in mind will the new graduates be able to profit from "that replenishment of invention upon which creative ideas depend, because invention is, in fact, a cautious dipping into the negation that lies outside system from a position firmly ensconced in the system."

Even allowing for a certain confusion between various imperfectly deployed metaphors, it is possible to decipher the sense of what Gould is trying to articulate here. Music is a rational, constructed system; it is artificial because humanly constructed, not natural; it is an assertion against the

“negation” or senselessness of what everywhere surrounds us; and, most important, music depends on invention as something that involves venturing beyond system into the negation (which is Gould’s way of describing the world outside music) and then coming back into system as represented by music. Whatever else this description is, it is not the expected kind of professional counsel volunteered by virtuoso instrumentalists who perhaps would more likely be dishing out advice about practicing hard, being faithful to the score, and things of that sort. Gould is addressing the difficult and surprisingly ambitious task of stating a credo about striving for coherence, system, and invention in thinking about music as an art of expression and interpretation. Moreover, we should remember that he says these things after years of association with a particular kind of music, Bach’s, along with which he had undertaken a longstanding, volubly stated and restated rejection of what he called “vertical” romantic music that by the time he began his career as a musician had already become the highly commercialized and accepted staple of the piano repertory, featuring the kind of manneristic pianistic effects that most of his performances (especially of Bach) avoided strenuously. In addition, his dislike of being in close touch with the march of time, his appreciation of out-of-time composers like Richard Strauss, his interest in producing a state of ecstatic freedom by and in his performance, his complete retirement from the ordinary routine of concretizing—all these added substance to Gould’s unusual virtuosic enterprise offstage so to speak.

And indeed the hallmark of his playing style, as he continued to produce it in the complete privacy of the recording studios that he inhabited late at night, was first of all that it communicated a sense of rational coherence and systematic sense, and second, that for that purpose it focused on performing Bach’s polyphonic music as embodying that ideal. Now it is not as easy as one may think to have seized on Bach (and dodecaphonic music strongly influenced by Bachian rationalism) and then made him the cornerstone of a pianistic career in the mid-1950s; after all, quite formidable pianists like Van Cliburn and Vladimir Ashkenazy skyrocketed to fame at the very same moment, and the music they performed with *éclat* was furnished out of the standard romantic repertory of Liszt, Chopin, and Rachmaninoff. That material was a lot for a young and in effect provincial Canadian pianist to have given up at the very outset, the more so when we remember that not only were the Goldberg Variations unfamiliar music, but Bach piano performance itself was extremely rare and very much associated in the public domain either with antiquarianism or with the school exercises so disliked by unwilling piano students, who thought of Bach as a difficult and “dry” composer imposed by their teachers as discipline not as pleasure. Gould

went much further in his writing and in his playing of Bach, asserting that an “ultimate joy” was contained in the effort to produce an “exuberant and expansive effort at re-creation” in performance. So we had better pause here and try to understand the implicit assumptions behind Gould’s statements in 1964 and the kind of pianistic idea he articulated in his playing of Bach, and the reasons for choosing Bach in the first place.

There is first of all the polyphonic web itself that radiates outwards in several voices. Early on in his work Gould emphasizes that Bach’s keyboard works were not principally written for any one instrument but rather for several—organ, harpsichord, piano, etc.—or for none, as in the *Art of Fugue*. Bach’s music therefore could be performed as if in marked isolation from the rituals, conventions, and political correctness of the *Zeitgeist*, which of course Gould dismissed at every opportunity. Second, there is the fact of Bach’s reputation in his own time as a composer and performer who was both anachronistic in his return to the old church forms and the rules of strict counterpoint, and daringly modern in his sometimes excessively demanding compositional procedures and chromatic audacity. Gould builds on these things quite deliberately by setting himself very much against the grain of normal recital practice: his stage manners were anything but conformist, his playing went back to a preromantic Bach, and in his unadorned, unidiomatic, unpianistic tone he attempted in a completely contemporary way to make musical sound the material not of consumerism but of rigorous analysis.

A justly celebrated essay published by Adorno in 1951—“Bach Defended against his Devotees”—formulates some of what I have been suggesting about Gould in terms of a contradiction lodged at the very heart of Bach’s technique: the connection or link between counterpoint, that is, “the decomposition of the given thematic material through subjective reflections on the motivic work contained therein,” and, on the other hand,

the emergence of manufacturing, which consisted essentially in breaking down the old craft operations into its smaller component acts. If this resulted in the rationalization of material production, then Bach was the first to crystallize the idea of the rationally constituted work . . . it was no accident that he named his major instrumental work after the most important technical achievement of music rationalization. Perhaps Bach’s innermost truth is that in him the social trend which has dominated the bourgeois era to this very day is not merely preserved but, by being reflected in images, is reconciled with the voice of humanity which in reality was stifled by the trend at the moment of its inception.

I doubt that Gould had read Adorno or at that point had even heard of him, but the coincidence between their views is quite striking. Gould's Bach playing bears the inflections of a profound—and often objected to—idiosyncratic subjectivity, and yet it is presented in such a way as to sound clear, didactically insistent, contrapuntally severe, with no frills. The two extremes are united in Gould as, Adorno, says, they were in Bach himself. "Bach, as the most advanced master of basso continuo, at the same time renounced his obedience, as antiquated polyphonist, to the trend of the times [*gaudium*, or style gallant, as in Mozart], a trend he himself had shaped in order to help [music] reach its innermost truth, the emancipation of the subject to objectivity in a coherent whole of which subjectivity itself was the origin."

The core of Bach is anachronistic, a union of antiquated contrapuntal devices with a modern rational subject, and this fusion produces what Adorno calls "the utopia of the musical subject-object." So to realize Bach's work in performance means the following: "the entire richness of the musical texture, the integration of which was the source of Bach's power, must be placed in prominence by the performance instead of being sacrificed to a rigid, immobile monotony, the spurious semblance of unity that ignores the multiplicity it should embody and surmount." Adorno's attack on fraudulent period instrument authenticity is not to everyone's taste of course, but he is absolutely right to insist that what in Bach is inventive and powerful should not be squandered or sent back to the sphere of "resentment and obscurantism"; Adorno adds that the "true interpretation" of Bach's work is "an X ray of the work: its task is to illuminate in the sensuous phenomenon the totality of all the characteristics and interrelations which have been realized through intensive study of score. . . . The musical score is never identical with the work; devotion to the text means the constant effort to grasp that which it hides."

In this definition, Bach performance becomes both disclosure and heightening, in which a particular kind of inventiveness in Bach is taken up by the performer and reformulated dialectically in modern terms. An example is the last fugal movement of the G major partita, where Gould's playing shows an amazingly prescient and almost instinctive understanding of Bach's creativity as manifested in a kind of polyphonic writing that is at the same time both virtuosic and intellectual in the discursive sense. For a brief explanation of what I mean I have relied on a recent study entitled *Bach and the Patterns of Invention* written and published in 1996 by Laurence Dreyfus. In my opinion Dreyfus pioneers a new level of understanding of Bach's basic creative achievement, and in so doing transforms

our appreciation of what it is that Gould himself as performer was able to do. It is a pity that Dreyfus nowhere mentions Gould because the common element for both of them is the word “invention,” which Bach himself used and which Dreyfus correctly relates to a rhetorical tradition going back to Quintilian and Cicero. *Inventio* has the sense of rediscovering and returning to, not of inventing as it is used now, e.g., the creation of something new, like a light bulb or transistor tube. Invention in this older rhetorical meaning of the word is the finding and elaboration of arguments, which in the musical realm means the finding of a theme and elaborating it contrapuntally so that all of its possibilities are articulated, expressed, and elaborated. Much used by Vico, for example, *inventio* is a key term for his *New Science*. He uses it to describe a capacity of the human mind, the *ingenium*, for being able to see human history as something made by the unfolding capacity of the working human mind; for Vico, therefore, Homer’s poetry should be interpreted not as the sage wisdom of a rationalist philosopher but as the inventive outpourings of a necessarily fertile mind, which the later interpreter is able to recover inventively by putting herself back into the mists and myths of Homer’s very early time. Invention is therefore a form of creative repetition and reliving.

This idea of both interpretation and poetry as invention can be given a musical extension by looking at the special quality of Bach’s polyphonic composition. His remarkable gift for invention in his fugal writing was evident in his ability to draw out of a theme all the possible permutations and combinations implicit in it which, through skillful practice, he could make it undergo as a theme presented to the composing mind, like the material of Homer’s poems, for a skillful performance and invention. Here is how Dreyfus puts it:

Rather than conceiving musical structure as unconscious growth—an aesthetic model that presumes a spontaneous invention beyond the grasp of the intentional human actions—I prefer to highlight the predictable and historically determined ways in which the music was “worked on” by the composer [Bach]. This intention to speculate on Bach’s willfulness invites us to imagine a piece of music not as *inevitably* the way it is, but rather as the result of a musicality that devises and revises thoughts against a resilient backdrop of conventions and constraints. . . . While it is true that parts and whole in Bach cohere in a way that is often just short of miraculous . . . I find it more profitable to chip away at musical “miracles” . . . pursuing instead Bach’s inclination to regard certain laws as binding and others as breakable, to accept certain limits as inviolate and others as restrictive, to judge certain techniques productive and others fruitless, and to admire some ideas as venerable while

regarding others as outmoded. In brief, . . . analyses that capture Bach as a thinking composer.

Thus Bach's gift translated itself into a capacity for inventing, creating a new aesthetic structure out of a preexisting set of notes and an *ars combinatoria* which no one else had the skill to use so outstandingly. Let me again quote Dreyfus here in connection with what Bach was doing in the *Art of Fugue*:

Examining these pieces from the vantage point of the many different kinds of fugal invention, it is striking how, within the context of a monothematic work, Bach was never concerned with providing "textbook" examples of the subgenres, which might conceivably have laid out in the disposition of each piece in an exemplary and justifiable order. Typically, he crafted instead a set of highly idiosyncratic pieces that show how very far fugal invention can be pursued in the quest for harmonic insights. . . . This is why the *Art of Fugue* pieces so often go out of their way to frustrate pedagogically oriented definitions of fugal procedures at the same time that they assert the preternatural status of fugal procedures as a source of the most inspired inventions.

To put it simply, this is exactly the kind of Bach that Gould chose to play: 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 works. The sight of Gould on stage or on videotape actually doing this, acting it out, gives an added dimension to his piano playing. Most important, as one can hear in the early and late Goldberg performances that eerily frame his career, one at the very beginning, the other at the very end, Gould excavated the highly refined contrapuntal as well as chaconne structure of the work to announce an ongoing exploration of Bach's inventiveness through and by way of his own virtuosic realizations.

So what Gould seems to be attempting at such moments is a full realization of a protracted and sustained contrapuntal invention, disclosed, argued, and elaborated, rather than simply presented, through performance. Hence his insistence throughout his career that 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 invention, repeated takes—in the fullest rhetorical sense of “invention.”

Among other things, then, what Gould did with Bach anticipates what we are only now beginning to realize about the latter’s enormous and singular gift, a gift which 250 years after his death in 1750 can be seen to have sired a whole generation of aesthetic children, from Mozart, through Chopin, to Wagner, Schoenberg, and beyond. Gould’s performing style, his writing, his many videos and recordings testify to how well he understood the deep structure of Bach’s creativity, and show also his consciousness of how his own career as virtuoso had a serious intellectual and dramatic component as well—which was to carry on that kind of work in performances of Bach and other composers who were, in a sense, invented by Bach.

I find it particularly dramatic and even poignant that on some important occasions (i.e., his liner notes to the Goldberg Variations recording) he would refer to Bach’s major work, the one he chose to make his own, as having a generative root, an “aptitude for parental responsibility,” in spawning the great exfoliation of thirty variation-children. Gould himself struck everyone who knew him, as well as his listeners and posthumous audience, as being a singularly isolated figure, celibate, hypochondriacal, extremely odd in his habits, undomesticated in every sense of the word, cerebral, and unfamiliar. In almost every way, Gould did not belong, whether as son, citizen, member of the community of pianists, musician, or thinker: everything about him bespoke the alienated detachment of a man making his abode, if he had one, in his performances rather than in a conventional dwelling. The discrepancy between his feelings about Bach’s music as fecund and regenerative, on the one hand, and his own unproductive isolation, on the other, is, I think, more than mitigated, and indeed overcome by his performing style and what he performed, both of which were resolutely self-created as well as anachronistic, the way Bach’s were. Thus, the drama of Gould’s virtuosic achievement is that his performances were conveyed not only with an unmistakably rhetorical style but as an argument for a particular type of statement, which most musical performers do not, and perhaps cannot, attempt. This was, I believe, nothing less than an argument about continuity, rational intelligence, and aesthetic beauty in an age of specialized, antihuman atomization. In his own semi-improvised way, therefore, Gould’s virtuosity first of all expanded the confines of performance to allow the music being rendered to show, present, reveal its essential motivic mobility, its creative energies, as well as the processes of thought that constructed it by composer and performer equally. In other

words, Bach's music was for Gould an archetype for the emergence of a rational system whose intrinsic power was that it was, as it were, crafted resolutely against the negation and disorder that surrounds us on all sides. In enacting it on piano, the performer aligns himself with the composer, not the consuming public, which is impelled by the performer's virtuosity to pay attention to the performance not so much as a passively looked at and heard presentation but instead as a rational activity being intellectually as well as aurally and visually transmitted to others.

The tension in Gould's virtuosity remains unresolved. By virtue of their eccentricity, his performances make no attempt to ingratiate themselves with his listeners or reduce the distance between their lonely ecstatic brilliance and the confusion of the everyday world. What they consciously try to present, however, is 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. This achieves the purpose of expanding the framework inside which performers are compelled to work, and also—as the intellectual must do—it elaborates an alternative argument to the prevailing conventions that so deaden and dehumanize and derationalize the human spirit. This is not only an intellectual achievement, but also a humanistic one. And this, much more than the kind of electronic fiddling Gould often spoke about misleadingly as providing listeners of the future with a creative opportunity, is why Gould continues to grip and activate his audience.