Playing *with* the Music: Ecologies of Attention and Understanding in the Classical Music Education Project of *Sesame Street*

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March 3, 2022

Introduction

If I have done anything right this paper should be easy to read. I think that is the kindest thing a writer can do. If I have done anything right this paper should also not be quite like anything you have seen before. I might say that is the second kindest thing a writer can do.

In the spirit of easy reading, here's a summary of what lies ahead:

This is a paper about the ecologies of attention and understanding evident in and emergent from the presentation of classical music on the classic children's television program *Sesame Street.*

The paper takes three parts. The first part is an analysis of context, attention, and education on the program, framed through the analogy of bird-watching. I argue that the classical music education which is presented on the program deviates from the humanitarian norm of "uplift" and absolute aesthetics—the bird's-eye view—and instead presents an understanding of music which resonates with ideas of "listening with"—the view of the bird watcher, or in the words of Jenny Odell, the bird *listener* who observes and is observed; who through acts of attention learns to perceive the world around them pluralisticly. In this section I argue that while *Sesame Street* engages with aspects of critical pedagogy, it is ultimately resistant to educational classifications. The program is itself *ecological*, composed of many interacting and competing parts which create a program whose character is emergent and consistent, but not unified.

Part two is an analysis of classical music performance on the program, framed through the analogy of the worm-listener—they who listen as outsiders to the arcane sound of the world beneath our feet. This section deals with questions of parody, virtuosity, and childhood. It contains three character studies of classical musi-

cians who made appearances on the program: Yo-Yo Ma, Evelyn Glennie, and Lang Lang.

In this section I argue that *Sesame Street* takes part in a long tradition of classical music parody which welcomes the outsider while at the same time engages the classical music native and initiate —that is, the worm, who has spent its life embedded in the classical strata. *Sesame Street* neither challenges nor exalts the classical music canon, but rather serves as an enabling technology, a *geophone*, which allows for the aerial listener to perceive and engage with the arcane sounds of underworld.

This project takes shape in two media: one is what you are reading right now, the "white paper" presentation of the research. The other is a non-striated recreation of the field in the form of a Multi User Domain, or MUD. The third section of this paper deals with the themes of diversity, equity, and liberation which inform the project.

Each part begins with a prologue—or dare I say, a dramatic monologue —written in first-person perspective which grounds the following discussion. If the chapters look at musical and educational ecologies, the prologues give lived context for the geological bedrock on which these ecologies are based.

I'll count myself off: LIGHTS. CAMERA. ACTION!

Prologue: In *media* res

On a summer evening in Saint Louis I was listening to the radio in the kitchen. In the research for this paper, which had grown from a character study on Yo-Yo Ma to encompass the themes of eduction and public broadcasting, I had decided that I should actually own some kind of broadcast receiver. After looking into mini televisions, I settled on the conservative option of a radio. As I chopped onions, my local NPR station's weekend programming buzzed in the background.

A program on the recent events in Afghanistan had ended and the PSA space, where a commercial station would have run adds, began. I heard a woman's voice say "This is Saint Louis Public Radio. Understanding Starts Here."

My ears perked up. What an intriguing declaration. It is not "This is Saint Louis Public Radio, your source of news," or "This is Saint Louis Public Radio: hear the nation." Instead, the slogan is a promise to increase your *understanding.* NPR is offering not just to inform you, but moreover to provide some kind of ethical education, presumably into cultural-socio-political events such that one comes away *understanding.*

A strange word, "understanding." In the context of the socio-political, cultural and economic topics under the purview of national public radio, something seems very kind about the word. It feels emotionally laden and steeped in empathy.

Its usage does not imply factual understanding, something like "Let us factually explain what's going on in Afghanistan," but rather, "cultivate an understanding of the human experiences of Afghanistan along with us."

Etymologically, the "under" in the first half of the word "understand" does not denote the more modern "below," but rather among or in-between.[1] To understand

1. "understand (v.)," accessed October 31, 2021, `https://www.etymonline.com/word/understand`.

is to stand among. What NPR is offering, then, is empathy in a broadcast.

This offering of empathy continues the founding ethos of NPR and its focus on hearing common people speak. *All Things Considered*, now one of the most listened-to programs on American radio, debuted with the chaotic coverage of what at the time was the biggest anti-Vietnam war protest to date. It consisted of tape gathered by multiple reporters at the event with no overarching narrative. It was unlike anything on the radio at the time. Its chaos was intended to capture the chaos of the moment, but was also part of a larger aesthetic and political trend on the program to hear the voices of normal Americans. Something now known as the "public radio sound."

The sound is recognizable to this day by its lack of a narrator and the featuring of interviewees from the general public. It was pioneered by the "founding mother" of NPR, radio journalist Susan Stamberg. She was inspired by the cinema verité of the time, saying that the idea "was to tell a story without telling it— just sound through chunks." This meant no authoritative radio voice, but instead just giving everyday Americans time to talk before moving along to another speaker. The work of narrative interpretation is left to the listener, who is given a more rhizomatic view of the events— a radical new direction in radio journalism and broadcast culture more generally.

One particular aspect of the public radio sound was the use of "cross talk," a technique in which two voices are layered onto one another in polyphony, which was inspired by Glenn Gould's "contrapuntal storytelling" in *The Solitude Trilogy*.[2] Stamberg retrospectively described the debut as having "no interfering narrator."[3]

The showcasing of alternative voices was so central to the ethos of the young

2. Jeff Porter, *Lost Sound: The Forgotten Art of Radio Storytelling* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 197.
3. Ibid., 185.

network that NPR turned down a $300,000 donation from the Ford Foundation contingent on the network hiring well-known broadcast journalist Edward P. Morgan as host of *All Things Considered*. Morgan, recipient of a Peabody Award, would have certainly brought the new network credibility, but NPR feared that the authoritative voice would get in the way of the alternative voices that they wanted to showcase. The ethos of "standing among" seems to be baked in to the entire project of public radio.

This ethos is visible in public television as well. In the mid-1960s Ralph Lowell, Board Chairman of the Boston Educational Television station proposed that the Oval Office put together a commission on educational television. President Johnson, believing that this was a job for the private sector, turned to the Carnegie Corporation. What was formed was a diverse team known as the Carnegie Commission on Educational Television. Among others, this team included writer Ralph Ellison, concert pianist Rudolph Serkin, and labor leader Leonard Woodcock.[4]

The commission put together a report titled *Public Television, A Program for Action* which stressed the artistic and transformative value of the medium and the importance of using it to resist the pressure toward uniformity found in commercial television but instead seek out and satisfy the needs of the nation's diversity.[5]

The need for this shift in broadcasting came about because the United States Government had granted access to the airwaves to commercial stations first, only adding public stations to the media landscape as part of Great Society era reformations. Canada and England, on the other hand, created public broadcasting first and only later opened the airwaves to commercial stations.[6]

It was this same era of reform that lead the Carnegie Corporation in search of

4. John Meany, "The Insitution of Public Television," *The Review of Politics* 30, no. 4 (1968): 409.
5. Ibid., 410.
6. Ibid., 412.

a way to increase the reach of their humanitarian educational programs for inner-city preschoolers.[7] Lloyd Morrisett, the vice president of programs at the Carnegie Corporation[8] and a psychologist[9] had noticed his own daughter's fascination with the television medium when his three-year old got up early in the morning to watch the pre-broadcast RCA test patterns.[10]

Morrisett then tasked Joan Ganz Cooney, a publicity specialist for the *United States Steel Hour*, a twice-monthly series on CBS,[11] with the project of producing a study on the educational possibilities of children's television, backed by a $15,000 grant. The resulting report, *The Potential Uses of Television in Children's Education* analyzed the ways that the relatively new technology of television could be used as an educational supplement for preschoolers, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

It was this report which lead to the creation of the program at hand, *Sesame Street.*

7. Michael Davis, *Street Gang: The Complete History of Sesame Street* (New York: Viking, 2008), 15.
8. Jans Cooney, "The Potential Uses of Television in Childrens Education," 1966, 7.
9. Davis, *Street Gang*, 15.
10. Ibid., 11.
11. Ibid., 27.

Part I

The Bird-Watcher: Attention, Education, and Entertainment

Entertainment: Welcome to *Sesame Street*

Sesame Street needs little introduction. One of the longest running shows in the history of television,[12] it has been a cultural staple of generations of children—and their parents—in the United States and worldwide.

While *Sesame Street* is an educational program, it is notable for its entertainment value. This stems from the realization by the original producers of the program that in order to compete with the non-educational television competition only a turn of the dial away, televised preschool education would have to be just as entertaining.[13] This is especially true given that at the program's premiere in 1969, there was nothing like it in the children's media landscape.[14] This means that there were truly no models for the production of the program, nor for its reception—they could not trust that children knew how to watch educational programs.

This realization lead to a fundamental characteristic of the production structure of the program: rather than hire child development and education specialists to produce the show, they used education research to inform decisions made by seasoned TV, radio, and Broadway producers, writers, composers, and actors. This decision was informed by the observation that children respond well to adult television and were known to recite adds for beer and cigarettes, as well as having their attention held by adult variety shows such as *Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In.*[15]

But *Sesame Street* is not just entertaining for children. In order to encourage parents to watch the show along with their children, a move which would also help keep preschoolers focused, the producers aimed to make the show entertaining

12. "Sesame Street," *Britannica Academic*.
13. Cooney, "The Potential Uses of Television in Childrens Education," 38.
14. Davis, *Street Gang*, See chapter 3 for a survey of the contemporary children's television landscape.
15. Kathryn A. Ostrofsky, "Talking Sesame to the Streets: Young Children's Interactions with Pop Music's Aesthetics in the 1970s," *Jounral of Popular Music Studies* 24, no. 3 (2012): 16.

enough for parents to want to watch it along with their children.[16] [17]

In terms of music, you see to this effect the featuring of musical performers that parents would know, often playing educational parodies of their own work. For example, Norah Jones' performance on *Sesame Street* in 2004.[18] Sitting at the piano with Elmo, Jones re-spins "I Don't Know Why," a somber song of heartbreak and alcoholism, as "I Don't Know Y," in which she laments all of the words she can no longer spell, now that her friend, the letter Y, has stood her up for a play date. Jones' performance and delivery are nearly identical to those which appear on her recording of the original for her album *Come Away With Me.* This is "quality" music for adults which has been modified to fit the highly specific musical demonstration which is needed for the *Sesame Street* educational project.

Listening *with*: Attention as Grounds for Ethics

The ethos of music on *Sesame Street* was perhaps best summarized by Joe Rapso, the first music director of the program, in a 1971 press release. The program's diverse music, he said, would help bridge cultural divides when the kids were grown up and "bring all kids together, whether they live in Grosse Point or on 148th Street in the Bronx... And the beauty of our music is maybe that the child in the Grosse Pointe home is hearing gospel and blues for the first time and the black child in the urban ghetto is hearing a harpsichord and flute for the first time. Someday, when

16. Kathryn A. Ostrofsky, "*Sesame Street* as a Musical Comedy-Variety Show," in *Music in Comedy Television: Notes on Laughs*, ed. Liz Giuffre and Philip Hayward (Milton Park, UK: Routeledge, 2017), 294.

17. Mixed-age television targeting likely began on the television program *Captain Kangaroo*. Davis, *Street Gang*, 46

18. *Sesame Street: Episode 4081—Rosita dislikes her accent*, May 7, 2004, `https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=goUNpfS_Aa0`.

they grow up, they'll have one more thing in common."[19]

Rapso's belief in the power of music is idealistic and his assumption that the privileged child has never heard blues or gospel is over-simplistic, but we see with this statement a clear expression of an ethics of understanding through sonic exposure: By using entertainment to focus attention and expose children to music from other social and economic contexts, Rapso is promising not only a musical education, but also an ethical one. Having "one more thing in common" is perhaps here grounds for the social understanding which is historically valued by public media. The "power of music" is an idea which often arises in neoliberal discourses of music and its value. While Rapso's statement on the power of music to bridge cultural divides shares many of the same language as these neoliberal discourses, I find that the presentation of music on *Sesame Street* diverges from the standard neoliberal narratives of music and music education, which I discuss in the section "Grouchy about multiculturalism." I understand these neoliberal discourses through Ana Bull's analysis of their prevalence in the British musical education system in *Class, Control, and Classical Music* and Marianna Ritchey's analysis of how classical music has been put to the service of capitalism in *Composing Capital*. Whereas the musical narratives discussed in these books emphasize the creation of value by the individual, the ethos of *Sesame Street* , while it displays certain neoliberal aspects, leans strongly toward a more collectivist and humanist ethos of understanding based not in creating value through music, nor even in creating music, but instead based in sonic exposure and practices of listening.

I take many cues from sound studies and acoustic ecology, particularly Annea Lockwood. A composer from New Zealand, Lockwood is known for her fascination with the transitory nature of natural sounds, particularly those of water and rivers.

19. Ostrofsky, "Talking Sesame to the Streets: Young Children's Interactions with Pop Music's Aesthetics in the 1970s," 297.

In the 1960s, Lockwood began a project with the goal of recording and archiving the sound of every river on the planet.[20] These recordings sometimes include the sound of what she calls the "river people," mixed in. These are the voices of the people who live and work on the river.[21] Though these interviews come from around the world and Lockwood has primarily been involved with anglophone audiences, these interviews are never translated. Rather than strict semantic meaning, Lockwood prefers to capture what she calls "the rhythm of memory," or the way that the speed and energy of an oral recollection ebbs and flows as the speaker gropes for a shaky memory.[22]

In 2019 Lockwood selected the theme for World Listening Day, a global project by the World Listening Project, which celebrates acoustic ecology and listening practices every July 18, the birthday of R. Murray Shafer. The theme she selected was "listening with," which she described as "listening with an awareness that all around you are other life-forms simultaneously listening and sensing with you—plant roots, owls, cicadas, voles—mutually intertwined within the web of vibrations which animate and surround our planet."[23]

She described in an interview how she came to this mode of listening:

> "[I remember] in the little neighborhood of our house and around us in the woods—an alertness. There was a quality of an electric alertness in the air and I suddenly realized I'm not the only one listening. I mean everything around me is listening, you know.
>
> So instead of listening *to* the neighborhood, I was listening *with* the neighborhood. And it's funny. It's a change of perspective. It's as if I was used to having my ears swivel this way and I turned, simply turned, and now

20. Tara Rodgers, *Pink Noises: Women on Electronic Music and Sound* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 117.
21. Ibid., 121.
22. Ibid., 122.
23. "World Listening Project – About Us," accessed January 14, 2021, `https://www.worldlisteningproject.org/about-us/`.

> they're swiveling that way and the mode of hearing—the mode of absorbing, brings for me, a strong sense of being totally interwoven with everything else around."[24]

Throughout this paper I use this phrase "listening *with*" to describe situations and practices of listening and being which engage in this mutual sonic awareness. Along with its variation "playing *with*," they form the two primary elements of my framework for the analysis of the acoustic ecology of *Sesame Street*.

To understand the practice of listening, I take the definition offered by Pauline Oliveros, a contemporary and friend of Lockwood.[25] In relation to her practice of "deep listening," a complete and intense sonic awareness based in observation rather than judgement, Oliveros distinguishes listening from hearing, clarifying that "to hear is the physical means that enables perception. To listen is to give attention to what is perceived both acoustically and psychologically."[26]

I take "listening *with*" not as "hearing *with*," that is, not as co-perception, but rather an amorphous and rhizomatic form of co- and meta- awareness and offering of attention.

My understanding of attention and my larger framework for understanding the media ecology of children's television comes from the theories developed by Jenny Odell in *How To Do Nothing*, a book at the intersection of media theory and ecology. Odell places attention as the center of ethics. We decide who is seen, who is heard, and who has agency, through acts of attention.[27] I propose that Odell can help us

24. "World Listening Day 2019 "Listening with is so nourishing"," accessed January 14, 2021, `https://vimeo.com/342883550?embedded=true&source=vimeo_logo&owner=20220901`.

25. Rodgers, *Pink Noises*, 116.

26. Jenny Odell, *How to Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy* (Brooklyn and London: Melville House, 2019), 33/366, As things stand today, e-books are basically useless for academic research because they lack, of all things, page numbers. At its bare-bones, a synthetic work like this methodology section is just a long list of page numbers, which makes my reading habbits slightly unhealthy. I'm going to go back and find the page numbers in the hard cover edition, but for now, I will list them as fractions.

27. Ibid., 154.

interpret the soundscape of *Sesame Street* and the listening which it cultivates. I take her theories of attention as my primary framework for the ecologies of music and understanding prevalent in the program. I make this shift away from traditional musicological tools of analysis largely because *Sesame Street* is a project which spans multiple generations of artists, producers, and sources of funding, yet has retained its character. It changes more like a forest does than a sonata. *Sesame Street* is an emergent phenomenon, the result of the interactions and conflicts of numerous actors, rather than the vision of a small group of musicians and composers—the scale which current musicological tools privilege.

Odell describes a way of engaging with the world similar to that of bird watching, which she says is better described as bird *listening*. By listening with the birds—listening in a way which acknowledges ones own subjectivity and their location as another sounding element of the sonic world—the listener learns to differentiate and identify the sounds of the different birds in an environment, and thereby becomes aware of the ecology around them and their place within it.[28]

This ecological, attention-based understanding of the world requires that one gives up the idea of discrete entities, simple origin stories, and simple one-to-one causalities, and above all, requires time. The direct product of this attention, Odell says, is context. That is, paying close attention can help us better understand the nuanced ecologies of being and identities that make up the ecological relationships of an environment. The longer that the attention is held, the more context appears.[29]

This is musically apparent in the skits of Muppet Simon Soundman. In one skit from 1973,[30] Simon visits a music store, where he tells the shopkeeper that he is in the market for a "nice, shiny—" and then we hear a long trumpet lick as his mouth

28. Odell, *How to Do Nothing*, 33/366.
29. Ibid., 155.
30. *Sesame Street: Episode 0458—Nobody believes that Snuffy is real/Another snowy day*, January 24, 1973, `https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L3N5B21EEXQ`.

moves in time.

> "Uh... Oh... Would you mind repeating that, sir?"
>
> "No, indeed. What I said was I'd like to buy a nice, shiny—" and then the trumpet sounds again.
>
> The shopkeeper goes off-screen and returns with an instrument.
>
> "Here you are, sir. A beautiful new violin."
>
> "No, no, no... I don't want a—" this time he makes violin sounds. "You see, because what I asked for was a nice, shiny—"

And the skit goes on like this with for a number of minutes with the shopkeeper bringing back the wrong instruments and Simon Soundman referring to them only through impeccable renditions of their sound.

This skit uses a simple and entertaining gag to expose children to the sounds, names, and appearances of several common instruments. Just as Odell discusses leaning to identify birds by their sounds, children are taught here to learn to identify the sounds of several common instruments that you would find in the environment of music store or a big band—the sound that the shopkeeper himself makes once Simon leaves, saying "that fellow was pretty good. Huh. I should have asked him if he would like to play in our—" and we hear the sounds of a big band.

But Rapso's statement on music and the broader ethos of *Sesame Street* demonstrated through its programming go beyond awareness and context of musical instruments. It is primarily one of social context. To quote pioneering broadcast journalist Edward R Murrow, the role of television is to make the world aware of itself.[31] By creating a media platform through which children of different backgrounds can

31. Davis, *Street Gang*, 49.

gain exposure to each other's music, they will have an increased awareness and understanding of each other. Implicit in all this is the idea that this will relive social and class tensions. The press release where this statement was made was titled "Beetles and Beethoven, Move on Over. The Seventies Sound Is Sesame Street." Rapso was selling the radical potential of the program and musical sounds, albeit idealistically. With this statement he was selling a social and ethical education based in context and understanding through acts of sonic attention.

This attitude, the social context of listening, is apparent in a number of musical skits on the program.

Case Study 1: Itzahk Perlman and "What's Easy for You is Hard for Me"

Fading in from black, there is a simple stage set with three folding chairs. On the third to the right is an instrument case. Entering from the bottom of the frame, a girl runs up the big grey steps to the stage and takes a seat to the left, smiling. She looks in the direction she came from. Itzhak Perlman enters with a cane in each hand. He begins to climb the steps to the stage, swinging each stiff leg up to the next level and climbing one step at a time.

There are three big steps, presumably made from grey plywood, and then a small step up to the stage. By the second step, the girl begins to fidget. By the third step her smile has faded and she looks to the side and kick her feet while she waits, perhaps to avoid staring.

Perlman climbs the small remaining distance between the steps and the stage and turns to sit down.

"Ooff. Those steps," he says.

In order to bend at the waist and hips to sit, he unlocks his leg braces with an audible click and a rotation of his hips. He sits down and pulls his hands out of the metal rings of his canes.

"You know," he says, turning to the girl, "some things that are really easy for you are hard for me."

He picks up his violin and checks the tuning with two quick plucks with his fingerboard hand and then a quick bow across each adjacent string pair, eyes closed. His tone is rich and bright, even when tuning. He launches into an impressive flourish, starting with double stops followed by a long run up and down the fingerboard, ending with a right hand pizzicato chord. He does this all with a certain light effortlessness.

"Yeah, but some things are easy for you that are hard for me," the girl replies. She lifts her violin and plays a melody in a minor key. She carries the tune, but her intonation is unstable.

Perlman tilts his head and leans in with appreciation as she plays. They both smile when she finishes.

The view of classical music which we gain access to here is not a traditional one. This is not a performance for an audience, but instead a intimate moment of discourse and vulnerability between two musicians. Here, classical music is not seen from the birds eye view, that of objective distance, looking over the musical landscape, but that of the bird listener listening along with. There is no audience in this skit, nor is there hierarchy, reverence, or authority. There is no criticism nor nor teaching going on and he is not there to fix or improve her playing. Perlman may be virtuosic, but he is not established as a master guiding his pupils. This skit is

not about Perlman as an individual of status, but rather it is about the interaction of the two musicians and how they listen to and acknowledge each other's lived experiences of music and the world.

We may be watching from home as a television audience, bit what we see is not the somber performance of canonic works, nor is it an accessible presentation of a classical music program for non-initiates. What we are watching is a demonstration of ecological musical listening, of listening *with*.

One might object that this is *media*, and that what we are seeing is fake, a construction. That is, in fact, the case. However, that does not reduce the potential of an ecological reading of this skit, nor its efficacy as a demonstration. What we are seeing here is a representation of an empathetic and ecological experience and a sandboxed recreation of real life, inasmuch as the producers created an actual experience on the set which we can view the recording of—an experience which speaks to actual, lived, human encounters.

The word "sandboxed" comes from software design, where it is used to describe an isolated or contained area where a program can be run with a limited number of resources, often so it cannot cause damage to or drain resources from the larger system. This term has been taken up by collaborative online communities and their projects, such as Wikipedia, to describe webpages and other spaces where users are free to experiment without risk of damaging actual content.[32] I use this term to describe a style of educational material where the learner is presented with a place to learn, play, and explore, much like a playground sandbox. The sandboxed space contains materials which are real and pre-existing, just as sand is, but have been curated for educational purposes.

And like sand on a playground is no less real for its context, this skit is no less real

32. "sandbox," accessed January 5, 2022, `https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/sandbox`.

for being filmed. Perlman actually limped up the tall steps onto the stage as he had done countless times outside of the *Sesame Street* set—this time was no easier than any other. The girl actually played as she has obviously done for hundreds of hours, and this time was no easier than any other. Though what we at home are seeing is a representation of a social encounter, it is a recreation of actual experiences.

And its sandboxing does not detract from its meaningfulness, but rather, it is only through this sandboxing that it can be made into entertainment and education such that it can contribute to an ethical education.

I say all of this to argue that an ecological reading and ecological education can come out of "constructed" media, that ultimately, it is not un-reality which is created, but a guided slice of reality, made in order to facilitate the ecological goal of awareness and context.

This next skit similarly features a disabled artist, deaf percussionist Evelyn Glennie. However, while the Perlman skit called attention to ability and disability and modeled co-awareness and understanding, the following skit chooses not to address disability directly and instead focuses on musical and social listening in the context of a classical music performance.

Case Study 2: Glennie and Linda

Glennie is first introduced by an off-screen voice: "And Now, Evelyn Glennie, world famous percussionist, will perform a duet with her friend Linda."

Glennie walks in followed by Linda.

"Now, I'll tell *you* when to come in. Okay," Glennie says, signing and speaking simultaneously, and hands Linda a single mallet."

Glennie launches into an impressive piece of solo classical marimba for four mallets.

At the beginning of an impressive run, Linda taps Glennie's shoulder.

"Now?" she signs and mouths.

"Not now, not now," Glennie responds, lifting her mallets. She continues with the run down from the high end of the Marimba to the middle. A small hiccup at the end of the phase suggest that she is slightly flustered, but only slightly. She continues on to the next phrase, displacing Linda, who stands by her side watching closely, which each step as she moves up and down the instrument. With a massive run upwards she finishes the phrase and raises her mallets into the air. Linda taps her shoulder.

"*Now?*"

"Not now," Glennie shakes her head.

Glennie crosses the stage to an assortment of unhitched percussion instruments, including a snare drum and numerous cymbals and other pieces of resonant metal. Glennie plays a very modern sounding solo, impressive in its wash of timbres and coordination. At first Linda plays close attention, but after a few moments she starts to look bored and disappointed, crosses her arms, and lets her head droop.

Glennie plays a roll on the snare and looks at her partner expectantly. Linda is not listening. She tries again. The response is the same. Glennie taps the splash cymbal lightly. She pokes Linda's shoulder. She looks up.

"Now!" Glennie gestures at the cymbal with a large gesture.

Surprised, but excited, Linda raises her mallet and strikes the cymbal.

> The audience breaks out in applause. The two look at each other with a smile and shake hands.
>
> They walk to the center stage and take a bow, first to the camera— representing the concert-hall audience—and then to each other. A girl walks up to them and hands Linda, the amateur, a bouquet of flowers. Glennie watches, miffed. She puts her hands on her hips and with a look of shock and disappointment on her face. Linda, soaking up the applause, smiles, and hands Glennie back her mallet, a gesture much like the lead ballerina pulling a single rose out of her bouquet to hand to her partner. Glennie takes the mallet, and storms off the stage, frowning. Linda turns back to camera and smiles.

Whereas the first skit centered on ability and disability, this skit does not present the two deaf performers as encountering any difficulty, not including interpersonal relationships. This is, in fact, where the humor of this skit comes from: their inability to listen to each other and their resultant misunderstanding of the meaning of a duet. There is a comic symmetry to their misunderstanding: Glennie is unfair to Linda, during the performance, and Linda returns the favor at the end.

By focusing on this misunderstanding, deaf interaction is normalized, attention is drawn away from disability to the point that one might not even realize that the two performers are deaf—not in an erasure of disability, but through the showcasing of Glennie's musical virtuosity, her domination of the stage, and the skit's focus on the friction which this creates between her and Linda.

This friction presents, as part of the musical lesson of the skit, what a duet is *not*, and in so doing suggests more fair ways that children might play with each other, musically or non-musically. This aspect of play is an enduring aspect of the musical performances on *Sesame Street*, where adults often act in childlike ways. Analogs for

children, Glennie and Linda show what can go wrong if we fail to listen—however it is in all of our human diversity that we do so. This skit presents an ethics of attention based not only in listening, but also in giving space for others to speak, make sound, and communicate. Through a comical demonstration of misunderstanding, it delivers a lesson on how understanding starts from fair and balanced communication.

Education

Sesame Street was met with a broad range of reactions to its educational model after its debut:

Echoing the thoughts of many traditional educators, preschool authority Carl Bereiter of the Ontario Institute for Studies in education wrote in the *Wall Street Journal* the morning after the program's premiere that the program was too far removed from "structured" teaching and warned that the program could fail because "it's based entirely on audience appeal and is not really teaching anything in particular."[33]

It received an equal amount of criticism form progressive educators, some of who thought that the program was too traditional. Frank Garfunkle, a professor of education at Boston University wrote in the alumni magazine that "any claim that *Sesame Street* is a major educational or media innovation is preposterous. The values implicit in the form and content–strictly three Rs with a mixed bag of dressing—are traditional... The image of *Sesame Street* as a unique vanguard of educational experience is a mirage."[34]

When the program was later slotted to be shipped abroad in international co-

33. Davis, *Street Gang*, 200.
34. Ibid., 201.

productions, the BBC turned it down. Children's program chief, Monica Sims, described the program "authoritarian" referring to its aims to change children's behavior and its emphasis on right answers.[35] This last observation is at odds with the intentions stated by Joan Ganz Cooney in her inaugural research for the program: almost all of the experts she interviewed wanted to see the teaching of cognitive habits—as defined by Jerome Kagan to be analysis, generating hypotheses, and reflection—rather than trying to teach them skills such as how to read. The idea was to teach how to think, not what to think.[36]

That there were such varied responses to the educational model of the program speaks to its complexity and its resistance to educational labels, traditional or radical.

On the face of it, *Sesame Street* quite literally conforms to the broadcast model of education. The whole project is, after all, inherently instructivist: it was created as a response to the question "how can we use new technology to give preschool education to as many children as possible?" The program uni-directionally streams educational material to the learner watching and listening at home, who is left to absorb the information. The learner has no say in constructing their own education. When it comes to the educational material it presents on basic literacy and numeracy there are, as noted by the BBC, clear right and wrong answers. Furthermore, the program has a curriculum designed by education researchers with intended outcomes and takeaways for each lesson.[37]

Literacy and numeracy education are, however, only part of the educational project of *Sesame Street*. A great deal of the programming can be interpreted as, and has been expressed by its creators, as giving kids a cultural and emotional educa-

35. Davis, *Street Gang*, 211.
36. Cooney, "The Potential Uses of Television in Childrens Education," 23.
37. Davis, *Street Gang*, 117.

tion.[38] A majority of this cultural and emotional education is open ended. In the skit with Itzahk Perlman, viewers are exposed to the stunning playing of a professional, the attainable playing of a child, disability, ability, and co-mutual visibility. When the two musicians play for one another, they do so to express their mutual relationship, not simply so that the other may listen. They are both listening and playing *with*.

What is a child at home supposed to get from this? This is where *Sesame Street* may be simultaneously instructivist and broadcast-based, but is moreover *non-striated.* I use this term *non-striated* to denote a space which is not hierarchical and bounded like striated space as understood by Deleuze and Guatari, but does not fall into the "nomadic" and free spaces which they describe as "smooth."

The *listening with* aspect of its educational model drops the learner into an existing network of understanding, discourse, and culture, such that what they take away from the lesson depends on their personal proclivities and needs, whether that is simply hearing the master violinist play, or the understanding that some thing that is easy for one person can be hard for others. The combination of the educational goals of the experts in Cooney's report and the musical ethos of Rapso, we get a program where children are taught how to *listen* as a cognitive habit.

I use this term *non-striated* to denote a space which is not hierarchical and bounded like striated space as understood by Deleuze and Guattari. In a chapter of their book *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* titled "[The year] 1400" the duo establishes a binary between smooth and striated spaces. This chapter, or rather, this plateau, might be described as a strophic prose poem where the concept is introduced several times, each time through a different lens. The binary is rated to fabric versus felt, agrarian versus nomadic societies, and distances versus magnitudes, to

38. Ostrofsky, "Talking Sesame to the Streets: Young Children's Interactions with Pop Music's Aesthetics in the 1970s," 297.

name a few.

To the best of my knowledge, the pair never uses the term "non-striated," but they state that no space is only smooth or only striated, but must be an ever-changing mixture of the two as one gives rise to the other.[39] Given that they also recommend that you read their book the way that you would listen to a record,[40] I interpolate out from this binary the gradation of the "non-striated" which does not necessarily imply smooth amorphism, but moreover a lack of the ruled, bound, measured, and governed spaces of fabric, the state, and—in this case—the traditional classroom.

The educational analyses in this paper are informed in large part by Ivan Illich and his book *Deschooling Society* where he argues that learning would be improved by the abolition of formalized compulsory education. Along these lines, Illich says that it is delusional to think that we can determine what is necessary education for others and what is not.[41] Furthermore, Illich demonstrates the ways that the traditional classroom asserts itself as the only worthwhile source of education, which Illich argues actually limits the number of skilled and educated people[42]

Sesame Street, on the other hand, understands that it is not the only source of education, nor does it attempt to be. In this way its educational material can be much more open ended and nuanced.

In one of Yo-Yo Ma's appearances on the program in the 1980s' he plays a classical quartet with the Muppets. Bob the music teacher appears, but he does not lead any lesson. In fact, he is pushed off the stage by a conducting Big Bird who tells him to take a seat after Bob hints that he finds the whole affair silly.

Where is the schooling, where is the teacher, in this skit? The traditional teacher is

39. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 474.
40. Ibid., ix.
41. Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society* (Hasbro, 1970), 12, `http://gen.lib.rus.ec/book/index.php?md5=d8e2ca8f363e74990fdc794505cb3879`.
42. Ibid., 39.

physically forced off the stage, leaving no clear instructor. Perhaps the teacher is the program itself. While the producers have presumably decided what should be taken away from this lesson—have in a sense decided what should be learned—there is no direction or guidance into how it should be watched. Ivan Illich proposes that in the place of traditional educators we have pedagogical counselors who would advise a student on where to seek instruction, what methods of learning would be appropriate for their skills, and the like. A role more like that of a subject librarian or a museum curator combined with a personal tutor.[43]

The presentation of classical music in this skit falls more in line with this style of focused curatorship; The producers of *Sesame Street* present to children a number of performances deemed appropriate for their age and level of understanding, but do not coerce their view or their understanding in one direction or another.

Of course, this is a written out, synthetic performance. It's not footage of Ma playing at Carnegie Hall, but something written with the express purpose of educating and entertaining children. While children are free to make their own judgements on the performance and learn from it on their own, it is sandboxed. It is a slice of worldly music—Yo-Yo Ma—fictionalized into an entertaining and open-ended skit.

Illich argues that "childhood" as a period of life separate from infancy, adolescence, or youth did not begin to appear until the Renaissance, and not in its present form until industrialization.[44] He continues that childhood is not only a modern invention, but is also a burden to the adolescent, who is prevented from being whole person.[45]

One might argue, then, that a true Ilichian education would disavow the entire idea of children's' media and simply present children with performances of worldy

43. Illich, *Deschooling Society*, 43.
44. Ibid., 13.
45. Ibid., 14.

art—perhaps in this case simply with *The Muppet Show*. This idea holds less water when you acknowledge that, again, the role of the Ilichian counselor is to curate materials appropriate to the skills and understanding of the learner, not just to throw them into the deep end of, say, molecular biology and tell them to swim. Anarchist education entails the lack of coercion, not the lack of guidance.

Furthermore, the argument that it is non-Illichian because it is is children's media depends on the assumption that *Sesame Street* is educational material only and not itself a work of art. Analyzing *Sesame Street* as art opens a whole tool set for understanding as well as bringing us closer to the production experiences of the Broadway, TV, and radio producers who were writing the show.

Illich also argues that obligatory schooling divides society into the realms of the "academic" and the "non-academic" and thereby renders education non-worldly and the world non-educational.[46] On *Sesame Street*, the musical education is more wordly than it is "educational," giving children a more or less direct look into the world of popular music. Even the show's set, based on actual streets and buildings in Harlem[47] has a woldly character to it where children learn *casually*—by which I mean, even when they are not being taught a lesson in spelling, they are being exposed to themes of difference and coexistance, not to mention exposure to kinds of music which they may not have heard and to the people who make them. In this way, the world is rendered educational. Likewise, education is rendered wordly as, for example, B.B. King singing about words that start with B. This is a lesson in literacy presented through music which is very much "of the world" and has its own real racial, social, and historical discourses which are rendered in its very vibrations. This is not "childrens music" or music built from scratch particularly to teach children words that start with B, but rather a worldly art form adapted for this

46. Illich, *Deschooling Society*, 12.
47. Davis, *Street Gang*, 154.

particular lesson-context.

I say all of this not to make the hard-line argument that *Sesame Street* is virtuous and non-traditional, but rather that is resistant to educational classifications. It is somehow at once instructivist, yet open-ended. This is what I mean when I say that *Sesame Street* is non-striated: It is not a reproduction of the traditional classroom where students are coerced into learning what their teachers deem important, but instead learners are free to interpret the skits to find whatever emotional or cultural meaning that they themselves need. Neither is it a smooth and amorphous Deleuzeian space with no educational goals or structure, but instead a sandboxed, curated space of open-ended cultural and emotional learning.

This all makes sense given that the program was developed in order to help close the gap between underprivelideged and middle class preschoolers.[48] These are learners who, definitionally, have not yet been schooled. Therefore all of their learning so far has been casual and incidental. Illich addresses this exact problem when he argues in the introduction to *Deschooling Society*, that poor students will always be behind their wealthier counterparts.[49] Poor students lack the books, conversations, and travel which casually educate wealthier children. A non-striated, Illichian education, then makes perfect sense for a televised early-childhood supplement.

Funding, political backgrounds, and deschooling society

Perfect sense, except for the fact that it was funded by the nation's two largest philanthropic organizations—the Carnegie Corporation and the Ford Foundation—and the United States Government. Critic John Leonard spoke to this conflict directly

48. Cooney, "The Potential Uses of Television in Childrens Education," sec. 1.
49. Illich, *Deschooling Society*, 5.

with his comment in the New York Times that "Any project seducing the philanthropies of two private foundations and a government agency is suspect." With this statement he was questioning the ability of the program to be a truly socially liberal institution, stating that "Government agencies are permitted to exist... only so long as they use hair sprays to attack our various social Medusas."[50] Leonard points to a central conflict in this study of Sesame Street: how radical is it really? How radical can it really be, given its establishment patronage?

As a partial answer to this question, I would say that the program ended up being more radical than its proposal suggested. This was in no small part due to executive producer Joan Ganz Cooney's trust of her artists and the resulting hands-off approach to leadership.[51] For example, a distinctive feature of *Sesame Street* is is its urban set:

Jon Stone, who wrote, produced, directed, and acted on the program knew from the start that he wanted a set which moved as far away from the conventions of children's television as possible. Inspiration struck in the winter of 1968 when a PSA by the New York Urban Coalition aired on television. The PSA, which opened with the printed message "send your kid to a ghetto this summer" was a biting satire in the style of a travelogue which pointed out the lack of amenities for urban children. Seeing this, Stone realized that the show must have an inner-city set. For urban children, the sets of traditional television—enchanted castles, circuses, toymakers workshops—were utterly foreign spaces. But "for a preschool child in Harlem," he later commented, "the street is where the action is. As often as not she is housebound all day while her mother works, and, from the vantage point of her apartment, the sidewalk outside must look like Utopia. Outside there are kids hollering, jumping double Dutch, running through the open hydrants, playing stickball. Our set had to

50. Davis, *Street Gang*, 146.
51. Ibid., 155.

be an inner-city street, and more particularly it had to be a brownstone so that the cast and kids could 'stoop' in the age-old New York tradition, sitting on the front steps and watching the world go by." The set was modeled after the actual streets and buildings of Harlem by set designer Charles Rosen. In particular, Stone wanted a movie style set, in all its detail, not the cardboard and canvas used on children's television at the time.[52]

Cooney, known for her hands-off approach to leadership is remembered by Stone as responding to this idea by saying "something to the effect that we were the people she chose to create this program, and if this is how I saw it, so be it."[53]

This idea of an urban set, and the racial politics which that entailed, came after the funding was secured. In effect, what the funding agencies of the Children's Television Workshop were signing off on was Cooney's proposal to use television entertainment as an educational medium for preschoolers. Given the state of the children's media landscape at the time[54] this was no conservative proposal, but perhaps its radicality was seen more as technological than social—at this point the ideas as they were presented did not include the racial politics which we will see in the Hoots and Ma skit in section X, but were more involved with questions of the ability of the technology—so far used only for mindless entertainment—to educate. This education was intended especially for inner-city children as part of the humanitarian goals which undergird the project, however, throughout its conception and production, the Children's Television Workshop tried to make a program that would appeal equally to children of all classes. In short, the program which received funding in 1967 was perhaps not what aired in 1969.

Of course, to receive continued funding, they must have satisfied their patrons

52. Davis, *Street Gang*, 154.
53. Ibid., 155.
54. Ibid., chapters 1, 3, and 4.

and not offended their sensibilities. This may have been made possible by the fact that the Children's Television Workshop was running all of their lessons and skits through scientific trials with children and they aired what worked. Follow-up research was regularly conducted to make sure that kids were learning "in vivo"[55] and perhaps this was enough.

This answer is a bit hand wavy, and *Sesame Street* did eventually lose government funding: In 1972 the Children's Television Workshop launched a plan to phase out federal funding by 1981, as the Nixon administration was opposed to the entire principle of public television and wanted to end the production of new episodes of *Sesame Street* and its sister program *The Electric Company*.[56]

There is another way, however, of looking at the problem of funding and leftist politics. So far the question has been "if *Sesame Street* was so radical, how did it get funded by such high-profile institutions?" But where did the assumption arise that these are incompatible? It comes down to pragmatics: In order to keep up with the non-educational television competition which was only the turn of a dial away, televised preschool education would have to be just as entertaining.[57] This is just showbiz. What do you get when you turn Broadway writers into distance-learning educators? You get anarchist education, not because of socio-political ideologies, but simply because it is a solution to the problems of the format. Watching with parents is encouraged, but ultimately it must be entertaining enough that no proctor is required to keep the child focused on the program, and in preschool distance education there is no possibility for coercion: Other techniques of attention must be found. For a number of reasons, almost all of the experts interviewed by Cooney wanted to see the teaching of cognitive habits, as defined by Jerome Kagan as analysis, gen-

55. Davis, *Street Gang*, 118.
56. Ibid., 218.
57. Cooney, "The Potential Uses of Television in Childrens Education," 38.

erating hypotheses, and reflection, rather than trying to teach them skills such as how to read. She writes "in the opinion of most, a television program would be very useful which would teach young children how to think, not what to think."[58] This is non-striation par excellence: the student is not guided down a predetermined path, but instead encouraged to cultivate certain attributes which will help them see their own path through whatever situations they may experience.

Going forward, when my analysis refers to aspects of *Sesame Street* as "ecological," "deschooled," or "anarchist," these are not to imply that executive producer Joan Ganz Cooney was an anarchist media theorist who constructed a program based on her philosophies of education, but rather that the answers to the particular design problems which the writing team faced led them to a particular philosophy of design which, by way of a sort of convergent evolution, lies so close the above philosophies that Ivan Illich provides a functional language for the analysis of *Sesame Street*.

Taking as my definition of anarchism, "the principled opposition to coercion," what we have here is instead "the pragmatic disutility of coercion." Is this anarchism? In many ways no, but the results are so similar that it is hard to tell the difference, or if that difference is really meaningful.

My analysis via these philosophies does the work of highlighting this convergence with radical politics which might otherwise go unnoticed. "Anarchy" is a word which frightens both those on the left, seemingly resonant of Libertarianism, and those on the right, for whom it stinks of Marxism. My goal is multifold: on the one side I would like to analyze these aspects of *Sesame Street*'s musical education which have gone overlooked. This is germane to scholars of *Sesame Street*, television, and children's media. On the other side, this is relevant musical pedagogy

58. Cooney, "The Potential Uses of Television in Childrens Education," 23.

more broadly. In a sense, I am attempting to radicalize *Sesame Street* and thereby normalize anarchism and deschooling and in so doing suggest new forms of education for all ages. I am writing this at a time when arts education in public schools and humanities education in higher ed are being challenged by both the weight of late-stage capitalism and the destructive influence of a global pandemic. What can be found in the *Sesame Street* archive which reveals its emergent philosophies of education, and what do these design practices reflect about musical education more broadly? In other words, how can *Sesame Street* give us insight into more resilient forms of musical eduction?

This is not, mind you, a paper on how deschooling can save education and how *Sesame Street* gives us a convenient case study to this end. Illich describes education as the fundamental state of human kind, it needs saving no more than does the abstract concept of love. I would also like to distance myself from the number of popular narratives which place the university in a moment of crisis. For one, crisis denotes a singular moment wherein a watershed decision must be made. Working within the Illichian framework, the moment of crisis came and went in the early modern period and maybe earlier.

Rather, this section has been a critical look into the emergent design philosophies of musical distance-education as they appear in the *Sesame Street* archive. While my research is localized to one particular television program, this study has ramifications for the present moment of education. That said, my goal is not to suggest that instructors remove their attendance requirements and stop assigning letter grades, but rather, in an Odellian sense, to teach the bird-song of non-coercion so that it may be appreciated where it perches.

Prologue: Geophones, televisons, worms

I spent something like a quarter of my life on the south side of Chicago. There was a summer during that period where I got into the habit of biking down to the 63rd street beach to comb the sandy shore for pebbles. There were two kinds that interested me: shiny black pieces of anthracite coal, and pale grey honeycombs of steel slag. Some thirty miles down the coast, at what now is the Indiana Dunes National Park, the beach is littered with pebbles of all kinds, glittering happily beneath the surf or ice of the ancient lake. Here, however, in the scorched earth left behind by the bonfire that built and destroyed America, the pebbles were largely fossils of that recent past.

That summer I went on a sound walk organized by the Midwest Society of Acoustic Ecology at the former site of the US Steel foundry. A section of the massive industrial campus had been re-wilded and returned to its pre-steel state of freshwater marsh. Some birds chirped, we saw an egret, but it had turned out to be one of those hot summer days where the air is still, heavy, and all the more stifling for its enveloping silence.

At some point the walk took us to a part of the wooded hammock where the artists had driven microphones—geophones—into the earth. When my turn came around I put on the headphones and listened.

I was immediately made aware of my on weight on the ground beneath me. Any small motion and I would hear myself in the microphone like an earthquake. Any large motion and the bugs, which I now realized were all around me, would stop and I would have to wait for some time before they started to move again.

I had never heard anything like it. It was a sound impossible to describe in terms of our air-based hearing. And I was part of it. The subterranean bugs heard and

responded to me just as I to them. Through the assistive technology of contact microphones and digital amplifiers, I was given access to the worm's-ear view of the ever-present world beneath my feet. The sounds were foreign, but in no way unpleasant. Is this the sound of an ant, a worm? I don't know, but I like it. For me as an air-based listener, this was the sonic experience of a complete outsider.

The *Young People's Concerts*: classical music and mass media

The Bernstein *Young Peoples Concerts* are perhaps the best known example of public classical music pedagogy. Leonard Bernstein's tenure on the program spanned 14 years from 1958 to 1972. The program, televised by CBS, was intended to expose adolescents to classical music by meeting them where they were in terms of musical understanding. This included explaining concepts in classical music through references to popular culture.

This program marks a different way of doing classical music pedagogy. Bernstein was critical of the traditional modes of music appreciation, which he described as falling either into the categories of anecdotes and nothing about music, or analysis. He saw the first as coy and the second as dull. Instead, across his pedagogy, he chose to focus on the mystery of meaning in music. He breaks musical meaning into four categories: narrative-literary meanings, atmospheric-pictorial meanings, affective-reactive meanings (like triumph or melancholy), and purely musical meanings.[59] His pedagogical intention was "to create and recreate a communally engaged audience"[60] and his goal is reflected in this turn toward this framework which is engaged

59. Alicia Kopfstein-Penk, *Leonard Bernstein and His Young People's Concerts* (Lanham: Rowman / Littlefield, 2015), 14.
60. Ibid., 51.

and analytical, yet qualitative and accessible.

In a letter to Humphrey Burton, Leonard Bernstein wrote that

> ”The great benefit [of television], for me, is the educational value, not only in the pedagogical sense but in the best sense of acquainting people with new stuff they can come to love (which is what I mean by education, rather than having to memorize the conjugation of an irregular verb.) Bringing music close to people... has always been my lifelong desire and goal even in writing my music. And I think there is nothing that comes near to television for this purpose. This is the best communicative means, and, after all, communication is what television is about.”[61]

Bernstien makes a distinction here between “pedagogy” and ”education,” suggesting that education is something more humanistic and having to do with pleasure and appreciation, rather than learning for simply pragmatic reasons. Bernsteinian education, which television enables, is about exposing people to new things that they can come to love. Education and classical music are not, importantly, about that oft cited ideal, *uplift.*

In her book *Class, Control, and Classical Music* Anna Bull analyzes the sociocultural meanings of classical music in British society. She argues that the practices of classical music contribute to the formation of a middle-class selfhood as middle class people use the cultural capital of the music and its institutions to maintain class boundaries through the accrument of ”cultural capital”—a word which refers to any form of value that can be acquired through classical music practices.[62][63]

Bull analyzes how the ethos of long-term dedicated practice which is seen in classical music means that those who are unwilling or unable to invest the time

61. Kopfstein-Penk, *Leonard Bernstein and His Young People's Concerts*, 71.
62. Anna Bull, *Class, Control, and Classical Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 4.
63. Ibid., 3.

and resources required are unable to participate. This, combined with the ideal of "autonomous" art which positions classical music outside of social, political, and economic concerns, creates a well disguised boundary which preserves middle class spaces.[64] To this point, it is put rather frankly by Claire Hall that ability in classical music can be understood from a Bourdieusian perspective as simply the investment by the musician's parent's and teachers in middle-class ideals.[65]

The idea of classical music providing economic and spiritual uplift from poverty is perhaps most recently and famously demonstrated in Venezuela's El Sistema and the propagation of numerous El Sistema inspired organizations. In essence, these organizations stipulate that if you get impoverished children to act like middle-class children they will be better off and find both economic and moral uplift.

Bernstein's pedagogy does not interact with class in the same ways. The ethos of the *Young People's Concerts* is, as seen in the letter above, one of "education" not "pedagogy." The goal is not to provide uplift for underprivileged youth, but instead to acquaint them with new music.

However, it is not completely without its class boundaries. Though Bernstein is quoted by his student Alicia Kopfstein-Penk as making no distinction between highbrow and lowbrow, saying that "there is only 'brow,' "[66] he did engage in pedagogy which appreciated the lowbrow through the highbrow: Bernstein worked to convince people to appreciate the "lowbrow" music of jazz, folk, and pop by relating them to "highbrow" classical music.[67] As much as this does to "elevate" these other musics, which have been overlooked by white and monied society, using western classical music as a metric re-inscribes its superiority and ideals of universality. David Hesmondhalgh argues that we should look at the ways that music reinforces

64. Bull, *Class, Control, and Classical Music*, 6.
65. Ibid., 7.
66. Kopfstein-Penk, *Leonard Bernstein and His Young People's Concerts*, xvi.
67. Ibid., 63.

structures of power, rather then reinforcing old narratives about the power of music.[68] In this case, although Bernstein is expanding the discourse of the power of music to these lesser-appreciated art forms, he is inadvertently using music to reinforce the power of the classical music institutional ecology—that is, the framework of organizations that make up the classical music world.[69]

I read this in large part as a symptom of how inescapable class is in classical music. No matter the engagement, even if it is accessible pedagogy and education via electronic mass media, the power of the classical music establishment and its institutional ecologies are re-inscribed. As we will see in section II, even parodies of classical music uphold its status as much as they deride it. By setting up the elite musical culture as an object worthy of deflation, its status and spectacle are preserved in their high place.[70] In a sense, the middle-class parents studied by Bull have the world that they want: there will always be an inside and an outside to classical music. There will always be the worm and the worm listener: those who listen from the inside and those who listen from the outside. This difference, however, does not have to look like class-warfare. Though the *Young People's Concerts* engage in classical metrics, the education is kind, welcoming, and based in exposure and entertainment, not uplift. After all, most viewers of the televised concerts were adults—only 6% were the target audience of the "typical 13-year old."[71] This demonstrates a co-permeability of worm-listening across the earth-air barrier. It is media enjoyable and educational across the spectrum of classical music familiarity. The *geophone* that is television allows for aerial ears to listen to the underground, and the worms hears the aerial listeners listening,

68. Kopfstein-Penk, *Leonard Bernstein and His Young People's Concerts*, xiii.
69. Bull, *Class, Control, and Classical Music*, 27.
70. Charles Hiroshi, "Shooting the Keys: Musical Horseplay and High Culture," in *The Oxford Handbook of the New Cultural History of Music*, ed. Jane F. Fulture (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 252.
71. Kopfstein-Penk, *Leonard Bernstein and His Young People's Concerts*, 2.

Mass media

So far, I have looked at *Sesame Street* as a piece of children's educational media. At this point, I would like to take a step back and look at the program as a piece of art—as a piece of popular art. Frankfurt school Marxists and cultural theorists Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer famously problematized popular art and mass media under late stage capitalism in a chapter of their book *Dialectic of Enlightenment* titled "The culture industry: Enlightenment as mass deception."[72] Late capitalism" or "late stage capitalism" refers to an economy in the trajectory of capitalism where the concentration of capital has already taken place and the problem becomes finding new consumers such that supply does not exceed demand. In this stage of capitalism, advertising takes on new importance, as the economy depends on manufacturing new consumers as well as new goods.[73] Where the worker was alienated from their labor in earlier stages of capitalism, they are now additionally alienated from their needs, drives, and imagination.[74] During this period, Adorno argues, popular art masks this alienation by providing diversion and pleasure which provide psychological shelter from the truth of alienation and so pacifies the masses.[75]

According to Adorno, emancipatory art, unlike papular art and media, would bring about the painful experience of being aware of one's own alienation. Emancipatory art reawakens the feelings of dissatisfaction and unease, the results of late capitalism, which have been occluded by the entertainment industry, popular art, and advertising. Emancipatory art makes possible the recovery of this "experience

72. Max Horkhiemer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2002).

73. Bruce Baugh, "Left-Wing Eletism: Adorno on Popular Culture," *Philosophy and Literature* 14, no. 1 (1990): 66.

74. Ibid.

75. Ibid., 67.

of the negative." This accomplishment, however requires that the artwork be difficult to understand according to normal modes of thought. This difficulty reveals to the listener the inadequacy of normal modes of thinking, which opens the mind to new ways of thinking as it reveals the old ways to be lacking. However, because this opening of the mind is revelatory of formerly illusory perception, it leads to anxiety rather than elation. Ultimately, this realization can lead one to try to change their relation to the world by changing the world itself.[76] This negation of consciousness wrought by emancipatory art can be achieved, he argues, not through the direct negation of standard artistic practices, which may come across as banally contrarian, but rather through sheer inscrutability and the creation of an uncanny sensation where the meaning and reason for the creation of the work are not immediately attainable.[77]

Bruce Baugh, problematizes this line of reasoning, pointing out, rather simply, that the arcane nature of Adorno's "difficult" art necessarily requires a certain amount of training to understand and create. This training requires time outside of productive labor, thus implying a class distinction in which some are required to work while others are able to live off the labour of workers and follow intellectual pursuits instead. Adorno's emancipatory art is damned from the start because it requires a bourgeois class.[78] It is in a sense, trickle down emancipation. Baugh argues instead that emancipatory art can arise from, and is in fact best created by, mass culture itself. He argues that this was seen with the art and music of the 1960s.[79]

Both authors put stock in the power of "emancipatory" art to expand the consciousness. I find emancipatory art in this context to be a misguided concept deeply rooted in classism and ideas of classical music as uplift. While Baugh may argue

76. Baugh, "Left-Wing Eletism: Adorno on Popular Culture," 67–69.
77. Ibid., 71.
78. Ibid., 74.
79. Ibid., 77.

against the classist aspects of Adorno's characterizations of emancipatory art, he only reinforces ideas of music as uplift and as having the ability to expand class consciousness. For these reasons, I do not find the idea of art as either emancipatory or pacifying a useful category for analysis, though this is not at all to say that children are not alienated.

Children in the United States are not generally part of the labor force and so are not engaged in productive labor. This would seem to disqualify them from capitalist alienation. However, children are in a constant state of labor at school, where they receive an education designed to prepare them for their entry into the labor force. With no control or ownership of their education, these students are at an ultimate level of alienation, especially given, as Paulo Freire says, it is only through inquiry that we make ourselves human: Knowledge emerges only through invention and reinvention through inquiry. Apart from inquiry individuals cannot be human—it is through engagement with the world that our humanity manifests.[80] Children are also susceptible to the same kinds of advertising and manufacturing of the consumer which define late stage capitalism. A child may very well be just as alienated as their parents.

While I think that emancipatory art is a misguided ideal, I find value in the idea that art can cultivate in the viewer new ways of observing and sensing the world and that this is seen in, and was the ultimate goal of, Bernstein's public pedagogy as well as the musical education on *Sesame Street*. It doesn't have to be difficult, but it helps to be unfamiliar.

80. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th Anniversary Edition, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York and London: Continuum, 2005), 72.

Part II

The Worm-Listener:
Parody, Virtuosity, and Childhood

Listening *with* the Music: Ecological Humor

Victor Borge was a Danish pianist of Jewish heritage. He was known for parodying the names of composers and unexpectedly inserting moving performances of the classics into what were otherwise comedy routines.[81]

Borge stressed that he never makes fun of the music, but rather makes "fun with the music" and thought that this attitude had brought new listeners to classical music, who would go back to the concert hall for more music without the comedy.[82]

Making fun *with* the music resonates with Lockwood's "listening with." What Lockwood means by this is that in any environment you are not listening to, say, the birds, but rather listening along with them, because they are listening to, and listening to you. This mode of listening dissolves some of the direct subject-object relationships of "listening to," favoring a more reciprocal relationship of co-awareness. When Borge is making fun *with*, rather than *of* the music, he is, like Lockwood, dismantling subject-object relationships—in this case they would be the performer and the audience as subjects ridiculing the musical object —and instead creating an environment of co-creation where the objectivity of the musical and comedic act are not, in a sense, *focused* on the work of art as funny object, but on the relationship as the source of humor. That is, Borge is not making of Mozart himself when he parodies his name, nor is he really deriding the classical music establishment, for as Garrett argues, classical music parodies uphold the status quo:

Parodies of classical music such as those in the Marx Brothers's *A Night at the Opera* or the animated short film *What's Opera, Doc?* uphold the status of classical music as much as they deride it. By setting up the elite musical culture as an object

81. Hiroshi, "Shooting the Keys: Musical Horseplay and High Culture," 255.
82. Ibid., 256.

worthy of deflation, its status and spectacle are preserved in their high place.[83] The representations of classical music in *A Night at the Opera* simultaneously "punches up" to classical music, mocking its elitism, while it bridged the divide between high and low culture. While this was entertaining to those outside of the classical world, it offered nuanced entertainment to those with a knowledge and admiration of opera.[84]

Borge said that it was generally the case that those who laughed the most at his performances were those who were more musically educated. In order to be successful, all parody and satire require that the audience has a certain level of cultural knowledge.[85] However, he stressed, he was always working two audiences at the same time—those knowledgable of classical music and those who are not. He said "my jokes must be understood by everybody. Nobody must be bored."[86]

Borges is engaged in a refocussing of the subject-object relationship to one which is more reciprocal and circular. The entire audience, who he was adamant about not leaving behind comedically, are in a sense gathered around the piano, having fun with Mozart, but not at his expense. What Borge described as "making fun with the music" is a restructuring of subject object relationships akin that that of Lockwood's "listening with." He is not looking at the music, pointing at it, and laughing at its expense, rather he is engaging with it, listening to it, and constructing something new in collaboration with it. In general parody tends to highlight certain qualities and virtues of the music, even if it makes fun of others.

A similar style of "making fun with the music" as undertaken by Borge can be seen on *Sesame Street*. Some of the exact same devices are used, such as the parodying of the names of classical composers, but more significantly, there is a shared

83. Hiroshi, "Shooting the Keys: Musical Horseplay and High Culture," 252.
84. Ibid., 251.
85. Ibid., 249.
86. Ibid., 256.

sense of using parody to uphold the status of the music) and the ways that this shifts subject-object relationships and allows for listening /textitwith the music.

"*Pretty Great* Performances:" classical music parody on *Sesame Street*

Recall the particular design constraints of music on children's television faced by the writers of *Sesame Street*: They wanted to expose children to new "serious" music without boring them, but also without boring their parents, who they hoped would be watching along with them. In the words of Victor Borge "nobody must be bored." One solution to this problem of two audiences is parody, for example the aforementioned performance by Norah Jones, where she parodies her own work. A related technique was used during virtuoso flautist James Galway's appearance on the show in 1989. Not lyrical parody, but rather a parodic pastiche, Galway performs with the "All Animal Chamber Music Ensemble" at "Barn-egie" hall. As part of the "Pretty Great Performances" concert series—a parody of the New York Philharmonic's "Great Performances" series—host "Phil Harmonic" introduces Galway and the "works of the great composer, Johan Sebastian Fox." In this performance, Galway delivers an impressive flute performance to the accompaniment of a chamber ensemble of animal puppets, all quacking and barking along in strict counterpoint.[87]

While the Jones and Galway performances are obviously very different, they both take the form of a juxtaposition of serious music and performances with contexts or lyrical contents which are inappropriate for the genera.[88] or, alternatively,

87. "Sesame Street: "Pretty Great Performances" - James Galway #2," accessed May 10, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kx3WmDzM-uc.

88. See also, Ostrofsky, "*Sesame Street* as a Musical Comedy-Variety Show," 18.

silly music in serious contexts such as the concert hall. This virtuosic whimsy works because it showcases skilled performances and exposes children to music which is perceived as having quality, while being varied enough to hold their attention, all the while being amusing to any parents who are present.

In general, this virtuosic whimsy is far more pronounced in performances of classical music than popular music. In another appearance on "Pretty Great Performances," a tuxedoed Galway performs a duet for flute and pool toy.[89] Compare this to Norah Jones's performance where she parodies her lyrics, but her piano and voice are backed by her normal jazz combo. While much of the music on *Sesame Street* expresses virtuosic whimsy, classical music in particular is expressed as *play*. In the Galway performance, his duet partner, Sesame Street inhabitant Maria Figueroa,[90] plays a literal toy. Part of this skit, ostensibly, is simply to demonstrate to children that air is needed to play the flute just as it is needed to fill a swim tube. However, it seems significant that the pool toy is played by Maria the Puerto Rican repair-shop worker and not any of the many musicians who live on Sesame Street. The writers of this skit are leveling classical music as something attainable and fun—-attainable to a working-class woman of color—rather than serious, somber, and esoteric. Like Galway, Maria is clothed in concert dress and taking part in the pomp and circumstance, however, what they are doing is not ritual, but play. Virtuosic whimsy allows for classical music to retain its cultural status, but shed its exclusivity.

89. "Sesame Street: "Pretty Great Performances" - James Galway #1," accessed May 10, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aAw-0HXrTno.
90. "Maria," accessed May 10, 2021, https://muppet.fandom.com/wiki/Maria.

Authenticity

An appearance by Yo-yo Ma on the program reveals the unusual status which "authenticity" has on *Sesame Street*. In a similar skit to that of Galway at "Barn-egie Hall," Ma plays the "Beethoven quartet for two honkers, dinger, and cello," Written not by "Ludwig Van Beethoven, the famous composer," but "Murray Beethoven, the famous honker."[91] In this performance, Ma demonstrates impressive technical ability, playing double stops and fast melodies high on the fingerboard. Accompanying this display of skill are three puppets, two "honkers" who each have a pair of cranial protrusions shaped like bicycle horns which honk when they press on their nose, and one "dinger" with a bell on its head. What they are playing sounds very common practice era, and is an effective pastiche.

What we see in both the Ma and Galway performances is a certain whimsical virtuosity, where players may be highly skilled, but are not somber and serious. This particular blend of virtuosity and situational humor brings into the mix questions of authenticity: In playing the music of "Murray Beethoven, the famous honker," Ma is represented as a serious and skillful interpreter of music, but not as a voice from the past. The classical canon seems less canonic on *Sesame Street*.

In her article "Staging Authenticity" Karen Leistra-Jones conceives of 19th century authenticity as a performative category, not a stable category which some musicians had and some lacked.[92] In other words, authenticity is something which artists performed, just as they performed interiority. Adding to this appraisal, authenticity seems to me something which is created in the audience and not in the performer. Artists may cultivate authenticity—Leistra-Jones says that musicians performed au-

91. "Classic Sesame Street - Yo Yo Ma and the Honkers," accessed May 10, 2021, `https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=89sFEuEuTYM`.

92. Karen Leistra-Jones, "Staging Authenticity: Joachim, Brams and the Politics of *Werktreue* Performance," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 66, no. 2 (2013): 400.

thenticity and cultivated it in their personas—however, I want to stress that authenticity does not exist in isolation. Authenticity is something ascribed to the musician by the audience. The performer can suggest authenticity, but ultimately their status as "authentic" falls on the listener. I see "authenticity" as a socio-cultural artifact—something like a superstition—and if authenticity does not exist, how can a performer "be authentic?" All that a performer can do is take up the cultural signifiers of authenticity and present them back to the audience.

When this audience is composed of young children, however, the listenership has little conception of what constitutes classical authenticity. On *Sesame Street*, the idea of authenticity to the classical canon is destabilized. In performing a piece by "Murray Beethoven, the famous honker," Ma's image as an interpreter of a venerable canon is redirected. Whoever composed this piece is more or less meaningless to the skit's young audience. Most children at this age would not interested in or privy to the classical canon which Beethoven represents, so the voice from the past—the authenticity of which is created in the locus of the audience—simply does not exist. Nor does *Sesame Street* try to teach this canon. The emphasis here is on classical music as something fun and approachable, not steeped in tradition and arcane cultural memory. Authenticity and composers' intentions are not emphasized on *Sesame Street* because these are things which are as much the work of the audience as they are the cultivation of the performer. Virtuosic characteristics are attainable on *Sesame Street*, but historical and compositional authenticity are essentially impossible given the audience's youthful lack of education on the topic.

Virtuosity

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