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# Noise, Music and Social Categories: The Institutionalization of Music at Bard College

Carolyn Hietter
*Bard College*

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by

Carolyn Hietter

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# INTRODUCTION

## Noise and Music

Music is a means of organizing sound, but it differs from language in that it organizes sound for sound's sake, rather than for communication. The comparison between the two systems have their moments of insight: there are phonetic rules governing what kinds of sounds can be played, syntactic rules that determine how sound elements can be arranged, and poetic functions that create aesthetic meaning. Music cannot convey semantic meaning in the same way that language can, however, and also unlike language, music's "grammar" is more conscious than that of language. Music communicates--if anything--moods, colors, and energy. It is an art form that has its own traditions and evolutions. The most fruitful comparison between music and language, in my opinion, is the idea that a language consists of a finite set of rules and a finite set of elements which combine to create an infinite capacity for novel utterances. Contemporary western popular music has shown us that music also has the ability to generate an infinite number of novel *genres*. When one hundred years ago there was mainly the divide between "serious" and "light" music, today those terms have been further divided, leading to evolutions of numerous other genres including everything from neo-soul to acid jazz to post-punk revival. These genres are all predicated on the idea that certain sounds constitute one style, while other sounds do not. In this way, music can be considered a system of "organized sound."

Sound Studies is an emerging field in which I hope to situate this thesis. Despite the vast amount of ethnographic literature on sound, there are only three ethnographies that deal explicitly with American music schools--which are essentially

the educational institutions which prepare students for careers in *organized* sound. Bruno Nettl's work on mid-western conservatories *Heartland Excursions: Ethnomusicological Reflections on Schools of Music*, Henry Kingsbury's work on a northeastern conservatory of music *Music, Talent, and Performance: An Conservatory Cultural System*, and Eitan Wilf's recent ethnography about two prominent American jazz schools *School for Cool: The Academic Jazz Program and the Paradox of Institutionalized Creativity*. All three of these ethnographies deal with the education of music in an institutional setting, illuminating much about the social and political interactions that constitute a music school. None of them, however, deal extensively with the interaction *between* different kinds of music in an institutional setting. This thesis, therefore, will explore the ways in which the concepts of *music* and *noise* become sites for the creation of social boundaries in the music building and the college as a whole. My fieldwork was completed in the music buildings at Bard College, which are occupied by two distinct institutions: the Bard College Conservatory of Music and the undergraduate music program.

Commenting on Edgard Varése's definition of music as "organized sound," Matt Sakakeeny asks "When does 'organized' sound become 'disorganized' and who are the arbiters of organization?"(Sakakeeny 2015:112). When considered from this perspective, music as the organization of sound becomes an inherently political decision that determines the ways in which people organize what would otherwise be considered a "chaotic" realm of sound. Sakakeeny's question is therefore one of the key questions this paper seeks to answer. By exploring the ways in which music is spatialized physically, temporally, conceptually, and even socioeconomically, I hope

to demonstrate the ways in which people organize themselves around supposedly different systems of music. The idea that there are different styles and traditions of music is what I aim to interrogate--not to prove that they don't exist, but rather to show the ways in which the concept of "musical" difference becomes a façade that music students and professors invoke to simultaneously divide and orient themselves in Bard's music programs. The categories used to discuss the sound involved in these different stylistic groups actually parallel social feature of the groups. The distinction between music (as organization) and noise (as chaos) is one of the principal ways in which this façade is discussed. A theoretical background in the concept of noise is thus necessary to understand the different instances in which these words are used.

The choices made about what is music and what is noise are fundamentally cultural in the sense that they depend on unconscious categories. In this paper I will employ the concept of noise as it is discussed in four separate contexts: Jacques Attali and his discussion of noise as political violence (Attali 1977); John M. Picker's work on noise in Victorian English soundscapes (Picker 2012); David Novak's exploration of noise (Novak 2015); and R. Murray Schafer's writing about soundscapes and environmental noises (Schafer 2012). I will also rely on Mary Douglas's discussion of dirt as matter-out-of-place (Douglas 1966).

In a work environment, noises are sounds that violate our concentration. John Picker interrogates this idea in his essay about middle class writers' historic inability to concentrate amid the noise of the industrial revolution in nineteenth century London, showing that "noise" complaints were really just masks for racist and class-based notions of superiority. In Picker's interpretation, noise is involved with a

distinction between refinement and vulgarity. Insofar as vulgarity is related to the industrial sounds of working class factories as well as other street sounds like organ grinders and musical Italian neighbors, vulgar street noises could not be kept out of the upper middle class intellectuals' homes. In this understanding, the attempt to eliminate it is an attempt to deny "outdoor commotion 'free access' to interior professional space"(Picker 2012:143). Noise is therefore something which disrupts and pollutes interior space. The street noises represent that which the middle class intellectual is struggling to define himself *against*: lower class, meaningless *noise*.

Mary Douglas's understanding of dirt as "matter out of place" is a pertinent concept to any discussion of noise. She says, "dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecing inappropriate elements."(Douglas 1966:44). Dirt is therefore the anomaly which is not in its appropriate position. In relation to a discussion of music, sound-out-of-place can be thought of as sound that does not belong, according to a pre-existing and unconscious structure of what *does* belong. The basic unit that all individuals of the music department deal with in one way or another is sound. The different music programs are divided, however, by boundaries that on the surface have to do with musical "style," which is a nebulous term that most musicians can't even fully explain. The physical walls, then, have much to do with creating legible divisions between systems of sound.

Changes in technology have meant that the general level of sound in our society has increased. Sirens, beeps, rings, buzzes, hums, and other byproducts of modern technology have become background noise in every aspect of our daily life.

As disturbances in the sonic universes we create for ourselves, noises threaten the legibility of our sonic life--which contain important sounds that we need for survival like language and threats of danger. If every noise received the same amount of human attention, we would collapse under information overload. The overwhelming amount of noises present in the modern soundscape, however, render silence completely impossible. So if the chaotic din of our generation's soundscape cannot be silenced, certain sounds must be ignored.

R. Murray Schafer, in his work on soundscapes, says, "Noises are the sounds we have learned to ignore."(Schafer 2012:95). Schafer is discussing soundscapes and his argument is related to the impact of the industrial revolution on environmental sounds directly, rather than Picker who traces the impact of the industrial revolution on class-based notions of vulgarity. In the context of soundscapes, these environmental sounds have just as much of a function as other sounds that we might consider more "important." In the music building, an example of this is the omnipresence of slamming doors, resonant footsteps, whistling, laughter and other sonic byproducts of general human movement.[1] Because of the acoustics of different areas in the building, a whole host of ambient sounds permeate the soundscape of Blum at all times. Silence, therefore, does not exist in the music building either. If music is something we are conditioned to pay attention to, all competing sounds are distractions. The competing sounds, however, are integral to the soundscape of the space.

[1] see sound supplement

For Jacques Attali, the act of "ignoring" sound is an example of the political function of noise. His argument traces the four different roles of Western classical music as they existed at four different times in Western history: music as ritual, music as representation, music as repetition, and music as composition. He does this to demonstrate how changes in the dominant musical structures--and their political functions--precede changes in social structures. In this way, music is a herald of social change (Attali 1977).

David Novak, who studies Japanese noise music, criticizes the linear ethnocentrism of Attali's work. Attali suggests that the way musical structures change can be mapped onto an evolution that starts as noise, emerges as music, and eventually dies as silence when it is suppressed by the ensuing regime:

"Music is inscribed between noise and silence, in the space of the social codification it reveals. Every code of music is rooted in the ideologies and technologies of its age, and at the same time produces them."(Attali 1977:37)

In Novak's criticism of Attali's argument, he says that Attali's analysis is too ethnocentric for situating a cultural evolution of sound in such a in a linear progression (Novak 2013). This resonates with Novak's own work, which treats noise as a rebellion *against* music. This criticism also resonates with any discussion of a music building, in which different styles of music are in constant circulation and competition with one another. Sound is not simply noise before it becomes privileged music. Instead, different sounds become noise once they transgress the boundaries that musical institutions erect, in an effort to contain sounds within their conceptual and physical domains. This is what I mean when I discuss "sound out-of-place." Noise

and music become instrumental categories which exist to order the otherwise chaotic simultaneity of musics in an educational space.

**Space**

In the music building, the issue of competing regimes of oragnized sound is compounded. Several hundred sound-making music majors and their professors are forced to share practice and performance space with one another in a building that is ever-expanding but still never big enough. Noise is one of the primary factors around which the programs organize themselves, because when and where certain people occupy certain spaces is entirely contingent on the noise they make and whom they are disturbing.

The convoluted structure of Blum makes it very easy to spend four years interacting with the same people in the same spaces. As an institution historically famous for the freedom it gives its students, Bard students in the normal undergrad program have a large amount of autonomy in determining what they accomplish, and that degree of freedom combined with the vastness of options can be overwhelming.

When I was an incoming freshman completing L&T[2], my teacher observed that both the architectural diversity and the haphazard layout of buildings on Bard's campus are a salient reflection of the way Bard functions as an institution. The campus is not "legible" in the way that other college campuses are. Instead, Bard's campus is an ever-growing collection of heterogeneous buildings that span over five hundred acres of riverside forest. Buildings like the nineteenth century schoolhouse

[2] Language and Thinking, a one-month program all incoming freshman complete before the school year begins.

(Bard Hall), or the twentieth century estates (Blithewood and Ward Manor), or the state-of-the-art twenty-first century Performing Arts Center (Richard B. Fisher Center for the Performing Arts) all reflect the diverse and spatially fragmented history of the school.

As an institution that has more or less been on the brink of financial collapse since its inception as a seminary in 1860, Bard has never had the financial means to construct a fully planned, architecturally homogenous college campus. Instead, buildings have been added gradually for the past 155 years whenever the school was able to secure funds for a project.

The music program developed along a similar as-needed/when-possible trajectory. Starting with vocal music performances in the campus chapel, the presence of music on Bard's campus has grown along with the college to accommodate everything from Baroque to experimental electronic music, though the programs never really developed with an explicit plan outright.

The spatial element of sound is crucial to understanding its role in the music programs. Any discussion of sound always includes a discussion of space, because the resonance of sound waves change depending on the spaces through which they propagate. The acoustic technology of a space can negatively or positively impact the quality of sound, depending on what kind of music is being played. Most performance spaces at Bard, for example, are more suited to the acoustic requirements of classical music (in terms of instrumentation and amplification). There has been a historic lack of space on campus for decades, so the ways in which students navigate around this

constraint have been historically integrated as part of a Bard student's music education.

Time is also used to create boundaries in Blum. While certain kinds of sound sometimes occupy specific spaces in the building, they can only do so for a temporary period of time. Efforts to reduce noise and maximize work have caused professors and students to reorganize their schedules around the contraints of the space and the size of the program. Although sound in the music building has a territorializing function[3], it is a temporary one. With the exception of the Conservatory building, no one building at Bard is completely dedicated to one style of music. This means that the times and places in which certain musicians are allowed to practice and perform are limited, leading to constant negotiation--bureaucratic or otherwise--between different musical groups. Chapter one will discuss the illegibility of the music building, and how physical boundary creations instill order on an otherwise chaotic assemblage of musical styles.

**Music and Group Creation**

In a conversation about Contemporary Music and the Public, Pierre Boulez and Michel Foucault discuss the tendency for musicians to form closed circuits. Foucault says,

" With rock, for example, one has a completely inverse phenomenon. Not only is rock music (much more than jazz used to be) an integral part of the life of many people, but it is a cultural initiator: to like rock, to like a certain kind of rock rather than

[3] Corbin , Eisenberg 2015

another, is also a way of life, a manner of reacting; it is a whole set of tastes and attitudes."(Foucault & Boulez 1992)

This demonstrates the idea that different genres have their own attending "cultures" which dictate everything from style of dress to general attitude. At Bard, students in the Conservatory are often described by their stress levels. They are students pursuing a five year dual-degree in music and any academic field of their choice (though exceptions are sometimes made for theater, studio art, and dance majors). Because many of them are preparing for a career in the competitive world of classical music, there is a rigorous standard put in place and much is expected of them. On the other hand, the standard in the music program is considered much more "loose." Students have almost complete freedom to determine what they play, and the only standard that operates in the department is a subtle level of creative competition between musicians. There is an unspoken expectation that students will compose original music for their senior concerts, and the main competition that pervades the music program is an unspoken judgment of compositional creativity.

David Graeber's discussion of value competition is a helpful way to interrogate the different "aesthetics" of different musicians (Graeber 2013). . In his essay about value and universes, David Graeber employs Max Weber's notion of status in order to explain how different types of groups come into existence on the basis of value. Although he doesn't discuss the notion of groups specifically in the context of music, his argument still applies. Value plays a significant role in Graeber's understanding of group boundaries and how they are created. Graeber discusses this phenomenon in terms of two different kinds of "value competitions":

Max Weber's notion of status (or *stand*), for example, proposed that there are always two sorts of value competition going on. On the one hand, for any status group--and he's thinking very broadly here; this might include Junkers, doctors, monks, or artistic Bohemians--there is an internal game, where members of a certain status group are vying over their own peculiar notion of esteem; on the other hand, there is a larger struggle within the society as a whole to establish that particular notion of esteem, and the style of life with which it is associated, as the highest or most legitimate value"(Graeber 2013:227-228)

Later on in the essay, Graeber gives names to these two kinds of value competition. The first one--the internal game--is a struggle over *infravalues*. These are interior values that "inform *how* one goes about pursuing value within certain fields"(Graeber 2013: 233). In the music building, this could be thought of as the Conservatory students competing with one another on the basis of technical skill, which is an infravalue in the Conservatory's value system. In the music program, the competition is in regards to compositional creativity, which is an infravalue for music program students.

The second value competition--the "larger struggle within the society as a whole"--concerns *metavalues.* The struggle to assert the one group as dominant against *other groups* in society is the political value competition that Graeber identifies as taking place in the "multiple arenas" of social life. This is a struggle over what he calls metavalues. In the case of Bard's music programs, where multiple styles now coexist with one another in a wide variety of different social contexts, the struggle to assert one style over another is becoming increasingly more prominent. I interviewed one professor who taught at Bard from the 1970s to the 1990s, and he discussed a kind of "snobbery" that pervaded the department when he was here.

He discussed "bad feelings" that existed amongst the faculty for various political and practical reasons, but says that this type of fragmentation existed amongst the students in a different way: "There was such bad feeling. And there was a certain amount--the students didn't necessarily have bad feeling toward each other, but they had this kind of snobbery toward each other. The best way to put it--they disdained the other guy's thing." This type of fragmentation is not unusual in musical contexts, and it is certainly not unique to Bard. Stylistic snobbery is pervasive in a wide variety of contexts, musical or otherwise. In Graeber's terms, it is the essence of a metavalue competition. Snobbery towards different versions of the same practice is a normal way in which people group themselves, maintaining discrete values within closed systems..

Bruno Nettl, in his ethnography of midwestern music conservatories, discusses concentric circles of other styles of music, which form around a central canon of Western Art music. He discusses the "special terms" on which these other styles are incorporated, saying that "there are some ways in which the music school functions almost as an institution for the suppression of certain musics"(Nettl 1995: 82). This, he claims, is a result of the need for one dominant organizational system in an educational, institutional setting.

Nettl's idea relates to Bourdieu's concept of an official language, insofar as the dominant style exists at the center with every competing style occupying the peripheries (Bourdieu 1991). Bourdieu politicizes the idea of "one" way of speaking, and along a similar vein, there are many political implications in the notion of *one* style of music. Bakhtin discusses the tension between centripetal and centrifugal

forces in all speech communities. He identifies the voices that mimic the dominant style as centrifugal, moving toward the center, and all peripheral or otherwise contrary voices moving out in all directions toward the edges (Bakhtin 1984). Although these concepts are written in relation to language, there is an important comparison to made in the context of a music school. At Bard, the presence of classical music is so strong that most students would not disagree that it could be called Bard's "official music." It is taught in both the Conservatory and the music program, and it is the favored music of Bard College's president Leon Botstein, who is a musicologist, musician, and conductor of classical music.

The idea of an official language has a fruitful comparison to music. The word music, for instance, is colloquially referred to in the singular form. Most individuals usually have their own discrete understanding of what "music" means. There are different kinds of music, different styles of music, different genres of music, but music itself is one universal activity in the mind of an individual. In this way, the homogenization of music style in Conservatory educational contexts contribute to the creation of "official" (or high culture) music. The local knowledge systems within each style of music dictate how the musicians deal with sound, but they also produce expectations about performance style and vocabulary. Classical musicians, for example, don't usually take the time to clarify that they mean western classical in conversations with one another about music--the specific *kind* of music they are talking about is implied. Jazz musicians at Bard, however, are more of a centrifugal force in the music building. Being a "jazz" major means that the individual has the opportunity to study jazz if he chooses, but he is also encouraged to compose and

perform other styles of music. This is only one of the ways in which vocabulary is used to enclose musical communities at Bard.

**Strict v. Loose**

It is undeniable that classical music, in an American educational context, has a certain set of social implications. In chapter two, I will explore the ideas of "rigidity" and "strictness" in relation to how Bard musicians discuss classical music, contrasted against the idea of "looseness" which is commonly invoked to describe jazz.

Chapter two will discuss conceptual categories about sound, and the ways in which they are employed to distinguish between noise and music in the context of a music's tradition. The interactions between noise and music are a sounded example of the interaction between different value systems. In his essay on *Noise*, David Novak says, "Noise is typically separated from music on the grounds of aesthetic value. Music is constituted by beautiful, desirable sounds, and noise is composed of sounds that are unintentional and unwanted."(Novak 2015:126). For Novak, what is considered "noise" is therefore contingent on where it is occurring, who it is disturbing, and what aesthetic value system the perceiver adheres to.

In Blum, the term "noise" is used in reference to the sound-leakage of other musicians practicing, but also occasionally to describe a certain style of music (noise musicians). What is noise to one person, then, is often considered music to the person producing the offensive sound (unless that person is a Noise musician, in which case he or she would probably agree with the accuser's position). Understanding *which*

sounds are considered noise--and by whom--is dependent on understanding the different value systems which organize sound. What my research has led me to believe, however, is that these value systems often organize much more than just sound. They extend inward to organize attitudes toward history, but they also extend outward to perform socioeconomic ideals insofar as they are represented by musical performances. In this way, different styles of music have different functions. Chapter three will discuss these functions in relation to the performance spaces on campus, and how expectations about certain kinds of performance index the concert's functional role.

**Performance**

A crucial part of a music student's education is the concert. At Bard, music students are required to have one moderation concert[4] and two senior concerts. Conservatory students have performances as well, but they are called "recitals" rather than "concerts" or "shows." In his essay "Verbal Art as Performance," Bauman says that performance is an important constituent of verbal art, because a performance is a special context--or what Goffman calls a frame--where the "addresser" and "addressee" have distinct roles with unique and explicit implications. In regards to the distinction between music and language, Bauman is specifically talking about verbal art, which is more commonly associated with music than referential language. Many people I interviewed equated "good" musicians with "good storytellers" or "poets."

[4] Usually given in a student's sophomore or junior year. It is a means of entering the music program as a music major. All Bard student's are required to "moderate" into their field of study.

In a performance framework, addresser and addressee become "performer" and "audience," respectively. By the nature of his role, the performer is necessarily in a position to convey "communicative competence"(Bauman 1975: 293) to the audience, which changes the *way* his utterances are regarded: "Performance thus calls forth special attention to and heightened awareness of the act of expression, and gives license to the audience to regard the act of expression and the performer with special intensity"(Bauman 1975:293). Its frame therefore changes the expression--or verbal art--of the performer from an ordinary expression to a *competent* expression of "special intensity." In regards to the language itself, Bauman notes that there are certain "keys" within the language that identify the frame as a performance. Ethnographically speaking, performance is an important indicator of a specific culture's communicative (or otherwise artistic) stock: "The performance forms of a community tend to be among the most memorable, repeatable, reflexively accessible forms of discourse in its communicative repertoire"(Bauman 1975:149) The nature of performance, insofar as it is a demonstration of "competence," has a legitimizing function for what is being performed. Setting up chairs facing a stage automatically invites the audience into a scenario in which they will be entertained by *competent* performers. That being said, the ethnographic details of certain concerts at Bard indicate that the different *kinds* of concerts (i.e. a classical versus an electronic music concert) have their own unique set of expectations and implications in terms the space in which it occurs, the kind of refreshments that are offered, what people wear, how they clap, etc. These different expectations are part of the social and historical boundaries dividing different styles of music. When performances enter the capitalist

realm of money-making enterprises, as I discuss in chapter 3, a new set of expectations and implications emerge.

**Reflexive Note**

This thesis emerges out of my own experience as a music student at Bard. My dual roles as anthropologist and music major created tension around how people spoke to me in an interview context. As a music student and a jazz student studying the music programs at Bard, much of this project involved reflexive analysis. In some of my interviews, people would use the fact I was a jazz person as an example of how they perceive and categorize musicians in the programs. Sometimes this would be a divisive point, to explain how my "standards" might be different from theirs. Other times it would be a fraternal gesture, to show that I understand where they're coming from because we both play "jazz."

Many people I interviewed were people that I interact with on a regular basis in the music department, meaning they were familiar with the topic of my project before I approached them for an interview. In casual conversation, I always described it as an ethnography of the music program, but it was clear from the ensuing raised eyebrows and maniacal laughter that most people already had their own idea of what that meant. Some would approach me, asking when I was going to interview them--clearly eager to tell me their thoughts and feelings about the shortcomings of the institution. Other times, people that I had known to have strong opinions about the relationship between the Conservatory and the college would surprise me by becoming very diplomatic and respectful in their interviews, giving only meaningful

eye-contact or pointed sighs as evidence of their true feelings. Some professors would even jokingly dodge me in the halls of Blum, claiming they were going to lose their job if they allowed me to interview them.

In many interviews, then, this meant that people would come in simply wanting to philosophize or complain to me on the subject of Bard's music programs. It wasn't until--much like in Henry Kingsbury's research--I asked questions like "what is the goal of your music education here?" or even "what is music?" that people would be caught off-guard. From my perspective, these were the most salient moments for ethnographic analysis.

It was clear from those moments that most musicians do not regularly address these "big" issues. Whenever I asked questions like the ones listed above, people would respond with either long, reflective pauses or general expressions of annoyance at being asked a question that seemed so obvious, yet proved extremely difficult to articulate. I am including direct transcriptions of their stuttering, grammatical inaccuracies, laughter, and swear words not for humorous effect, but rather to show the ways in which people struggled to articulate what I consider to be the most fundamental aspects of musical life. Moments like this revealed that these musical boundaries are not as clear as we may imagine them to be.

Although this may be an obvious point to make, it is important to establish that the disdain for Conservatory is very real in Bard's campus life. As a pre-professional school in the middle of a progressive liberal arts college, the Conservatory doesn't exactly "fit in." The high level of technical skill that all Conservatory students have makes it an elite, audition-only program that aims to

bring its students to a level of professionalism during their time at Bard. As a result of this, the being in the Conservatory comes with more "perks" than being in the music program. Students travel to New York City to have lessons with famous classical professionals, they perform in regular concerts in Bard's Frank Gehry-designed performing arts center, they study at Bard with members of the American Symphony Orchestra, and at the end of every year they get to tour a foreign country and show the rest of the world what the Bard Conservatory can do.

It is not only the music students who feel slighted in comparison to the Conservatory. There are professors and students from all of Bard's programs--academic and artistic--who perceive a clear hierarchy between Conservatory students and the rest of the school. Many students and professors consider them the "athletes" of Bard, in a way that is analogous to the privileged position of athletes at Division I sports schools. Any ensuing resentment is usually a reaction against a perceived sense of entitlement or a lack of dedication to their chosen academic field.[5] This dynamic is neither unusual nor unexpected: integrating a population of exceptionally talented pre-professionals into a traditional Liberal Arts context is *bound* to create friction--especially when one is perceived as more privileged than the other.

I therefore have no intention of belaboring the perceived "injustices" of this dynamic, because that kind of moral activism serves little purpose for the argument of this thesis. Instead, I aim to show that this pervasive notion of inequality had a

[5] Students in the Conservatory's undergrad program have a dual-degree program that requires them to double major in music and an academic field of their choice (or any division of the arts that is *not* the undergrad music program).

profound impact on how I conducted my fieldwork. ~~A~~n incredible amount of extra work was dedicated to reassuring professors and students that nothing they said would be traced back to them and that they wouldn't "get in trouble." Despite the precautions I took, however, most interviews had a subtle feeling of anxiety or trepidation when I asked about interactions between the Conservatory and the college. Each individual I spoke with was different in terms of what made them hesitate, but it is certain that the presence of a recording device made most people more self-aware.

I wanted these people that I had known prior to interview contexts to talk freely about their experiences with the department, but instead I was inundated with their assumptions about what I might be thinking, because I'm a "jazz person." I tried my absolute best to make the individuals I interviewed feel comfortable to say what they wanted. I spent a good portion of the interviews asking people about their musical backgrounds, to understand the nuances of their musical conditioning and get more context for any preconceived stereotypes I might have had about them from my experience as a jazz major. But every time the subject of "other" styles of music came up, I could not shed the effect that my identity had on their responses.

I was struck by the way the conversation about music changed as soon as I assumed the role of ethnographer. Knowing that their words and behavior could end up in my project elicited a clear anxiety amongst my peers and professors, which in turn revealed the ubiquitous sentiment about the Conservatory and its allegiance to larger power structures at Bard. While everyone was aware of a clear division, the idea of speaking freely about it sometimes seemed less worth the potential

repercussions. Insofar as classical music is the "official music" of Bard, many people were hesitant to speak poorly of it because they felt they would be acting directly against the larger interest of the school.

Although I acknowledge the contentious relationship between the Conservatory and the other music program, what is more interesting is how the seemingly sonic differences between styles of music collapse when interrogated, revealing a vocabulary that really involves the creation of social categories.

**Chapters**

In the first chapter I will discuss the music building as a cultural site for boundary creation. Walking through the physical space demonstrates not only music majors' relationship with their environment, but also the ways in which the department has developed and grown into the space over the years. The Edith C. Blum Institute for the Arts--also known as Blum--became the site for Bard's music department in 1993. Since then, the department has grown to include a Conservatory of Music and several masters programs, including Vocal Arts and Conducting. To accommodate these new programs, new buildings have been erected around Blum with the help of donors. This chapter will explore the ways in which the physical space leads to problems of noise, and how members of the music programs at Bard transform the space further through temporal and spatial politics, in order to keep noise from violating its boundaries.

The second chapter will consider the *social* boundaries which historically divided jazz from classical music--light music from serious music--and in turn led to

the vast number of musical genres that exist today. This musical transformation can be followed at Bard in the school's history and newspaper archives which date back to 1895. Though it began as an institution primarily concerned with religious music, Bard transformed over the twentieth century. The goal of this chapter is to show that the "fences" which people erect and maintain between different styles of music have little to do with the sound itself. Instead, they serve to perform and order different aspects of a person's relationship to history, tradition, and sound.

The third chapter is a discussion of the various performance spaces at Bard, with ethnographic detail of different performances as a reflection of the different music programs. The aim of this section is to show the many social and performative factors that go along with music performances, and how these different features reveal the social group or musical classification to which the performance may belong. Different kinds of music have different functions in society, especially in terms of the economy. I will discuss the importance of the concert experience in relation to the economy, utilizing Attali's perception of a "new" economy based on composition.

## CHAPTER 1

## GETTING TO KNOW THE SPACE: THE PHYSICAL BOUNDARIES

I once gave a first-year jazz student a ride to rehearsal, and due to the congestion of the parking lot, I had to park closer to the film building's rear entrance. We got out of my car and I started walking towards the film building entrance, which is one of many ways of getting into the music building. He said "whoa" and I asked him what was the matter. He responded, "I just didn't know you could get to Blum by going in this way. This building is so confusing. I feel like I only ever go to the same two rooms." As a student without a car, he rarely enters Blum from the rear parking lot. His usual path involves entering Blum from the front entrance, close to the main road. As I led him down the hallway which connects the film building to the second floor of Blum, it was clear that he had never been in that part of the building before. By saying that he only ever goes to the same two rooms in Blum, he meant that his experience with the department--both spatially and stylistically--was limited by the concentration of jazz majors in one specific area. This is a common experience for many members of the music department.

The physical structure of Blum has several distinct hallways which contribute to the stylistic grouping of musicians in the program. In an interview with a music professor who was intimately involved in the construction and design of New Blum (the newer wing of the music building), she told me that "buildings play a *huge* role in the educational experience of people." I asked her to explain why, and she said:

> Because having participated in the design of these buildings, I see how people go to certain places but not any other places. That's just where they go because that's

where they do their work. So the traffic patterns dictate who they run into and, you know, who they talk to, who they hang out with. And there's one little couch on the second floor, and sometimes there's somebody there with his earphones on. But it's not used as a hang-out place. There's no hang-out place.

In terms of a student's "path," this quote illuminates how those paths become carved out. "Traffic patterns" in the building create social networks of individuals who engage in both musical and social activities together. The lack of a hang-out place means that social activity between students either happens outside, at the table and chairs in the courtyard, or otherwise in musical settings.

**Space and Musical Categories**

The aim of this chapter is to situate musical categories within the physical spaces they occupy in the music buildings. Put more broadly, the more general aim is to show the political impact of spatial organization in educational and *sonic* contexts. The building itself is convoluted and spatially fragmented. While the Conservatory has its own building, Bito, for most of its requirements, the program shares Blum. Throughout the course of its expansion, different types of music have grown into different areas of the building, giving students a divided understanding of the music program. What follows is a detailed description of the various hallways--and their respective functions--that make up contemporary Blum.

This is therefore a tour of different musical sounds and their respective locations, which temporally and spatially fragment the department. In Blum, the organization of the place implies that sound does in fact respect space, as different musical genres are sectioned off into different parts of the building. Humans have no

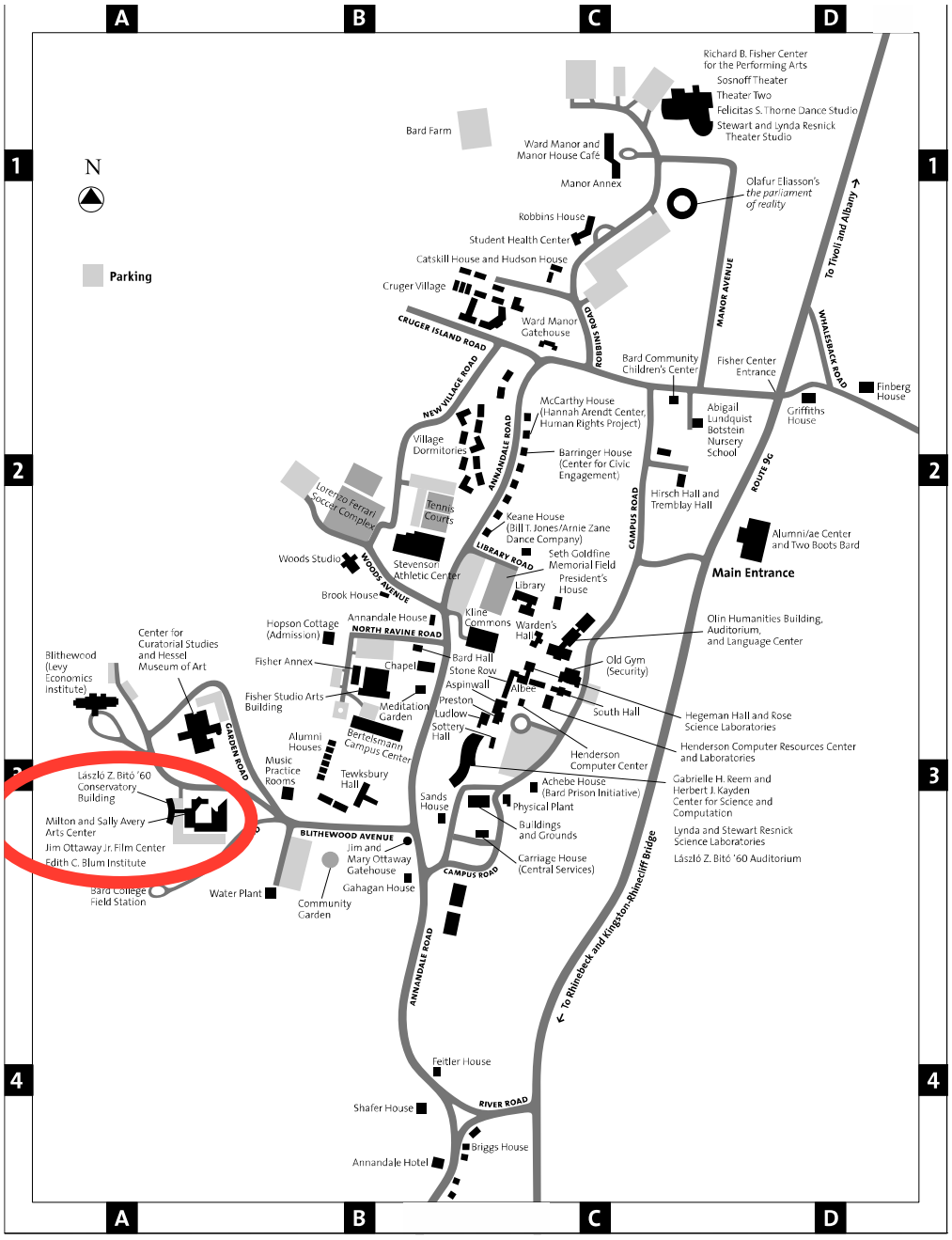
earlids, however, and buildings are no help to this problem. The moments when different kinds of sound leak out across their boundaries are transitional moments, when what was considered "music" within the boundary becomes noise outside of it--sound out of place. The walls of the building are not suitable boundaries for isolated soundmaking activities because sound travels through them. All microcultures within the music building make sound, so the existence of one becomes a threat to the other as soon as it passes through the walls and disturbs other groups as noise. In performance contexts, working contexts, and recording contexts, noise is something to eliminate. Blum and Bito are the buildings in which all of these activities take place, and as I hope to demonstrate with the sound supplement to this thesis, noise is a constant presence in the music building.

As a consequence of this noise, different rules about when rooms can be occupied--official and otherwise--have been put in place to assuage its effects on particular groups. Time therefore becomes intimately involved with space as a tool for boundary creation. The various categorized sections of it are under constant construction as different social groups adjust to the noise of others--either by occupying a different space, occupying the same space at a different time, or implementing official rules that determine when a certain space can be occupied and by whom. The space of the music building is therefore a dynamic, liquid, socially constructed space which is constantly changing to accommodate the ever-expanding diversity of students, styles, and sounds. In this way, one of the most fundamental aspects of being a music major involves learning how to navigate around the many noise and scheduling problems of the program. This section will examine the ways in

which this "noise" problem is dealt with through both architecture and regimented scheduling.

**Map**

The music buildings at Bard are situated in an obscure southern corner of the campus, close to the river and quite a distance from most other buildings. Although they appear to be one large structure, in general conversation students refer to three separate parts of it: Avery, Blum, and Bito. Below is the map of Bard College's Campus showing where the music facilities are located in relation to the rest of the school. Below that is a zoomed-in segment of the map, which depicts the three buildings of interest.


A
B
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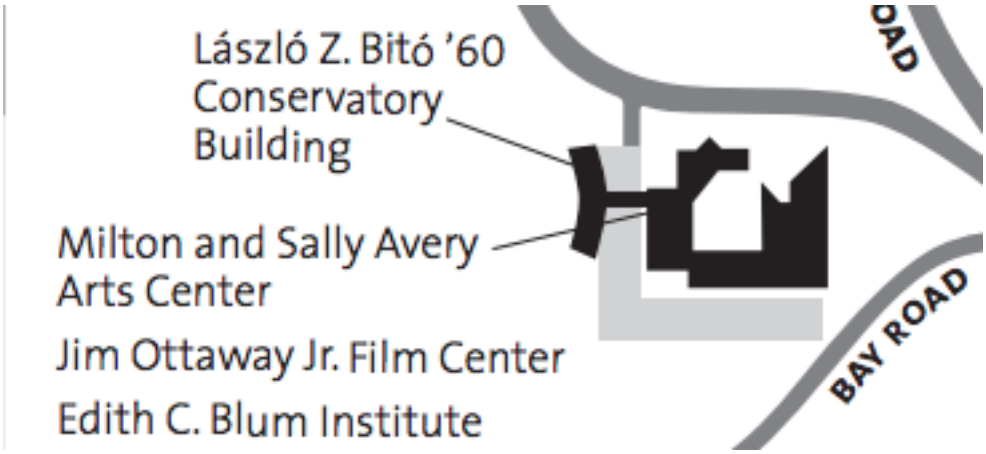
N
Parking
Richard B. Fisher Center for the Performing Arts
Sosnoff Theater
Theater Two
Felicitas S. Thorne Dance Studio
Stewart and Lynda Resnick Theater Studio
Bard Farm
Ward Manor and Manor House Café
Manor Annex
Olafur Eliasson's the parliament of reality
Robbins House
Student Health Center
Catskill House and Hudson House
Cruger Village
Ward Manor Gatehouse
CRUGER ISLAND ROAD
ROBBINS ROAD
MANOR AVENUE
To Tivoli and Albany
WHALEBACK ROAD
NEW VILLAGE ROAD
Bard Community Children's Center
Fisher Center Entrance
Finberg House
McCarthy House (Hannah Arendt Center, Human Rights Project)
Village Dormitories
ANNANDALE ROAD
Barringer House (Center for Civic Engagement)
Abigail Lundquist Botstein Nursery School
Griffiths House
ROUTE 9G
Lorenzo Ferrari Soccer Complex
Tennis Courts
Keane House (Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company)
CAMPUS ROAD
Hirsch Hall and Tremblay Hall
Woods Studio
WOODS AVENUE
Stevenson Athletic Center
LIBRARY ROAD
Seth Goldfine Memorial Field
Alumni/ae Center and Two Boots Bard
Main Entrance
Brook House
Library
President's House
Kline Commons
Warden's Hall
Olin Humanities Building, Auditorium, and Language Center
Hopson Cottage (Admission)
Annandale House
NORTH RAVINE ROAD
Center for Curatorial Studies and Hessel Museum of Art
Blithewood (Levy Economics Institute)
Fisher Annex
Chapel
Bard Hall
Stone Row
Old Gym (Security)
Aspinwall
Albee
Fisher Studio Arts Building
Meditation Garden
Preston
Ludlow
Sottery Hall
South Hall
Hegeman Hall and Rose Science Laboratories
Alumni Houses
Bertelsmann Campus Center
Henderson Computer Resources Center and Laboratories
Music Practice Rooms
Tewksbury Hall
Henderson Computer Center
László Z. Bitó '60 Conservatory Building
GARDEN ROAD
Achebe House (Bard Prison Initiative)
Gabrielle H. Reem and Herbert J. Kayden Center for Science and Computation
Sands House
Physical Plant
Buildings and Grounds
Lynda and Stewart Resnick Science Laboratories
László Z. Bitó '60 Auditorium
Milton and Sally Avery Arts Center
Jim Ottaway Jr. Film Center
Edith C. Blum Institute
BLITHEWOOD AVENUE
Jim and Mary Ottaway Gatehouse
CAMPUS ROAD
Carriage House (Central Services)
Bard College Field Station
Water Plant
Community Garden
Gahagan House
ANNANDALE ROAD
To Rhinebeck and Kingston-Rhinecliff Bridge
Feitler House
RIVER ROAD
Shafer House
Briggs House
Annandale Hotel




The map doesn't clearly show how the film building is separate from the music building, but it does explicitly make the distinction between the Conservatory Building and everything else. In the shape that remains--everything that is not the Conservatory Building--an imaginary diagonal line extending from the bottom left corner and going up into the open space on the top right demarcates the division between the film building (Milton and Sally Avery Arts Center/Jim Ottoway Jr. Film Center) on the right and music building (Edith C. Blum Institute) on the left. The open space between Blum and Avery is a courtyard that has a steep downward slope, allowing access to the bottom floor of Blum. With the exception of the front entrance, the courtyard is entirely enclosed by the concrete walls of Blum and Avery. Blum has a balcony on the second floor that leads out into the courtyard, and underneath it there are tables and chairs where a visitor can almost always find an assortment of music students and faculty smoking cigarettes and conversing.

The narrow, horizontal strip in between the Conservatory Building and the rest of the complex is a one-story hallway, lined with frosted glass windows, that has entrances on either side of it (allowing access to both the parking lot (south) and the

road (north). Both buildings are two-stories, however, so if anyone wishes to cross from Blum to Bito, they have to go to the center of Blum, down (or up) to the ground floor, and then through the frosted glass hallway. This renders the upstairs of Bito inaccessible from the upstairs of Blum.

Referring to the maps above, "Blum" is the central structure, which consists of the vertical rectangle and the convex octagonal shape directly above it. Old Blum is the octagonal shape, and New Blum is the rectangle. Old Blum has an entrance on its northeastern tip, which opens out into the mouth of the courtyard and directly faces an entrance to Avery. We will start there.

**Walk-Through**

Immediately on the left, when walking in through the "front" entrance, is Blum Hall--the most popular space for electronic and jazz student concerts. Of all the performance spaces on campus (and there are seven), Blum Hall's acoustics are the most preferable for a drum set. In an interview, one student was talking about the different performance spaces on campus:

If it's gonna be a crowded music or like fast, anything with drums really, I think Blum Hall *sounds* the best. For drums anyway.

*C*: Why?

Um. It's the dryest. That's really it. It doesn't get too muddy with drums.

The other performance spaces were designed primarily for classical music performances, as they are extremely resonant spaces with a lot of wood for acoustic sound to bounce off of. The resonance of the instruments' sound is extremely

important in classical music but also many other kinds of music. Horn players and vocalists typically enjoy playing in resonant spaces because they are able to hear their sounds clearly reflected back at them. It allows them to hear more nuances in their sound, which makes them more aware of how their playing might sound to an audience. This kind of acoustic space is problematic for drums and amplified instruments, however, which sound better in "dead" (or "dry") spaces where the sound doesn't bounce around as much. In a very resonant space, drums and amplified instruments become so loud that they often overpower acoustic instruments. I think of resonant spaces as spreading sound out wider and fuller so as to allow the ears better access its details.

Blum Hall's acoustics are unique in that they accommodate both extremes quite nicely. It is a fairly resonant space, but it isn't so resonant that drums overpower everything else that is going on. In a conversation with a faculty member who knows a great deal about acoustics and sound, he acknowledged that students tend to like Blum Hall so much because it is the most accommodating for different kinds of music. The problem with Blum Hall, he explained, is less about the acoustics and more about the scheduling problems that it presents. There is a professor who offers a performance workshop in Blum Hall, which is open to all performing musicians in the department[6] *or* Conservatory who seek to improve their performance skills. Don is classically trained, and very well-liked by members of both the music program and the Conservatory. He has been involved with music at Bard

[6] Officially, the music program is not called a "department." Few people know this bureaucratic fact, however, so the words program, department, and even "music college" are used interchangeably to differentiate it from the Conservatory. I will use the words interchangeably as well.

for quite a long time, so he has had the opportunity to work with a wide variety of musicians. The workshop usually interferes with student concerts, however, because it goes until the early evening when students would typically be having their soundcheck or last minute rehearsals. Because this class is offered every semester--and almost every day of the week--Don's presence in Blum Hall has become an uncontested obstacle which students must simply learn to plan around. This class, combined with the fact that Blum Hall is a favorite performance space that must now accommodate the some-odd 113 music majors, makes scheduling rehearsal time in it a very difficult maneuver.

Scheduling problems aside, Blum Hall's location in the music building also poses a host of noise problems. The hallway surrounding Blum Hall makes up the rest of Old Blum's ground floor, and its wood floors make for some of the most resonant footsteps in the whole building. It is home to one of the vocal instructors' offices as well as a music historian and several piano instructors. A visitor passing through this hallway on a weekday afternoon is likely to hear anything from opera student, singing scales in a vocal lesson,[7] to an electronic music student rehearsing for her senior concert. Sound therefore leaks across the hallway during the daytime, but at night the majority of sound leakage comes from downstairs.

In an obscure, almost hidden corner of the hallway, there is a staircase that goes down into the basement of Old Blum. At the bottom of these stairs is a music professor's office. It is a spacious office which used to belong to the department's ethnomusicologist, because the ethnomusicologist at the time had a large number of

[7] sound supplement

exotic instruments to store. Recently, however, the ethnomusicology office was moved upstairs to what is referred to as the "jazz hallway," and a musicologist moved in to the basement office. He too has instruments that need storage.

In terms of noise, this is perhaps the most inconveniently located office in the entire building because it shares a hallway with several of the drum practice spaces. Down the hall from the office are several small practice studios where student drummers keep their drum sets. These rooms are invaluable for many students in the department because if they didn't exist, drum students would have to store their drum sets in their dorm rooms, transporting them to Blum every time he or she wanted to play. The number of these rooms is limited, however, so most rooms are shared by anywhere from four to ten people. This is also an important space for non-music majors who play in some of the student bands on campus. They often hold their rehearsals in this hallway. The percussive elements of everything from jazz to punk rock to death metal can thus be heard rehearsing in this hallway, and it is in direct response to this that fliers were pasted to the doors of each studio at the beginning of this year:

There is no drum playing before 5 PM Monday - Friday.
No exceptions.

Please don't jeopardize the privilege to use these studios that the college has provided for you. Thank you.

The memo--although a fair courtesy for a professor whose office is inconveniently situated in one of Bard's "noisiest" and loudest spaces--invokes an uncomfortable power dynamic between the students and the anonymous authority that distributed

the memo. I say uncomfortable because although many non-academic student music groups rehearse in this basement, it is also the space where drummer music majors practice and sometimes even rehearse.

For music majors, the primary form of "studying" is on their instruments in the practice rooms. Practicing is a musician's mechanical, individual work. It is imperative and unavoidable for all musicians, so forcing all drum practice hours into the evening means that anyone wandering around Blum late at night will almost always find a tired drummer shedding[8] in their small, sweaty room. One drummer, Klaus, discussed this issue during an interview:

"As a drummer, I *can't* practice anywhere whenever I want. I'm limited to my practice room, which I have to share with people, and then I'm limited to spaces like the jazz room, or n001 in the basement, or John's Office, which can be locked whenever. So, you know... drums are just as much an instrument as anything else! And I sometimes feel slightly neglected in that sense--or I used to, not really as much anymore. Because...the more you're in the music program, you learn how to sortof maneuver around those obstacles. But they shouldn't really be there in the first place."

This response was part of his attempt to articulate why he feels that the Conservatory has more "resources" than the music program. He described the nature of their instruments--violins, trumpets, flutes--as allowing them to practice anywhere, whenever they want. Although this is not entirely true (practice rooms are limited all throughout campus, not just for drums, and piano players are similarly limited by their unportable instruments), it did cause him to raise a fair point: being a music major requires maneuvering around certain "obstacles" that arise simply as byproducts of the size and heterogeneity of the department.

[8] another word for practicing--refers to the phrase "shedding wood"

In his essay "Sound Structure as Social Structure," Steven Feld provides a rubric for the inquiry into music as a cultural practice. In the rubric, one of the questions he suggests is, "What mystical or cosmological associations with the environment support, contradict, or otherwise relate to the socioeconomic context of musical beliefs and occasions?"(Feld 1984: 387) In terms of the mystical or cosmological associations with the environment, Klaus's perception that the Conservatory doesn't have the same spatial constraints that he does is a primary example. Most music program students lament about their lack of resources, citing how professors have had to provide students with amps, drumsets, and other expensive music equipment with their own money. The myth that the Conservatory has "more" certainly finds support in the presence of a new Conservatory building, but the myth was active in the department even before the plans for that building were announced. The idea that Bito is much larger and much more capable of suiting Conservatory students' needs is a reflection of the overall feeling that Conservatory students are more "important" to the school. Most students make these kinds of claims without fully understanding the intricacies of the Conservatory's spatial constraints--it is implicit, *felt* knowledge rather than knowledge grounded in fact and experience.

The constraints of the drum hallways present only some of the many scheduling dilemmas that arise from the structural constraints of the building. The effort to regulate noise and optimize productivity has led to the implementation of rules that negotiate who can occupy what space and when. Each new rule comes with its own unique set of repercussions, however. In the case of this hallway, the noise of

drummers and rehearsing punk rock bands leaks out and up into Blum Hall. Although most professors are no longer working in their office after 5 pm, almost all student concerts happening in Blum Hall occur after 5 pm, because of Don's performance class.

I once heard the unfortunate consequence of this scheduling dilemma, during a student's concert in Blum Hall. The concert was for a jazz major, who had decided to play a variety of tunes during his show (that weren't all necessarily "jazz.") One song, for example, was particularly slow and quiet. It would have been a beautiful moment in the show if it wasn't for the punk rock band that started practicing downstairs at full volume. The "noise" was coming from the practice room directly below Blum Hall, and it was so loud that the sound became an actual part of the concert. The overall effect of the downstairs rehearsal was that it became a complete distraction from the performance going on in Blum Hall, and created an awareness in the audience of sound outside of the room. Although the punk band probably thought they wouldn't be disturbing anyone by practicing at 8 pm, they became actual participants in the jazz student's performance--as distraction and noise.

Proceeding south in the basement of Blum, out of the drum hallway, is a strange triangular room with two offices, a copy machine/printer (used by almost all professors in the program), a paper shredder, a handicap ramp and 2 small steps that lead up into the ground floor of New Blum. The shape of this hallway is utterly perplexing and its function is mysterious. In terms of R. Murray Schafer's argument about industrial noises, the constant hum of the copy machine and paper shredder make this hallway a unique example of the power of industrial noises. There is a door

that usually remains closed between the drum hallway and this hallway, and when the door closes behind you after entering the hallway, the hum of the machines take over the soundscape of the place, drowning out the noise in the drum hallway with an industrial hum that feels like silence.

Leaving the mystery hallway and continuing further south opens out into the central space of the music building. Not only is it physically the most central place in Blum, but it is also a common gathering spot for students who are meeting for rehearsal or finishing class. It makes sense, then, that Blum's main office is in this room as well. This is where the chair of the music department and the director of Conservatory admissions have their offices, as well as administrative assistants for both the music program and the Conservatory (although there is another office in Bito). Students come here to book practice rooms and rehearsal spaces

The central room has several bulletin boards, which display advertisements for music lessons, student concerts, campus events, and music scholarships. The music department's semester event calendars are also in this room, and they show the time and place of all student and faculty concerts that will be happening throughout the semester. Conservatory events are not listed on this calendar, however, as there is a separate calendar and bulletin board in the lounge area of Bito.

There is a door into the courtyard as well as a stairwell that leads to the second story of New Blum and--due to the downward slope of the land Blum was built on--the ground floor of Old Blum. This central room is also the portal to Bito (via the frosted glass passage) and the electronic music hallway.

The Bito portal joints with Blum here, near the exit to the courtyard, so this is an area where Conservatory students and music program students most often comingle. The outdoor courtyard has tables and chairs where students and professors sit to smoke, converse, or enjoy the weather if it's warm. In the office, there are two large armchairs where many students often sit and converse with the Conservatory's administrative assistant, who is beloved by both Conservatory and music program students alike. One Conservatory student I spoke with, who entered Bard in the music program and auditioned for the Conservatory in February of his freshman year, described the differences between the two buildings to me: "I *love* Blum. It's so nice in there. Because as soon as you go into Bito, it is just immediately: stress." He said that Bito is often filled with famous classical musicians that he would admire on the radio growing up, and seeing them at his school and in his classrooms creates a high level of anxiety and responsibility. "You have no idea what goes on behind those doors," he said. He described the atmosphere as one of constant "judgment," making gestures of pretending to write on a clipboard or squinting his eyes and pretending to scrutinize an imaginary person playing for him. The "level" of musicianship in the Conservatory, as many have explained to me, is much higher. Conservatory students go through a rigorous audition process to be admitted, but students in the music program do not. There is a standard of excellence in the Conservatory that is maintained at all times, and bringing in famous musicians does much to keep students working within that standard on a daily basis.

The student described Blum as something different. He used hand gestures and smiles to explain that the atmosphere is social, congenial--*fun.* "And that is why Conservatory students always go there--they love it. You can tell."

Going up the stairs in this central room leads to an open space that has, on the western wall facing Bito, a room enclosed by glass-windows called the "Listening Library." This room includes 4 computers and large bookshelves littered with different recordings of classical music--solo and orchestral--as well as printers. The windows on the western wall facing Bito are frosted, and though they are impossible to see through, they blind anyone who chooses to work in there on a sunny afternoon. This is another common space that Conservatory students and music program students occupy together, using the computers for everything from Skype to Youtube to Sibelius[9]. The room is Blum's private computer lab, where composition students can sometimes be found at 5:55 before a 6 pm composition class, scrambling to print out their music. Outside of the listening library is a small bench, with no arm rests, as well as a balcony that looks over the courtyard.

Although this central space--both upstairs and down--has many features that would normally belong in a recreational space--benches (2), bulletin boards, calendars--it is important to note that is not what it is. The lack of any kind of lounge in Blum is perhaps, as one professor speculated, tied to the idea that if students are "hanging out" then they aren't *working*. But the spatial and scheduling constraints of the building mean that students often have a large amount of downtime when waiting for a practice room, lesson, or rehearsal.

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[9] A music notation software

Returning to Klaus's quote, he discussed the other options he has for practicing when his practice studio isn't available: "I'm limited to spaces like the jazz room, or n001 in the basement, or John's Office, which can be locked whenever." These are the rooms that have drumsets meant for student use. The drumsets (which were mostly donated to the department by its own professors) are chained together to prevent theft, and students must bring their own cymbals. The spaces Klaus listed are used for classes or lessons during the day, and sometimes at night, as in the case of one Jazz Composition class that goes from 6-9 pm. To avoid class schedules, most student rehearsals have to happen at night. All of these rooms can be "locked whenever," meaning there is no predictable logic dictating when and why certain spaces are locked. So even if students book a space for rehearsal, there is no telling whether or not the room will be locked when they get there. If that is the case, students have to call Bard Security to come across campus and unlock the room for them, and Security will only do this if the student calling was put on the access list for that particular room.

The wait for Security--especially in the upstairs hallway outside of the jazz room--is one of the instances in which the central space becomes a kind of "waiting room." Because there is no lounge, this means that students can often be found leaning against walls or crowding around one of the small benches in the central space as they wait for Security to arrive and let them in to a room. The jazz room and John's office are just down the hall from the listening library, so students often congregate around the small upstairs bench. The upstairs floor is made out of concrete, so sitting on the floor isn't an appealing alternative, but it still happens all

the time. Downtime in the hallway also means laughter and conversation in the hallway, and the concrete floor carries these "noises" all throughout the building.

Going back downstairs leads to the electronic music hallway. It is colloquially referred to as this because the recording studio, the electronic music faculty offices, and the electronic music classrooms are all located in this particular space. The hallway wraps around toward the film building, and at the end there is an elevator, an exit to the parking lot, and an entrance to Avery, all of which make this a popular traffic hallway. This hallway also has what students call the "project room," and it is filled with everything from soldering irons to children's' toys to old iMac speakers. It is where students fix, build and take apart electronic devices. A visitor walking by this room could hear anything from the soundboard of a children's picture book to the drum beats of a 1992 mini Casio keyboard. Often times in my conversations with people about the department, discussion of the electronic music part of the program would elicit hand gestures from the speaker that were directed towards this specific hallway. In my interviews with jazz students and professors, they would refer to electronic music majors/faculty members as "the guys downstairs," because the jazz hallway is located directly above the electronic music hallway.

In a 1993 *Bard Observer* article announcing the music department's move into Blum, the author discusses the building's potential for categorical division as a new and exciting benefit of the move. In listing all the highlights of the new building, she says "other features include: ...a separate 'section' of the building for the electronic music program--which will allow the musicians of this area of the department the

freedom to be louder, if they so wish, without disturbing other musicians" (1993, *The Bard Observer)*.

There is a common perception that electronic musicians make an unusually high amount of sound. While this may be true at times--electronic music students' concerts can sometimes reach ear-splitting volumes--I have never been "disturbed" by any noises coming from this downstairs hallway.

Instead, it is the upstairs jazz hallway that tends to make the most "noise." The hall includes a large performance and/or rehearsal space (known as "the jazz room") and a narrow, window-less classroom where most non-playing-based classes are taught (Jazz: The Freedom Principle, for example). The rest of the rooms in this hall are offices belonging to jazz faculty (as well as the ethnomusicology professor).

This hallway, like the drum hallway in the basement of Old Blum, presents another interesting "noise" problem on Fridays. Samba School is a music workshop that is offered to all Bard students, regardless of their musical background and skill level. It is a Brazilian drum ensemble that performs with a wide variety of different percussion instruments, and they meet once a week on Fridays. In a conversation about the different acoustic qualities of Blum and Bito, and their capacity for sound-leakage, Marvin told me, "Blum conducts sound too. Samba school? Takes over the building. Love Samba School, but gotta book the studio after 2:00 on Fridays. So...". When he said that Blum conducts sound, he pointed to the floor, referring to the concrete floor upstairs. While the floor is carpeted downstairs by the studio, muting the perceived "loudness" of the sound activities down there, the floor of the upstairs hallway causes sound to bounce all over the place, disturbing professors and students

throughout the building during particularly loud rehearsals. Marvin mentioned another one of the unique scheduling conflicts that members of the Blum culture all understand: Samba School happens on Fridays at specific times, so if you want to record something in the studio or meet with a professor, it will have to wait until the drums are packed up. Different people maintain different attitudes about this, however.

Neither the jazz nor electronic hallways are entirely devoid of classical music. In both hallways, the offices closest to the central room (with the staircase and portal to Bito) are inhabited by professors involved in some way with classical music (a historian, a composer, a performance coach). There is no "unofficial" space for classical music in Blum in the same way that there is for vocal, jazz and electronic music. Before the construction of Bito, one faculty member told me that "classical people sort of had different choices of where they could do their thing." There was not one specific hallway where all classical faculty members had their offices. Instead, the spaces designated for classical music were (and still are) distributed all over campus: Bard Hall, Olin, and the Chapel on central campus; the Fisher Center and the Ward Manor gatehouse[10] on north campus. While Bard Hall and the Chapel--two of Bard's oldest buildings--are open to use by all kinds of music students,[11] all of the other spaces I listed are not. Every time I have tried played the pianos in Olin (to practice in between classes), someone has interrupted me and told me that I'm not allowed to use them. Similarly, the idea of holding a rehearsal in the Fisher Center

[10] Before the construction of Bito, the Ward Manor Gatehouse was utilized by the Conservatory's graduate Vocal Arts program. It has since turned into administrative offices for

[11] The piano in the Chapel has a lock on it, but anyone can play the organ.

would be comical to members of the music program, because it is a professional performance space that students rarely have access to.

Before Bito existed, classical music resided in Blum and the other music spaces on Bard's campus. The Conservatory has their rehearsals on the stage of the Fisher Center, and Conservatory musicians can almost always be found in any of the practice rooms in Blum--as well as academic classrooms late at night--but it was always confusing as to where their classes were held and where their faculty was. There was no one space for it, but the Conservatory was still a prominent institution on campus. The construction of Bito, which was built on what was previously Blum's parking lot, finally gave a physical manifestation to their presence on campus.

As an integral part of a music student's time at Bard, practice space is in high demand but short supply. The need for more practice space is not a new consequence of Bard's population increase, but rather it is something that Bard has struggled with for decades. Bard's student newspaper archives are filled with articles about the campus's lack of space, and the music department's pleas for more practice rooms. Before the music program occupied Blum on south campus, it was in Annandale House--a dilapidated, WWII-era pre-fab structure across from the dining commons, that has since been demolished. Old Bard student news publications would often harp on the lack of adequate music facilities, illustrating the hopeless search for an available piano that even contemporary Bard music students know all too well. In 1970, an article entitled "Music Students Speak Out" reports a department meeting between faculty and students that discussed the two main problems that the music department was dealing with: lack of faculty and lack of facilities. The music

department continued down the seemingly endless quest for suitable space for decades, but it did not attain its goal until it secured a permanent residence in Blum (Bard's former art gallery) in 1993.

The move into Blum signaled the beginning of the music department's permanent settlement, and the dawn of the department's strange relationship with the space it inhabits. "Blum" is now at least three times the size it was in 1993, growing with the addition of "New Blum" around 2002 and then again with the addition of Bito in 2013.

In an interview with a music professor, I asked her what the department looked like in the late 1990s. She told me, "Well, we were much more integrated--electronic, jazz, classical. We were a *really* small faculty. I mean we inhabited just Old Blum, that was it. There was nothing else." Her immediate referral to the building itself demonstrates the degree to which an understanding of the department is bound to its physical space. The rapid growth of the music department--stylistically and otherwise--is most obviously represented by the rapid addition of buildings. In just the past fifteen years, the music department has had its facilities expanded with the construction of a performing arts center, "New Blum," a new dorm with practice rooms in the basement, a separate building consisting only of practice rooms, and most recently, Bito--a "conservatory building."

Aside form the central and north campus practice spaces, there is a set of practice rooms in the basement of New Blum. This is where students compose their concerts, practice their instruments, hold rehearsals, and even have lessons. One student, named Theodore Monroe Strongin, wrote a 1941 senior project entitled

"Suggestions for the music department at Bard College." He mentions the "problems" with the department, as well as suggestions for improving it. On the subject of practice rooms, Strongin remarks:

"Practise Rooms: It will be difficult to find practise rooms next year if Hobson is reclaimed as a dormitory. A practise room is useless if the user is always conscious of the fact that unwilling people are listening to him." (Strongin 1941:14)

This is an example of the other perspective involved in the problem of practice room noise: the opinion of the noisemaker. Although noise is typically discussed from the position of the person it disturbs,[12] Strongin is concerned with the musician who produces it. In 1941, like today, many practice rooms were located in dormitories. Although sound-out-of-place is to be expected in a music building (which Bard did not really have in 1941), it is doubly displaced in the context of a dormitory. Strongin maintains an assumption that putting musical practice in the context of a dormitory would automatically render it a disturbance to other occupants of the building. Sound-out-of-place, in this case, involves musicians practicing in a building that is not explicitly dedicated to music.

At Bard now, however, the sounds of instruments are to be expected in most buildings that offer small rooms. Students have to practice wherever they can, but it is usually Conservatory students that practice in the *most* unusual buildings, like classrooms in Olin. In terms of soundscape, the sounds of pre-professional orchestra players practicing doesn't present as much of a "disturbance" as maybe the sound of an amateur trumpet player would. Classical music is used as background noise in myriad different corners of the American marketplace, so the sound of a flute

[12] Bijsterveld, Picker, Attali

working out a Bach sonata sometimes goes unnoticed in a classroom environment. This is most likely why the soundscape of academic buildings usually only contain classical musicians. In the practice rooms of Blum, the noise sounds much more "violent." Conservatory students practice here, too, but there are also electric guitars, saxophones, trumpets, and opera singing contributing to the soundscape. This complexity of competing sounds, if it were to occur in Olin, would create quite a different atmosphere as background "noise" for an academic class.

Are you confused and disoriented? Good! That is the typical sensation shared by most newcomers to Blum. I deliberately refrained from using bolded section titles in this chapter to mimic the experience of walking through the space, which has no labels or maps illustrating where things are. The building itself, with its various triangular hallways and doors to nowhere, is difficult to navigate on its own. The unofficial stylistic domains are so complexly woven into the architecture of the space that a deep cultural understanding of the department is mandatory to properly navigate Blum. Although chaotic and confusing, the sociomusical categories that zone-off the building's various regions serve some purpose: how else would students carve their own educational "path" in the music department's cosmos if there weren't groups for them to orient themselves toward or against?

The structure of the building, which is primarily used by members of the music program, mimics the "looseness" of the department. While Bito is one long and narrow hallway, with a one classroom, lounge, and performance hall at the end of it and practice rooms or offices all the way down the hall, Blum is convoluted and mysterious. Similarly, the path of a Conservatory student is often thought of as a clear

and straightforward, in terms of what they are supposed to accomplish at Bard. Their requirements are "strict," their expectations are "rigorous," and the overall standard to which they are trying to adhere is simply their shared understanding of excellence.

The music program, on the other hand, has somewhat more "loose" requirements. This is not to say that this is some kind of shortcoming of the department, but rather that it gives students a certain amount of freedom in regards to what they do with their time here. They are encourage to explore, compose, and play with one another on a regular basis, in order to find out what it is that suits them. To recall the anecdote at the beginning of the chapter, the freshman who only spends his time in "the same two rooms" is simply a student who has not yet had sufficient time to explore the department. As he takes more classes and meets more people, he will undoubtedly become more familiar with the space, and thus more able to get involved with the many different stylistic opportunities afforded to him.

Strictness and looseness are therefore crucial terms in describing the structure of the Conservatory and the music program, and their physical manifestation is only one of the ways in which students understand the different kinds of music at Bard.

## Chapter 2

## SOCIAL BOUNDARIES AND SPATIAL METAPHORS

The physical space of the department is carved up by walls and scheduling rules that regulate when and where certain sounds occur, but that is certainly not the only way in which boundaries are maintained between different categories of music. The categories themselves are conceptual, so a kind of fragmentation occurs in the figurative language people use to talk about music and each other. In the same way that noise travels through walls in a building, different sonic and aesthetic features of music flow across conceptual lines, thereby confusing any attempts to maintain discrete boundaries between them.

These boundaries, though they seem to deal explicitly with sound, actually include a variety of social indices as well. It is common for musicians in an institutional setting to focus within the boundaries of one specific musical category. Music conservatories traditionally focus on one style of music, training students in a regimented and rigorous atmosphere so as to prepare them for a career in one particular field. Furthermore, classical musicians readily identify themselves as classical musicians, whereas the "jazz" musicians at Bard have trouble with being grouped into that category. This is only one of the many ways in which student's relationship to different styles of music structure social categorization.

This chapter will analyze the boundaries between the social categories of "jazz" and "classical" music at Bard, exploring both what they encompass and how they are described. Throughout the course of my fieldwork, jazz was described to me as "loose" and classical music "strict." These words were used when talking about the

boundaries that separate the two styles of music: classical music has a strict set of standards while jazz is more "loose." This parallels the way the different kinds of music are institutionalized on Bard's campus. There are a clear set of requirements and expectations for students studying classical music, which leads to not only strict rules governing the use of classical music space, but also actual competitions and ranking systems that keep Conservatory students striving to be "the best." The students that study jazz, on the other hand, have much more freedom to determine what they accomplish at Bard. Any notion of "competition" between jazz students is therefore implicit and subtle, rather than overtly institutionalized.

**Classical Music and a Standard of Excellence**

Most classical musicians I've worked with operate between the rigid poles of good and bad, right and wrong, ahead and behind. This is both a consequence of the music itself and the socialization of classical musicians. Classical music instruction is something that begins (for most people) at a very young age. Instructors are often strict and unforgiving, in order instill discipline as early as possible. For classical musicians, to whom rhythm and intonation are of primary importance, playing *well* is about playing *in* time and *in* tune. Within the realm of classical music, notions of right and wrong are compounded onto notions of "in" and "out," creating exclusionary and inclusionary politics even within classical's stylistic domain. The spatial nature of these metaphors--"in tune," "in time"--imply that to be correct is to be *within* the boundaries of the tradition.

Eric, a conservatory student, described this distinction to me in an interview. With an interest in a wide variety of musics, he's considered one of the "die-hards"[13] that crosses between the two worlds of the Conservatory and the music program. Although he is a proficient classical musician, he has a strong interest in several different styles of music and he is an excellent improviser. In a conversation about improvisation, he was telling me that he doesn't think some of the "great improvisers" in the music program would garner the same kind of respect in the Conservatory. I asked him why, and he responded:

> Well because and perhaps their skill would be unknown or it wouldn't be identifiable to somebody who's used to a standard that's based in classical music. It would be something that wouldn't be considered valuable because that's something that fits into a different context.

Improvisation, insofar as it exists as an infravalue within the music program, has no position within the classical context. He even suggests that it would be unknown or unidentifiable, which is eerily reminiscent of Boas's concept of alternating sounds. In his famous essay, *On Alternating Sounds,* he responds to the claim by Daniel Garrison Brinton that phonetic "inconsistency" in Native American language is a symptom of evolutionary linguistic inferiority. An popular example of phonetic inconsistency is the interchangeability of the phonemes "*r"* and "*l*" in Japanese. When speaking in English, native Japanese speakers use *r* and *l* interchangeably, because the two sounds do not having meaningful difference in Japanese. Boas contends, however, that this is not due to evolution, but instead is the result of differences in perception. After discussing his experiences with alternating sounds in several other cultures and

[13] In several interviews with faculty members, a handful of certain Conservatory students that are involved in both the music program and the Conservatory were described as "die hards"

languages, Boas explains that it is possible to hear alternating sounds in our own language as well.

"The second and better crucial test is to attempt to ascertain whether individuals speaking one of these languages with 'alternating sounds' hear sounds of our language as alternating sounds. This is, in fact, the case."(Boas 1889:53)

He goes on to discuss the several linguistic "tests" he performed with native speakers of languages that are purported to have alternating sounds. He asked a Tlingit to pronounce certain sounds thought to be non-alternating, such as the English *l* and the German guttural *r*, and found that he alternately pronounced a variety of different sounds. This led Boas to conclude that alternating sounds are not a result of a phonetic or aural deficiency, as Brinton would have believed, but instead are results of "'alternating apperception'"(Boas 1898:53). In the case of Bard, there is an acknowledgement of this alternating apperception as one of the major differences between the Conservatory and the music program.

To explore these different value systems further, I persisted in asking Eric to describe what it is about the "context" of the music program that makes improvisational playing more valuable than it would be in the Conservatory. It took him a while to figure out his response, admitting that he's "never been put on the spot to articulate these kinds of things," but when he did, he chose to explain it in the form of two different hypothetical scenarios:

So it's like the Conservatory is a classical music education, with some **forays into** contemporary classical music, which--sometimes contemporary classical music incorporates folk music or jazz elements, but usually is still pretty stuck with reading notation or reading notes. That's what the conservatory **encompasses**.

And the music department has classical, it has jazz, it even has a Latin music curriculum, and you could say it also has a folk music curriculum with the ethnomusicology teacher, and also has an electronic music curriculum. So I think that in that department there's a lot more flexibility and there's also the flexibility of standards. Which could be problematic because I mean maybe, what is the opinion of an electronic music teacher listening to a classical pianist perform, versus maybe let's say a classical piano teacher listening to, say, an electronic music major perform? So that can occur in a music department.

C: But what is "that"?

Well I think that it's--there's a lot more **stretch**. I think that "that" is **stretching** somebody's **comfort zone** if anything. So what it is is that I...Ok so I study classical music, right? So if I'm being judged from a classical music situation... I'm gonna be judged on having good intonation and good rhythm. You know, it should be pitch perfect and sound really good. So let's say you have a performer in the music program who really is **in to** experimental music. Let's say they play the cello. So they're really **in to** experimental music and music that doesn't have the same standards of intonation[14], doesn't work ***in*** an intonation, doesn't view things as **in or out of tune**, and doesn't connect **in or out of tune to good versus bad** or, you know, correct versus false. And you have that person play their cello for me. And let's say I'm very very **in to** this classical standard. And let's say that they're using a lot of extended techniques,[15] and they're using their slides, and they're playing things that are **out of tune**. Then to my ear, it might sound completely**--completely stretch the comfort of my ears** because I'll probably be expecting to hear things that are clean and precise, and rhythmically in tune. And then perhaps when they hear me play it'll sound *too* clean, and *too* in tune. So I think that it's forcing people in the music program--you're forcing people to experience the performances of musicians that adhere to different standards, and those standards are not necessarily correct or false. Whereas in the Conservatory there's probably a much more strict, a much more strict set of standards that people are trying to adhere to and to be judged by.

To illustrate the omnipresence of spatial metaphors in discussions about music, I bolded all of the instances in which Eric spatialized musical concepts in relation to one another. The standard of excellence he describes--and it becomes clearer in his elaboration--has to do with being in or out of a kind of conceptual space: "the

[14] Most Western music uses Equal Temperament

[15] Extended technique refers to the unusual sounds musicians can produce on their instruments by playing it in unconventional ways. For example: one type of extended technique on the saxophone is growling, which occurs when the player sings in their throat while playing.

tradition." This resonates with David Graeber's notion of infravalues. Insofar as the "tradition" defines a certain value system, members of that group are contently in competition with one another to uphold those values. He's really "in" to classical music. Considering that being "in" to something is a common figure of speech in English that describes being "interested" in something, this has interesting implications when it is used to illustrate the ways in which individuals orient themselves within music. When taken in that sense, it gives the impression of being both immersed in and moving towards a certain musical style.

Some of the other bolded items are common musical phrases that musicians use in day-to-day interactions. The two I will focus on here are intonation and rhythm.

**Playing in tune**

In December of 2014, the Bard College Conservatory Orchestra played Rachmaninoff's *Symphonic Dances* for their last concert of the semester. In the first movement of the piece, there is a small section that involves an alto saxophone. Because the Conservatory doesn't have any saxophone players, I was approached about playing it. The part is short and not too difficult, so I don't think there were heavy doubts as to whether or not I could do it. I had to audition and work with a clarinet coach in preparation, but it all seemed as if it would workout for the best.

Unfortunately, my playing wasn't as perfect as the rest of the orchestra's on the night of the performance. Although I had managed to suppress some of my "jazz" techniques (scooping into notes, laid-back time, bright sound), there was one specific

section that I had trouble with during rehearsals, in which I land on a G# and hold it with the flute. Adjusting to the intonation of other musicians is something that I usually do quite well in jazz contexts, so I didn't foresee it being as big of a problem as it was. On my particular instrument, the most difficult note to keep in tune is the G#. This, combined with the fact that the flute was seated in front of me and several chairs to my left, made it difficult to hear her and difficult for me to adjust. I not used to listening and adjusting to other instruments at such a great distance and such a low level of volume.

Whatever the reason, my G# went sour during the performance. It sounded OK to me on stage, but the expressions on peoples' faces afterwards showed me that I had not attained the level of perfection that they expect from one another. The degree of enthusiasm I received from some of my friends in the orchestra (good job! you did great!) was not as high as it was after other rehearsals, when I had managed to play more in tune. And low and behold, when I listened to a recording I cringed as soon as I heard that note. The flute and I must have been at least a quartertone apart. I stuck out from the rest of the orchestra, because that kind of microtonal dissonance is almost *never* present in classical orchestral settings (unless the piece is explicitly marked as microtonal).

"Correctness" of pitch is always relative to what else is going on, and in a classical orchestral setting, everyone else is adhering to the standard they have been trained in. If one person breaks from it, it doesn't sound "cool" or "original," it is simply wrong.

So what is the tuning standard that a classical orchestra adheres to, and what does it really mean to play in tune? Being "in" or "out" of tune means playing notes at "correct" frequencies, according to the mandates of a specific tuning system. The note "A" is located on the sound spectrum at 440 Hz. The Bard College Conservatory Orchestra, however, usually tunes to 442 or 443 Hz. Most orchestras have a unique frequency to which they tune, and it is almost never 440.

Classical musicians (and many other kinds of musicians) use devices called "tuners" when practicing. Although there are many different kinds of tuners, the most common ones are small, handheld devices that fit on a music stand, and have three small circular lights with a rectangular screen directly below.


The function of a tuner is to detect the frequency of incoming sound, align it with the closest note in the equal temperament scale, and map its fluctuations with a needle. If the note is perfectly in tune, the needle will be perfectly vertical in the center of the screen (as pictured), and the center light will turn green. If it is slightly sharp (higher

than 440) or slightly flat (lower than 440), the center light will stay green but the light on the right or left will turn red (depending on whether the note is flat or sharp) and the needle will fluctuate. If a note is *really* out of tune, the green light won't even turn on. Tuners can be adjusted to tune to the traditional A=440 Hz, or moved up and down to accommodate different standards (such as the 443 used by Bard's orchestra).

In an orchestral setting, playing in tune is important because of all the instruments involved. When two musicians play the same note, a sonic friction occurs between their sounds if one or both of them are out of tune. The speed of the frictional vibration reveals how close in pitch they are--slower if it's close, faster if it's not. Adjusting intonation is an activity that is different for every instrument.[16]

This kind of adjustment can be heard when two people are playing together, because as they get closer and closer to being in tune, the vibration gets slower and slower until it finally stops. That moment of alignment that occurs when two voices merge to become one is integral to the overall sound of the orchestra. Merely getting *two* people to play in tune is a remarkable feat considering all of the physical adjustments that must be made around the contours of the instrument. Getting an *entire orchestra* to play in tune with one another demonstrates a profound level of proficiency and practice from the musicians. In this way, "sticking out" is associated

[16] Broad intonation adjustments on woodwind instruments involves moving the mouthpiece out or in on the cork. Brass have slides that they push out or in. Strings have to adjust the knobs at the end of the neck to tune each string, and their finger positions on the neck must be precise, because that position determines the pitch. The strings on pianos need to be tuned by a professional because of how large and complex the instrument is. In wind instruments, minor tuning adjustments can be made with the lips. The phrase "lip it down" is often used if on particular is sharp. Adjusting the mouthpiece changes the tuning of the whole instrument (because it elongates the tube through which the wind passes). If one note is sharper than the rest, then the musician is told to "lip it down" because adjusting the mouthpiece, slide, or knob would compromise the intonation of the entire instrument.

with breaking the unity of the orchestra, and it is therefore against traditional expectations. The beginning of orchestra concerts, for example, has a ritual of tuning before beginning the program. After the concertmaster[17] walks on stage and shakes hands with the conductor, he or she plays a note to which the rest of the orchestra tunes. What follows is a beautiful swell of sound as different instruments play various consonant intervals to align themselves to the pitch of the violin.

Jazz bands also maintain expectations about tuning, but they are not enforced as rigidly as they are in a classical setting. In CJC[18], for example, tuning is often an afterthought. If everyone start playing and the horns sound badly out of tune, the professor will say "let's tune" and the piano player will play a note. The horns will play it as well and adjust accordingly. Unlike the orchestra, however, this activity does not have a formalized ritual during performance.

Tuning is integral to most wind players' practice routines, whether they play jazz or classical music. While string instruments pretty much stay in tune once the strings have been set, intonation is in constant fluctuation for wind players. The slightest movement of embouchure[19] can affect the pitch drastically, and different notes are often more out of tune than others on wind instruments. Their construction is not as simple as the harmonics of a string--instead, there are valves, finger holes, pads, pipes, rods, reeds, and buttons which introduce a number of variables and

[17] The first-chair violin
[18] An ensemble in the jazz program. It stands for Contemporary Jaz Composers Ensemble, and it is typically comprised of students that have some kind of background in jazz or otherwise proficiency on their instrument.
[19] The specific position of facial muscles and lips around the mouthpiece of a wind instrument

potential malfunctions. Wind instruments thus require constant control and adjustment, making them the most difficult to play in tune.

The reason I describe the intricacies of instruments and tuning at such length is to demonstrate that playing "in tune" is by no means a natural activity. It involves an intense amount of focus and practice just to achieve the same, arbitrary frequency every single time. It makes sense, then, that traditional classical musicians would have such a strong distaste for something that deviates from their standards of correctness. Those deviations are precisely what they spend their livelihood working to avoid. Someone playing out of tune in a classical music context, however, is not something that must simply be ignored, in Schafer's understanding. Instead, it becomes violence: sound that threatens and disrupts the order of the active regime. It is the kind of noise that offends. Out-of-tuneness in an orchestral setting causes discomfort because it is, by nature, a direct violation of the standards of classical music. In this way, any discussion of a musical "comfort zone" immediately implies that certain sounds can elicit discomfort, and this is not true for other styles of music that have less "rigid" and otherwise *mechanical* standards.

**Playing in Time**

Another important aspect of the classical tradition is rhythm and its associations with playing "in time." In many of my interviews, people equate music that doesn't have regular, mechanical time with music that doesn't have "rhythm." Although the term "rhythm" has to do with the general interaction between music and time--whether it is regular or irregular--many musicians understand it as the

presence of order. Karen Bijsterveld, in her essay about *Listening to Machines*, identifies the distinction between noise and chaos as inherently tied to rhythm-as-order:

> "In war, revolution and ritual, the irregular and extremely loud use of drums and bells usually expresses intimidation, change and chaos, whereas a restoration of rhythm stands for situations of being in control." (Bijsterveld 2012: 153)

Equating the restoration of rhythm with the implementation of order demonstrates that Bijsterveld is operating on the definition of rhythm as something that is regular and patterned. Indeed, the introduction of the metronome was arguably one of the most mechanized strictures put on rhythm in human history. The introduction of the metronome created a mechanical sense of time that imposes mechanized order on what was previously considered natural. By mapping rhythm onto the ticking of a clock, it has now come to mean something less about human emotional expression and more oriented towards notions of "correct" or "incorrect": *in* time or *out* of time.

In his essay about the metronome, Alexander Bonus contextualizes its invention with classical composers' initial attitudes toward motion in their composition, explaining how *metronomic* was once a pejorative term that implied lack of emotional musical expression, but has since transformed to become the apex of musical virtuosity in certain avenues of contemporary American society. "Indeed, notions of musical meter, rhythm, and pulse existed well before precisely ticking clockwork technologies were readily available to musicians"(Bonus 2014: 2). These metronomes inspired a host of insults about *metronomic* playing, which indicated a lack of expression. Even at Bard, an article in a 1919 issue of *The Messenger* shows that the concept of overly mechanical playing still had more pejorative connotations

than virtuostic ones: "Each fraternity chapter should study its own conditions with a view to having at its meetings music that will be neither mechanically studied and consequently spiritless, on the one hand, nor bald, crude and suggestive of a 'roughneck' crowd, on the other"(Fowler 1919). Cuthbert Fowler was writing in 1919, when certain kinds of music had strong associations with the dignity of the audience. This quote situates the perception of music at an interesting time, when early feelings about natural time and beautiful music were still relatively recent memories, but also when the industrial era was painting pictures of a utopian future in which mechanical regulation kept illegible deviations from the norm out of civilized society.

The contemporary obsession with metronomes in the Western Classical tradition, Bonus contends, emerges from our modern pursuit of "mechanical" perfection. He explains:

"The search for one authentic metronome indication has more to do with what modern culture desires rather than what nineteenth-century composers actually intended or asked for when performing their works. Since the twentieth century, scholars' and pedagogues' metronome use largely reflects--not Beethoven's full intentions but *our values* and *our needs* for ever-greater exactitude, precision, and objectivity in musical time and performance practices"(Bonus 2014:2)

In reference to Karen Bijsterveld's quote, then, the perceived strictness of classical music is largely connected to notions of control. Popular perceptions situate classical music as profoundly different from everything else in its levels of rigidity, but this notion of mechanical control is relevant in the education of jazz and electronic music as well. In some kinds of electronic music and all contemporary pop music, computer programs have become tools for regulating rhythm. The rigid adherence to rules and standards is not unique to classical music, but at Bard--where classical music is more

or less the "official" music--rigidity becomes the primary way in which classical musicians distinguish themselves from other kinds of musicians. Similarly, the rigidity with which they respond to deviations from the norm are indicative of a paradigm shift regarding that which does not conform to a mechanical standard as something abhorrent: "What nineteenth-century musicians understood as artistry was now defined against the metronome as psychologically deviant behavior"(Bonus 2014: 8). In a Conservatory's educational context, tendencies toward this type of behavior are eradicated outright by the audition-only admissions process. This creates a body of individuals that are unique for their sameness: their ability to stay within the confines of the classical tradition.

**Jazz is a Bit More Loose**

In the music program, the jazz students compose and play a wide variety of music that could hardly be understood by the blanket term "jazz." Jazz has become something similar to classical music in that it now has a pedagogy, a place in the academy, and elite organizations whose primary goal is to give it its proper "respectable" place in civilized society (Wilf 2014).

In my interviews with various nonjazz members of Bard's music faculty, there was a common struggle to define jazz. Words like "loose" and "open" were used to describe jazz in relation to other kinds of music, but few specific examples were given to explain what they meant. Although most seemed to have a clear idea of what is and is not jazz, they were all caught off guard when I asked them to explain why. In an interview with Linus, a professor in the music program, we were talking about

composition and different styles of music. Although his training is primarily in classical music, he eventually admitted that one of his compositions made it on a top 10 list of "Jazz Is" magazine. It was a piece he wrote for the disklavier, based on a Theolonius Monk tune called "Bud Walked In." His piece was called "Bud Ran Back Out." In the middle of the interview, he walked over to a disklavier sitting in the corner of his office, pressed play, and the piano immediately began playing what sounded to me like an up-tempo jazz tune. It was playing jazz chords, it was moving in a traditional jazz harmonic progression, and it was playing the same kinds of sixteenth-note lines that are to be expected of any proficient jazz cat who wants to show off his chops. To my ears, it sounded like jazz. The only thing that was different between this experience and a live jazz show is that the disklavier was playing at a speed that would be impossible for a human.

When I asked Linus to explain why he didn't think his piece could be considered "jazz," it took him a while to explain the distinction that was creating clear divisions in his mind. I finally asked him directly what it is about jazz that makes it different from what he played me, and he said:

"Oh, it's because I think that jazz should probably be improvised. You know, you can't imagine jazz without a live performer, making it up as they go through, with a little bit of looseness--you know?"

He elaborated upon what he meant by looseness by explaining that the rhythms themselves that jazz musicians play are extremely complicated. Because the piece was written for the disklavier, Linus had to specify the *precise* rhythms that he wanted the piano to play. This is, in fact, more difficult than it sounds. Although jazz can now be notated in the same way as classical music, the rhythm itself can never be

communicated as precisely as the notes. This is because jazz has a "swing feel" which has to be felt instead of read. The playback function of music notation softwares, like Sibelius, demonstrate this disparity quite well. Metronomes were condemned for their mechanical, unnatural rhythm, because the ticking of a clock is far too simple in comparison with the "complex," natural rhythms that humans play on their own. Linus said that in his disklavier piece he was trying to simulate these "natural" rhythms of jazz, but because he was using a computer, he had to use "really complex algorithms to simulate something that sounds natural."

In terms of Alexander Bonus's writings on the metronome, then, this reflects a movement from natural rhythm to mechanized rhythm and then back to natural rhythm again. This illustrates the fluid definition of the term "natural," which has in our contemporary age of machinery come to mean something completely different than it did to nineteenth century composers. The desire to make a machine play "natural" rhythms is, in a way, demonstrative of the alienation caused by musical machines from a perceived *human* naturalness that existed prior to the industrial era.

**Elevation of Jazz**

Jazz--though it is perceived by many at Bard as "more free," "less formal," with a bit more "looseness,"--certainly has its own standard of excellence in the rest of the country. In *School for Cool: The Paradox of Institutionalized Creativity*, Eitan Wilf discusses the "rise" of jazz into the world of higher education at the same time as its decline in American popular culture. In its golden years, jazz was performed in smoky bars for little to no entrance fee. When jazz started growing into something that was

less accessible to audiences, its popularity started declining. As a consequence of gradual gentrification, rising real estate costs, and increasing numbers of noise complaints, jazz musicians were forced into other kinds of performance spaces, like the loft concerts in Greenwich Village. Now, there are only a few token "jazz clubs" left in New York City, and they exist as museum-like caricatures of what jazz once was. At most of these bars, exorbitant entrance fees and age limits keep most interested youth out (Wilf 2014).

Jazz performance in the United States is now going through a preservation process similar to that of classical music, just as the word "jazz" is changing to encapsulate an ever-expanding variety of improvisational music. Similarly, there are several jazz programs in schools across the country that teach jazz as a closed system with its own history, pedagogy, dieties, and standard of excellence. Wilf cites jazz's lack of "repeatability" as a reason for its lack of commercial success, and suggests that the academization of jazz was a way to secure funding. Jazz programs are also now the primary way in which the tradition is kept alive, because its decline in popular culture has prevented the kind of apprenticeship through which most jazz musicians learned their craft. "At the present moment jazz programs *are* the reconfigured jazz scenes of the past"(Wilf 2014:52). Academic jazz is thus the only way in which jazz can continue to exist as it once did, because it has been more or less forced out of the commercial scene. In an interview with a member of Bard's classical music faculty, he described how this came about:

"Every art form develops up to a point where it has a crisis of self definition. And I'm sure--you know, going to the Jazz department here--you have been dually taught that Wynton Marsalis took advantage of Jazz's crisis of self-definition in the '80s, to make it a repertoire, or basically declare it's history finished and say, 'We're just gonna play

the great classics of Jazz from now on.' And, you know, lots and lots of jazz people thought that was...*premature*. To put it nicely."

He's right--I *have* been taught that exact story in several different contexts during my education in Bard's jazz program. This is an element of the implicit knowledge about jazz's historical journey in American culture throughout the twentieth century that is shared by musicians in the field. Wynton Marsalis is a professional jazz trumpet player who has also published several books about his views on jazz. The idea that he did to jazz what has already been done to classical music is not entirely mythical--he runs Jazz at Lincoln Center, which has effectively and literally situated jazz in the elite circle of expensive "spectacle music" or "highbrow" music in New York City. By visiting Lincoln Center on the Upper West Side (which has its own elite cultural connotations), a tourist has the opportunity to see the Metropolitan Opera, the New York City Ballet, the New York Philharmonic, and now also "Jazz."

Jazz has entered the upper-echelons of society-- that much is certain. The *type* of jazz which is associated with the bourgeoisie, however, is still heavily contested. In the same way that music is an incredibly vague and nebulous term, jazz has multiple meanings for different individuals and in different contexts. Most students in the jazz department[20] at Bard would agree that this high-society jazz--traditional jazz, structured jazz, museum-jazz, academic jazz--is not what jazz musicians are trained to play at Bard.

[20] Jazz is not its own department at Bard or even its own program. It is simply a part of the music program. There is close attention played to this kind of terminology by the head of the music program (program, department, etc.), who is careful to remind people of this when they misspeak. In general conversation, however, the words are used interchangeably.

**Jazz at Bard**

On a sunny afternoon in the courtyard of Blum, I was sitting on the hill with several of Bard's jazz majors. We were having casual conversation when a member of the classical vocal program emerged from the building and started walking uphill, most likely on her way to central campus. When she walked by us, she said casually, "hey jazz guys," obviously oblivious to the identity crisis that this term arouses in the minds of many jazz majors. Immediately after she said this, everyone looked around at each other with puzzled and slightly perturbed, expressions on their faces. A vocalist said, "Yo I don't know how I feel about being called a jazz guy." What then followed was a fifteen-minute discussion of our label in the department and how it relates--or doesn't relate--to the music we actually play. There was laughter, joking, eye rolling, and even mock-jazzy finger snapping on beats 2 and 4, alongside interjections of, "I can't really play jazz," and "You can play jazz better than I can play jazz."

At the root of this exchange was an anxiety about being interpellated as a "jazz guy," because of a difference in opinion on what the term "jazz" really means. To the classical vocalist, jazz is probably a perfectly acceptable term for the music she hears from non-classical, non-electronic music majors. To jazz students, however, the term indexes an entire history of tunes, feels and improvisational styles that may or may not align with each individual's personal interests. Negotiating whether or not we can

really "play jazz" involves reference to the Great American Songbook[21]. A traditional jazz musician is expected to know the melodies and harmonic structures of at least fifty of these tunes, and be able to improvise *well*--creatively, expressively, and with occasional reference to the masters.

This involves an immersion in jazz recordings and transcription books that many Bard jazz students don't have or want. It is certainly not expected of them, either. Instead, most jazz students spend their time learning the theory, playing with each other, and trying to compose their own music. This changes every year, depending on what kind of students arrive in the program. Four years ago, as one student tells me, most of the jazz majors considered themselves "post-jazz." He says there was "the assumption that we already knew how to do it, so if you were playing jazz you were just being an idiot." This was the atmosphere I perceived when I arrived at Bard. Now, however, the department is growing rapidly (there are now around 113 music majors) and some younger students with a proficient background and interest in traditional jazz are renewing its popularity in Blum. Whereas four years ago, a typical jam session in the jazz room would sound like noise music or neo-soul, now it is more common to hear students playing through standards together at 9 pm on a Thursday night--just for fun. Just a few weeks ago, I was astonished to hear a table of underclassmen in Bard's cafeteria engaged in a heated debate about whether or not Sonny Rollins was "better" than John Coltrane. Although jazz is making a comeback in this generation of Bard students, it is still not quite the norm in

[21] A collection of tunes written by most of jazz's most historical figures, including everyone from Cole Porter to Jerome Kern to Miles Davis. It is also known as the "Real Book"

the jazz program. An emphasis on compositional innovation and creativity still holds precedence over "following the tradition."

This attitude towards Jazz often manifests itself in the jokes students make during ensemble rehearsals. The beginnings of CJC rehearsals are usually characterized by a chaotic din as students jam with one another, play long tones and arpeggios, or otherwise practice the music we will be playing once rehearsal begins. In one iteration of this ritual, the din died out suddenly once the professor walked in the room. Only one person seemed to not notice her entrance, as the II-V-I[22] licks he was playing suddenly became the only sound in the room. Once he noticed that he was the only one playing, Ian laughed and said "I'm a jazz bot." He proceeded to sing the lick he had just played, and then--almost as a kind of justification--said, "Roy Danes[23] played that lick in front of me earlier today." Ian's musical affinity is undeniably oriented toward jazz, but even he would agree that innovation and creativity overpower any kind of rigid adherence to the jazz tradition. His acknowledgement of the overt "jazziness" of his playing--by making a joke about it and attributing the line to someone else--demonstrates an awareness of the pervasive attitude toward "jazz" in the department. When I asked him if it would be a bad thing to only play jazz standards in a senior concert, he said, "Just playing jazz standards out of the real book and not changing them in any way would be lame, yes."

This is because in student's jazz concerts there is an implicit expectation that the student will compose. For students in the jazz program, the attitude toward both

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[22] A common harmonic progression in jazz song strucutres. Students are taught to "practice their II-V-I' licks" because most tunes have this progression, and many teachers think it is important to develop a repetoire of automatic licks to play over it.
[23] Another student

the tradition of jazz and other jazz musicians is inconsistent. Some students strongly work towards mastering the jazz tradition, while others strongly oppose it. There is not a sense of all-inclusivity in the program, and they are not in explicit competition with one another either. The "looseness" and flexibility that I hear about in conversation with members of the music programs is a broad but salient description of the attitude students have toward musical boundaries and pedagogies in general.

In the Conservatory student's discussion of the stressful atmosphere in Bito, he mentioned the presence of famous classical musicians as being an important factor in motivating him to be at his best at all times. While the jazz faculty are probably not of the same level of celebrity as some of the people who work with the Conservatory, there are a considerable amount of relatively "famous" jazz musicians in Blum. The jazz students don't pay as much attention to this as the Conservatory students do, however. In Bass Seminar that was held on campus, the jazz program brought four of some of the most famous jazz bassists in history together in one room to talk to Bard students. They were Malcom Cecil, Dave Holland, Kenny Davis, and Ira Coleman--all four of whom have worked on some of the most influential recordings and played with some of the most influential musicians in jazz's history. A lot of people showed up, but what was perhaps more striking was how many people didn't. And when Jack DeJohnette walked in the room, a famous drummer who has worked with musicians like Miles Davis, Joe Henderson and Sonny Rollins, only a couple of students seemed to notice who he was, and even fewer seemed to be affected by his presence. This episode may seem inconsequential, but to die-hard respecters of the jazz tradition, seeing Jack DeJohnette walk into the room would be the equivolent of seeing

Schubert walk in. Every tradition has its own "deities," and the amount of them that were in the room during the Bass Seminar combined with the level of nonchalance exuded by the jazz students, shows that the "tradition" is not quite as important to jazz students as it is to Conservatory students.

Instead of staying within one tradition, then, they are encouraged to compose their own music and perform that in their concert, which often requires drawing from many different traditions to create something new. If there is any competition in the department, it is less about who is playing more in tune or in time than you, and more about "who is making doper shit than you," as one student put it. This is where the competitive emphasis on composition comes from.

**Competition**

In the Conservatory orchestra, as in most orchestras, the musicians are ranked by the chair they sit in. The "first chair" first violin, for example, is the Concertmaster. The general rule is: the lower the chair, the lower the skill. The Conservatory also has concerto competitions, and special fundraising concerts at which they choose the "best" representatives of the Conservatory to perform. These direct and indirect competitions serve as motivators to keep members of the Conservatory working hard and striving to be better.

The music program doesn't quite have these events. Although there is a concerto competition offered for classical members of the music program, it is often not even known about by other members of the department. There are no salon concerts in the Fisher Center, showing off an exceptional jazz big-band playing jazz

standards. There are no competitive ensembles that students have to fight for slots in. There is no J.K. Simmons snapping in drummers' ears as thick beads of sweat trickle down their faces[24]. There is, however, a subtle but pervasive notion of excellence operating in the minds of some of the more technically advanced players. Although the idea of a "standard of excellence" was typically attributed to classical music in my interviews with students and faculty members, the ways in which students talk about one another in the non-classical music programs reveal a similar--though implicit--standard based on creativity.

In my interviews with some of these musicians, this came up when they began considering--unprompted by me--why "some people" choose to be music majors. In an interview with two jazz students, Ian and Fred, Ian said:

> *Ian:* I mean not to sound conceited or anything but there's some people definitely who you see and you're just like, "*Why* is that person studying music?" Like they're just wasting their...I mean, I don't know. And you can't say that they're wasting their time or their money because you don't understand them and why they're doing it. I mean everyone has their own reasons.

Even in this quote, the student is second-guessing his impulse to judge other students based on their technical ability. In many other places where music is institutionalized, judgment like this is the norm among students. Even in Bard's Conservatory, there are competitions and ranking systems that engender a constant sense of competitiveness amongst the students on the basis of technical skill. One professor described it as wanting "to play as clean and as fast as anybody had ever been." This

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[24] from the 2014 movie *Whiplash*. This movie is considered a joke to most jazz students at Bard.

particular jazz student, however, is hesitant to judge other students based on their technical abilities.

He and Fred are both extremely technically proficient--they can play very clean and very fast, which is important in the classical tradition, but they also both have an excellent grasp on the rhythmic feel of jazz and many other styles of music. Fred, a drummer, responded to Ian's statement:

*Fred:* I mean that's what I like about the Bard music scene--not the department, necessarily, but the scene is that it's like pretty noncompetitive. People just do what they do. There's definitely some elitists. Maybe count myself among them. *laughs.* Yeah but people just do what they do and it doesn't really matter how good they are or quote on quote whatever, it's just like... Whereas like at a real music school *laughs* "real music school" everyone's like basically killing each other to be the best. Like if Contemporary[25] was like *Whiplash* and I was tryna like, I don't know, like poison Klaus[26] so I could take his

*laughter*

That shit happens at other schools! It's totally nuts. And here it's just very chill. Very cool. I don't know if that breeds the nastiest[27] musicians necessarily, but it's a pretty good place to be.

This kind of comparison to other music schools happened often in my interviews with jazz students--either by students who considered themselves "better" than the aforementioned "some people," or by people that more or less identified as "some people," admitting that they had limited technical ability upon arriving at Bard but no less passion for music.

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[25] The Contemporary Jazz Composers Ensemble (known as CJC or Contemporary) is one of Bard's jazz ensembles. It is typically made up of students that can read music and improvise with some knowledge of harmony. They play in the Fisher Center twice a year as entertainment before Leon Botstein gives his speeches on Parents Weekend and Accepted Students Day. There are usually about ten people in the audience.
[26] The drummer in CJC
[27] Slang for "good," usually in reference to technical ability

Many times, these students would justify their claims by making comparisons to how they imagine certain "other" music schools functioning, claiming that limited technical ability wouldn't be tolerated at other institutions:

I mean, I think half the music majors here couldn't make it at a lot of other schools. You know, because all other schools have to do juries and they get assessed once or twice a semester on how they're playing. And *every* other college I know does that. *Every* other music program has juries.

Bard students, however, only have "board" meetings after each of the three concerts. Three professors (members of your board) attend your concert, and you set up a meeting with them at the end of the semester to receive their comments. There are no special requirements dictating what kind of music a jazz major should play in his or her concert, and in my four years here I still haven't been able to ascertain what technical skills they expect students to have upon graduation. This freedom produces a kind of anxiety about what students are "supposed" to be doing, causing them to invoke spatial metaphors about where they are in relation to a linear idea of good/bad, ahead/behind. One student observed:

People graduate this program and I'm sure there have been a lot in the past and a lot in the future that are just behind. *Seriously* behind.

So the linear trajectory that is so characteristic of the classical tradition--right/wrong, good/bad, behind/ahead--is active in the minds of jazz majors as well. It is, in a way, impossible to remove that standard from the minds of formally trained musicians. Many jazz musicians were trained classically at the beginning of their music education, and even formal jazz education involves standards and notions of "right" and "wrong." Institutionalized music necessitates a formula. The idea of legibility in

an educational context dictate that students and teachers alike need a sense of utility about what they are doing.

So if certain standards about time, intonation, and technique are relatively similar for jazz musicians and classical musicians, then why are they perceived to be so different? In Eric's anecdote, he associated having good rhythm with "sounding really good." People also talk about it as playing "in time," and suggest practicing with a metronome if a musician is not playing in time. Playing "in the pocket" or "swinging" is the typical jazz slang for being rhythmically correct--which is determined less by a metronome than jazz's unique rhythmic standard.[28] Time is of the utmost importance to both disciplines--not to mention the importance it has in certain kinds of electronic music, where devices like arpeggiators can ensure completely accurate rhythm for a wide variety of different "feels."[29]

In the quote at the beginning of the chapter, Eric gave the example of experimental music as a contrast to classical music in terms of their different "standards" or infra-value systems, as Graeber would call them. Certain kinds of experimental music--though they may appear to not have any kind of rhythmic standard--often do have a rigid standard. Many experimental noise musicians would be horrified if someone started swinging[30] on a drumset during a performance, for example. The standards for experimental music are much more complicated,

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[28] It's often described as a triplet feel, but it's more than that. It's been described to me as circular, swinging, dotted-eighth-sixteenth feel, or just something that you are supposed to feel after immersing yourself in the sound. The subtle rhythmic differences between Count Basie's Big Band and Glenn Miller's orchestra reveal the subtle, inarticulable quality of "good" jazz rhythm (Basie had it, Glenn Miller didn't). This is also related to the invocation of "whiteness" as a rhythmic pejorative.

[29] A style-specific way of dealing with time, also known as groove

[30] Playing a certain kind of jazz that heavily emphasizes beats two and four

however. Unlike jazz and classical music, experimental music--by nature--resists any kind of standardization. Instead, the rules are dependent on localized knowledge that is created in compositional or improvisational contexts by the musicians involved. This logic can be applied to student concerts, in that they are encouraged to compose "their own" music rather than simply playing standards.

## Chapter 3

## PERFORMANCE SPACES AND THEIR FUNCTIONS

The Conservatory's orchestral performances in the Fisher Center are some of the most privileged events that Bard students have access to on campus. They are professional, formal, and always perfectly executed (because of the rigorous standards of the Conservatory). My freshman year, Leon Botstein gave a lecture which freshmen were required to attend. When I walked into the theater, there was an entire orchestra seated on stage and he was preparing to tell us about Jean Sibelius, the composer they had been celebrating in that year's Summerscape. There was one particular moment in which he demonstrated a brief moment in one of Sibelius's compositions, and though it was unclear what he was saying from my seat in the audience, the music was clear and pure and perfect--everything classical music is *supposed* to be. At the time, I was blown away by the orchestra. This was the first time I had heard anyone perform in the Fisher Center, and I don't doubt that this particular memory has stuck with me for the past four years because of how awestruck I was by the whole experience. The massive, modern titanium exterior; the enormous ceilings with three levels of seating for the audience; the --all of these visual components--accompanied by the sound of so many different instruments playing in perfect synchrony with one another, gave me an impression of *something* profound, though I am not sure what exactly it was. Although I am a musician, and I was at the time of that performance, I felt as if I was witnessing something completely foreign. Classical music had previously been of little interest to me, but the short segment of Jean Sibelius--when combined with all of the visual components that held

my attention--suddenly seemed more beautiful than anything I had ever heard. This, I would assume, is the desired effect of a classical music concert. This chapter will discuss the different performance spaces utilized and desired by music students at Bard, to explore the larger social and political functions that these different styles of music have.

**Performance**

Performance is a crucial aspect of a musician's life, as it is the moment when music becomes oriented to someone other than the musician himself. For Bauman, performance has a legitimizing function in that the nature of performance assumes that the performer is demonstrating competence of some kind (Bauman 2005). This is true of classical music and all other styles of music: regardless of the style of music being performed, the fact that it is *being* performed makes it music. The moment of performance is the transitional point when the "noise" of practice, rehearsal, and other kinds of preparation become competent displays of organized sound.

Every music department student has certain requirements for graduating. In addition to class requirements (theory, history, performance), he or she must have three concerts: one moderation concert and two senior concerts. It is also acceptable for seniors to submit an album or a paper in place of a concert. Most moderation concerts serve as a kind of rite of passage for music students, in that it solidifies a student's status as a "music major." In it, the student must perform roughly thirty minutes of music. There are no requirements about the actual music that is performed, however, so this forces the student to make stylistic decisions about the

kind of music he or she will play. In this way, the concert is not only a performance of the student's (usually original) music, but it is also a performance of the stylistic affiliations that student developed in their time at Bard. The band is not provided for the students by the school, meaning they have to seek out and assemble their own group of musicians to perform with, unless the student chooses to do a solo concert (which is rare). This is an important aspect of the grouping tendencies of students in the music department.

Conservatory students have to perform recitals, but these individual concerts are not as important to the Conservatory as they are to the music program because the Conservatory's main focus is on the orchestra, whereas the music program is more oriented toward the individual. In terms of performance space, this constraint means that the Fisher Center, with its big stage, is an ideal space because it will always accommodate the orchestral music that the Conservatory plays. Music program students prefer a space like Blum Hall, however, because they can transform it to meet their individual needs which change with each student. This chapter will discuss some of the performance spaces and practices at Bard, to demonstrate how they relate to the value systems of different programs.

**The Fisher Center and Classical Performance Spaces**

Being in the audience at an opera or a symphony allows the listener the chance to listen to traditionally "beautiful" music and simultaneously gaze upon the splendor of the tradition which provides it: look up at the concert hall's ornate ceiling and find likenesses of God and his angels smiling back at you; look around at your fellow

concertgoers and see them clad in similar elaborate and expensive costumes; look at the stage and see a body of modestly dressed professionals looking expectantly up at a single, tuxedo-clad conductor, silently conducting their every move. Although the implications of the concert hall change in different historical contexts, the symbolic implications are nonetheless ripe for analysis.

From Attali's writing about the concert hall in the eighteenth century, all aspects of the concert experience served to confirm and perform the elite status of those fortunate enough to enjoy it: to make people believe in the harmony of the institutions which put them there in the first place (Attali 1977). From Theodor Adorno's perspective, the institution that provides this experience is the institution that *sells* the experience: capitalism and the commodification of art: "The consumer is really worshipping the money that he himself has paid for the ticket to the Toscanini concert."(Adorno 1938:278)

It could be argued that classical music--meaning Bard's Summer Music Festival, the Conservatory of Music, the new Training Orchestra, and even the Fisher Center itself--is one of the primary ways in which Bard secures its operating funds. A report from Moody's Investor's Service on the downgrading of Bard's rating showed that almost 40% of Bard's operating costs come from donations to the school *citation*. Bard has a historically low endowment, but little effort has been put towards building the endowment during Leon Botstein's tenure. If a large portion of Bard's revenue is reliant on spontaneous "gifts," then the likelihood of repaying its $135 million rated debt gets slimmer, and investors become more skeptical (Rivard 2014). In a response to Moody's report, Botstein said that in the next ten years he plans to raise the

school's endowment. For now, however, that 40% of donations is the primary way (aside from tuition) that Bard is able to exist.

Current Bard students have witnessed the fruits of some of these donations: in the past four years, two of the three major "gifts" that were constructed on campus were directly intended for use by the Conservatory.[31] It is therefore no coincidence that in just the last twenty years, Bard has become a cultural hub for classical music. The reason given to the students when they ask, for example, why a new Conservatory Building was built if hundreds of students are still living in temporary housing (referred to as the "trailers), is that wealthy donors choose to donate to the Conservatory, and Bard College--notorious throughout history for always being on the brink of going under--has needed those wealthy donors for the past 150 years.

In the past, newspaper articles would be published lamenting the poor condition of Bard's facilities. In a 1963 issue of the *Bard Observer*, a spread called "The Face of Bard" was published, and its only content was close-up pictures of building damage and general disrepair on campus facilities. In another issue of the *Observer*, a short article entitled "The Atmosphere" read:

> The Atmosphere: The most unique aspect of Bard, however, is not found so much in its facilities as in its atmosphere. Here one overcomes the materialism and becomes concerned with the intellectual. The Bardian does not worry about the physical, but about the spiritual. At any rate, that's what they keep telling me down at the B&G whenever I complain about the falling plaster. *(The Bard Observer)*

Bard's generally poor physical conditions are a historical joke that many generations of Bard students share. Although older students will always claim that Bard was in

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[31] One was a set of practice rooms, which were constructed on the site of what had previously been a dilapidated dorm which was demolished the previous year. The second gift was the Laszlow Z. Bito '60 Conservatory Building, visible on the map. The third gift was a baseball field.

worse condition when they were students, it's general shabbiness (along with its financial instability) are common environmental myths that the student body hand down to one another, generation after generation.

Creating a residency for the American Symphony Orchestra, a $62 million concert hall, and a Conservatory of Music that competes with the top schools in the country has done wonders for Bard College's reputation. Leon Botstein has successfully made Bard a cultural attraction for wealthy elites and in so doing, he has allowed the college to continue operating--despite the precariousness of its current financial plan--overcoming decades of predicted financial collapse.

Despite the contemporary implications of literature which aims to situate the concert experience as historically oriented toward the middle class,[32] the visual impact and cost of a concert hall (specifically Bard's concert hall) reveals its contemporary function as a "cultural" site for American elites. In conversation with Michel Foucault, Pierre Boulez illustrates the problem with depoliticizing music. He pokes fun at the liberal dream of an "eclectic ecumenism" of music, which retains apparent equal respect for all variants ["All those musics are good, all those musics are nice. Ah! Pluralism! There's nothing like it for curing incomprehension."(Boulez)]. This fantasy loses its luster, he contends, because it ignores the blatant reality that certain styles of music have an explicit function in the marketplace. The liberal idea that all musics deserve a happy amount of appreciation and respect exists outside of the political economy, which cannot fully conceal the explicit use-value of music in contemporary society:

[32] See Botstein 1992

"The economy is there to remind us, in case we get lost in this bland utopia: there are musics which bring in money and exist for commercial profit; there are musics that cost something, whose very concept has nothing to do with profit. No liberalism will erase this distinction."(Foucault & Boulez 1992)

The idea that "all musics are good," then, is a utopian vision of equal respect for all things, which exists outside the contemporary reality of commodified art. At the Bard Summerscape, tickets for all theater, dance, and opera events start at $25. Events from Summerscape are written up regularly in newspapers like the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal. Bard, just like any other institution that gives concerts of classical music, is very much a part of the marketplace.

Taking Bard's role in the marketplace into further consideration, the financial and public position to which classical music has elevated Bard. Classical music, and all of its associations with "high" culture and "advanced" musicians, has an ability to "elevate." In a 1999 article of the *Bard Observer* about the plans for the future Richard B. Fisher Center for the Performing Arts, Jim Brudvig is quoted enumerating the assets of the new addition:

"Associate Vice President for Finance and Administration Jim Brudvig recently described the proposed facility as 'essential to the long-term health of the institution.' Brudvig, has worked extensively on the project...sees the Center as a great asset to both the college and the local community, potentially attracting cultural events for which one might previously have traveled to New York City or Saratoga, spurring the local economy, and enhancing the national visibility and reputation of Bard's theatre and dance programs."(*Bard Observer*, 1999)

It is something of a surprise that music was not listed in this article as something that would enhance the college's "national visibility," because in many ways the Fisher Center was the catalyst for Bard's ensuing public association with music. Indeed, music did not appear once in the entire 1999 article. Fifteen years later, the Fisher Center is famous on campus and all over the country for its ties not only to the Bard

Conservatory Orchestra but also the American Symphony Orchestra and Bard Summerscape.

The Richard B. Fisher Center for the Performing Arts is one the most unique buildings on Bard's campus, to put it modestly. It was initially proposed as a $25 million project, but in the three years that it took to build, the cost eventually reached $62 million. Designed by the prominent contemporary architect Frank Gehry and acoustically treated by Yasuhisa Toyota, it is simultaneously modern, beautiful, sustainable, and famous. In terms of "enhancing visibility," the Fisher Center has more than accomplished its proposed task.

Understanding the implications behind this statement about the proposed goals of the Fisher Center is contingent on the notion of visibility, within a conversation about "high and low art." The visual plays an important role in the concert hall, as classical music is traditionally associated with good health. That the physical manifestations of classical music should reflect its elevated status is not an unusual idea. This attitude can be traced back through Bard student newspaper articles for over a hundred years. One particularly opinionated classical music aficionado, W. Judson Rand Jr., writing in the 1930's, wrote an article in a 1934 edition of *The Lyre Tree* entitled "Appreciation of Music." In the article, Rand acknowledges the musical ears of Bard students, and expresses his wish to steer Bard students' tastes in a more noble and "beneficial" direction. The overall aim of the essay is to encourage students to develop "keener" and "more exacting" taste in regards to music, because of the more beneficial return afforded by classical music than any other kind. Rand explains that students turn to music for "refreshment and

rest," but ultimately warns against turning to popular music for this purpose, because its simplicity will diminish the quality of students' emotional lives in their retirement:

> "After having diligently and conscientiously followed the music more or less analytically, he will discover that his tastes have become keener and more exacting, and that the 'sugary' melodies and harmonies of the ragtime are no longer capable of contributing to his more serious moods"(*The Lyre Tree*, 1934).

The comparison Rand makes between music and nutrition reveals concerns at that time about the value music had on humanity. The 'sugary' quality of ragtime has a whole host of implications that reveal his attitude toward commercial music: immediate gratification, not "good" for you, favored by children, etc. This hierarchization of music insofar as it parallels the nutritional ranking of food, put classical music at the top of the food chain and commercial music at the bottom.

**Physical Elevation of Jazz in America**

As a result of this high/low thinking, the idea that jazz needs to be "elevated" into a position of value has been key in the academization as well as commodification of jazz. For the past forty years, jazz has gradually been establishing a place for itself amongst the elite. In the earlier discussion about Jazz at Lincoln Center, I described how it is now physically aligned with other elite art forms like ballet, opera, and orchestral music. Something similar has happened in San Francisco, where just two years ago a state of the art SF Jazz[33] building was erected just half a block from Davies Symphony Hall, the San Francisco Opera, and City Hall. Before the addition of the

[33] SFJAZZ is a San Francisco "cultural institution" that was founded in 1983 by Randall Kline. It puts now puts on over 300 concerts a year with big-name jazz legends heading the bills. It also has an elite ensemble called the SFJAZZ High School Allstars, which is an audition-only big band made up of high school students.

building and its new performance space in 2013, SF Jazz had its concerts in various ornate performance halls throughout San Francisco: Herbst Theatre, Grace Cathedral, and even Davies Symphony Hall, to name a few. In my opinion, nothing confirms the entrance of jazz into the bourgeois circles of society better than Ornette Coleman[34] playing free jazz--what Attali considers one of the first musical orientations *against* the power of the industry--in a symphony hall for an audience of SF elites.

Wynton Marsalis and many others have made it their mission to "elevate" jazz into the realms of high society and higher education. This is not the project of jazz students at Bard, however. While jazz certainly does not occupy a privileged position in the same way that it does in Lincoln Center, the jazz students in the music program don't necessarily want it to. Building an expensive performance space like the Fisher Center or San Francisco's SFJAZZ building would only create a different set of acoustic constraints that students would have to manipulate. What they want, then, is a space that they can completely transform to suit the needs of their music:

> People say, "Well, you know, Bard has so much money and people give money all the time," and that's not true. If someone gave us money I would say "Let's build a venue!" That's what I wanna do. So, we have a venue that--it's a club, it's actually a club, minus the alcohol, and there's a stage and a PA so you go in and you can--you get that experience. Cause they have that for the classical dudes, but the rest of us, not so much. I mean, we have to create these spaces all the time. The Jazz Room! How to massage the jazz room so it's not a hospital, you know? Um. same thing with the Old Gym. That's why people like the Old Gym, it's a blank canvas. You know, it's not a hospital. So yeah if somebody asks me I say yeah, give us a couple of million dollars and we'll build a venue. And it can be used for everything. But it's a venue, and it's primarily jazz department, electronic music department. Primarily no classes. You know because that's what's wrong with Blum, you can't get in there.

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[34] A famous saxophone player, active during the "golden years" of jazz. He invented the term "free jazz."

This is a relatively succinct articulation of an attitude shared by most students in the program. The Conservatory uses a performance space that attracts people from all over the country for both the beauty of the structure itself and the events that happen within its walls, but that is a consequence of the kind of music they play. Most performance halls for classical music are extravagant and otherwise oriented toward a specific kind of audience. The "music" made by members of the music department is not something that can be described in the singular form, as the many different styles that students create are non-uniform, highly individual, and they change every year.

**Composition**

In his book *Noise*, Attali identifies "composition" as the last of his musical "zones." For Attali, composition is the embodiment of music as prophecy, as it heralds a new kind of economy which exists after the destruction of the codes that created the representational and repetitive societies before it. Composing is the absence of exchange--it is "self-communication," "self-knowledge," "non-exchange," "self-valorization"(Attali 1977:142). It is both the break from and refusal of the repetitive society, which normalized codes by repeating them over and over again in the different musical iterations built upon the foundation of the old codes:

"Beyond the rupture of the economic conditions of music, composition is revealed as the demand for a truly different system of organization, a network within which a different kind of music and different social relations can arise. A music produced by each individual for himself, for pleasure outside of meaning, usage and exchange"(Attali 1977:137)

In the old modes--ritual, representation, repetition--music structured society at its center. When music finally entered the marketplace, a central code became necessary. Prices cannot be set and value cannot be assigned if there is not a norm from which to base these

judgments. The problem with this model, it became clear, is that the institutions which more or less structure the behavior of society (and therefore set the norms) began reproducing different iterations of a homogenous style of music, effectively suppressing all contrary musical forms by giving them lower market value: structuring difference at its core and silencing it. The logical answer to this structure, then, is a shift away from the marketplace and into the individual. This is the new economy Attali discusses: composition. In relation to the music department, this is the project of the student: create music that *you* want to create, and perform it in a space that you get to manipulate for an audience of your peers.

**A Blum Hall Concert**

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, the favorite performance space for many members of the music program is Blum Hall. At a typical student concert, a refreshment table would be set up in the hallway offering boxed wine and PBR, and maybe some cheese and crackers as well. The audience is often comprised of the student's friends, which brings students from all different areas of the school. Within Blum Hall, there is no stage and the chairs are set up in a unique configuration of the student's choice prior to the performance. There are two pianos that can be rolled to any area of the room, and a mixer[35] that sits on a rolling table. All of this means that the student has complete autonomy in determining the configuration of his concert. Some set up the band in front of the large glass windows that overlook the courtyard, while others put the band at the end of the room, away from the

[35] Used by the sound engineer who controls the mic levels and also records the concert. Students usually do the sound for other students concerts.

doors. People have experimented with having few chairs, many chairs, and no chairs. In this way, the performance format itself is part of the student's compositional freedom.

Students manipulate everything they can in order to make their concert cutting edge. If taken from Attali's perspective, this could be seen as a way to keep music oriented toward the self and thus away from any larger institution or power structure. Most students don't think of their music in such a political and conceptual way, however, because it is simply a consequence of their professors and peers telling them to find music that *they* want to play. When asked what he thinks the goal of the music program is, one student said, "Work on your voice. You know? Figure out your thing. How to cultivate your thing. Get your thing cultivated. Whatever." Students in the program are relatively nonchalant about this expectation, though all are aware of it. When contrasted with what is going on just down the hall, however, this "goal" has quite profound implications. Whereas music has historically been taught in western educational contexts as something that is right or wrong, good or bad, strict or loose, the idea that music can turn into whatever you want is simultaneously overwhelming, frustrating, and liberating.

Conservatory students have an incredible amount of technical expertise, and that is perhaps its most obvious difference from the music program. Many people I interviewed in the Conservatory described the lack of imagination as a problem faced by students with a history of rigorous technical training. One classical professor told me:

> The result is that the college has some players that are much more wide in their imagination of what music is. not to compare, but that's a fact because Conservatory students, many of them were put at an instrument at the age of five. to play as clean and as fast as anybody had ever been, right? and of course, they learn music and

repertoire and so on, but by the time they get here--at least what I see--is that technically they are *way* ahead of what they have to say. Whereas in the college, they are technically sometimes way back from what they *can* say.

This description of the divide is generally accepted amongst musicians at Bard. What is most interesting, however, is how much the performance structures parallel this comment. While students in the music program have complete freedom to change the features of their performance context, students in the Conservatory are obligated to sit in the same chair in the same auditorium, in further contribution to a representational system of music that is, more or less, closed, rigid, and strict.

## CONCLUSION

The initial perception of music at Bard is one of division: there is a Conservatory of music that plays classical music, and then there is the music program which is even further divided by genres of jazz, electronic music, classical music, and ethnomusicology. Although there is a fair amount of crossover, it is not nearly as much as one would expect from a body of 300+ individuals that are interested in playing and performing music.

This thesis, although only a very small contribution to what could easily have been a much larger analysis of this particular institution, shows the ways in which space contributes to these divides, physically and conceptually. This is a unique time in history, when aspects of technology and ceremony are being used in different ways to preserve the power of the institution. Music is being thought of as a closed system that overemphasizes the importance of mechanical *precision*, and not just in the classical tradition. Jazz and hip-hop, and their obsession with metronomically correct drumming, are becoming legible institutions that keep correctness *in* and deviations *out*.

On the other hand, contemporary classical music is growing exponentially in terms of what it can "do." Since the twentieth century and into today, the rules have been "broken" up to a point where the goal of the music is not as much to contribute to a canon as it is to be on the cutting edge. Foucault comments on this in his conversation with Pierre Boulez:

"The cultural insularity of music today is not simply the consequence of deficient pedagogy or propagation. It would be too facile to groan over the conservatories or complain about the record companies. Things are more serious. Contemporary music owes this unique situation to its very composition. In this sense, it is willed. It is not a music that tries to be familiar; it is fashioned to preserve its cutting edge. One may

repeat it, but it does not repeat itself. In this sense, one cannot come back to it as to an object. It always pops up on frontiers."(Foucault & Boulez)

In this understanding, always popping up on frontiers delegates contemporary classical music into a position of perpetual incomprehensibility. If the system does not stay still long enough to grab onto it, then no one can capture it and "declare its history finished," elevating it into a museum culture, where it becomes the preserved entertainment of the elite. Although contemporary classical music already has that status because of its association with traditional classical, many other styles of music have not yet reached this fate.

It is for this reason that Adorno claims that music exists to maintain social distinctions. He says,

"The differences in the reception of official 'classical' music and light music no longer have any real significance. They are only still manipulated for reasons of marketability. The hit song enthusiast must be reassured that his idols are not too elevated for him, just as the visitor to philharmonic concerts is confirmed in his status. The more industriously the trade erects wire fences between the musical provinces, the greater the suspicion that without these, the inhabitants could all too easily come to an understanding."(Adorno 1938: 276)

Adorno is, of course, famous for his overly cloudy view of the music industry, but his point is worth considering. At a place like Bard, where practitioners of different kinds of music are not overtly encouraged--spatially or institutionally--to come to an understanding with one another, what other function could these fences have? People erect their own versions of these fences as well, so the divided state of the music programs cannot be entirely attributed to some underhanded Master Plan to keep classical musicians away from other kinds. Furthermore, the fences are fluid and constantly changing, as members of the departments try to negotiate what the *actual* differences are that keep them divided.

This is the point I have gleaned from my research, which I hope to impress upon the reader: boundaries are fluid and conceptually uncertain from every angle. In terms of the sound elements themselves, notions of playing in tune and in time have varying degrees of meaning and importance to all different kinds of music. There are social categories that maintain broad distinctions between groups, but even those are broken down under close analysis. The most important distinction to be made, if any, about the divide between music at Bard is in the vocabulary. How students regard tradition, sound, music, and one another all weave together to create a complex social fabric of competing ideologies about sound and noise. Bard is simply a place in which the institutions themselves reflect the degrees of "looseness" and "rigidity" that are operant in the different programs.

On professor in my interviews told me that, "drawing lines is not the interesting part. Having the vocabulary is the interesting part." Indeed, the way different styles of music translate into the communicative realm is one of the most important ways of navigating a music department like Bard. While sound is a mere product of nature and our environment, music is the uniquely human way in which we engage it--in relation to one another. For this reason, I contend, any discussion of music is a discussion of social practices, and any ensuing divisions are merely the byproducts of preexisting social, historical, and even political trends.

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