

To: Gene Mason
Michael Simpson
Richard Wiles

From: Ben Boretz

A Preliminary Broadside

A new idea at Bard College is the reconsideration of what the appropriate content and desiderata are for that avenue to a way of life quested for under the rubric "Liberal Arts Education". Neither the militant generalisms nor the intellectually laundered vocationalisms of the past seem to have conjured the elusive ghost of that enlightened existence in a real world, really enriched by the light of that existence, visioned by those intellectuals who become educators as the most profound act of political-social aspiration available to them. We in the music department of Bard College have in some measure anticipated this renewed quest, since those of us who have made a full-time (i.e., way-of-life) commitment to our work here have done so in just the abovedescribed holistic spirit. Our approach, within a curricular "permanent revolution" determinately responsive as we can make it to the specific communal and individual situations that arise before us, is to deeply attach the practice of music in the most overt sense of performance, composition, and audition, to the full depth of musical thought it embodies, and hence through it to the full range of intellectual life in which it participates. Thus our own deepest sense of musical theory, analysis, and culture emerges in ~~the~~ context as actual realization of musical entities: the preparation of performances, the composition of passages of music, active listening that discovers how much must be put out in order that much may be taken in.

So we understand generalism as: the maximally general in the service

of the optimally particular, the empirically sensitive abstraction in the service of the experienceable creative concretion.

But this is how we speak to each other, not to our students, for we understand education as in^{part} the art of bearing a goal in mind as the desideratum of a person-sensitive strategy, rather than the art of asserting that goal with disarmingly exquisite rhetoric. Designing the just task, the just confrontation, the just situation for the student learning to be an active brainworker, rather than elocuting the just phrase for the student exercising his capacity for rapt admiration, seems to us the focal point of the work at hand; we want to be interesting coworkers rather than fascinating gurus. So we have, within our own curriculum, developed an activity/project, rather than a subject-matter, slicing of the landscape within which we meet students; also, we lean toward constituting ourselves a faculty pool, each of us threading the global territory in individual ways, rather than toward assigning ourselves more narrowly demarcated local territories to patrol.

The drawbacks of our approach are immediately obvious: open-ended demand of faculty time is made possible by the way-of-life as distinct from the professional-service attitude to teaching, and by the necessity our open-plan curriculum entails to exercise a high degree of individual vigilance to see that essentials and persons are not being shortwighted. But immediately evident advantages, apart from the smug ideological comity of our attitudes, and apart from longrange hoped-for "results" (dangerous in any event if hoped for too narrowly), are most obvious in the music faculty's sense that its time is being well and happily used -- in contrast to the sense it had under the rather isolated course/area/subject-

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matter structure formerly in effect -- and in the reciprocal morale of the music students -- ⁱⁿ similar contrast to former days at Bard, and to the relative morale of music students elsewhere.

This preliminary is the background of what follows. What follows, follows from this specific exploration we have undertaken, as it follows our sense of belonging, and wanting to belong still more, to a total intellectual environment throughout our whole community -- Bard -- whose people we have undertaken to know, and want to undertake to know better, and in whose ultimate capacity for a lucid creative realism that can supply the confused ivory tower frequently referred to as "the real world" with most of what, to survive, it really needs, we really believe. So although our proposals, like our work, are designed to be specific and determinate, they merely represent what, in part, we just now are able to imagine that will most substantially help us improve and extend what we do. Granted, they will merely inspire us to the invention of countless more: caveat grantor.