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# The first musical space: Articulating the music of the moment

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**ABSTRACT**

The thinking and conceptualisation of music education is undergoing considerable change. More recently, the formalist and canonical notions of "aesthetic education" have been critiqued and challenged in music education literature. The articulation of the music education process is a burgeoning field, and this article seeks to further this endeavour by drawing on the ideas of Deleuze and Lyotard to expand the notion and importance of the musical moment in music practice and education. The temporal spoken statement provides a helpful analogy for music in action and the notion of "little narratives" help draw out the interactive richness in contemporary live music making. Music educators are encouraged to explore the richness of the "first musical space" in their work and thus begin to bring students to a more critical understanding of music in action within cultural contexts.

## Introduction

During the last decade there have been a number of challenges to the styles of thinking and methodologies, which have dominated music education. Research in the music education field, following the human sciences, has been criticised for its tendency to embrace scientism and reflect a general underlying positivistic and structural approach (Regelski, -1998). The dominant " formal aesthetic" paradigm as reflected by Reimer (1989) has undergone fierce criticism by Elliott (1995) who challenges the relevance and fundamental value of aesthetic education as a legitimate force in the field. In addition to these critiques, pluralistic philosophies of music education have emerged with specific attention to cultural difference, drawing from the insights of ethnomusicology, multicultural theories in education and critical theory (Tillman- Boyce, 1995; Bowman, 1998; Mansfield, 2001).

Although these challenges have helped generate lively and worthwhile debate in the field, the music education conceptual landscape is still new and in many cases considered unproblematic. Further, moving away from a "canon" of established and entrenched practices can be a difficult and resistant process, regardless of the theoretical challenges thrown into the pool of ideas for best practice and understanding. The theoretical insights of contemporary French philosophers now referred to as "poststructuralism" provide a rich theoretical and philosophical landscape for coping with these difficulties and changes in music education. This essay explores two insights helpful for music education and worthy of exploration: the Deleuzian (1988) notions of temporal spaces of power, knowledge and the constitution of the subject, and Lyotard's (1984) ideas on the hegemony of "metanarratives" in discursive structures. These insights help articulate the "space" of the musical moment, an important but often ignored aspect of music making in context.

## Deleuze and the temporal statement

Within Gilles Deleuze's analysis (1988) of Foucault's (1972) *The Archaeology of Knowledge,* is a description of the spoken "statement", outlining its characteristics in comparison with established conceptions of the philosophical "proposition" (Deleuze, 1988: 2-4). Deleuze concentrates on this important aspect of Foucault's earlier work to articulate his (and his reading of Foucault's) conception of discourse and knowledge. Briefly, this new conception seeks to ignore and critique what is transcendent, hierarchical, and truth-claiming in linguistic discourse, and instead point to a more affirmative conception of the more temporal, moving and changing "statement". Deleuze's reading of Foucault brings out the value, character and positivity of the statement, in particular, its surface and extrinsically derived features, not directly linked to a speaking subject, operating in a derivative realm, and constantly changing in relation to a decentred subject.

Deleuze's understanding of Foucault's "statement" should be considered in the context of a larger critique of values and forces in the multiplicity of poststructuralist theory. The affirmation of the "decentred" subject (i.e. not at the centre of any notion of transcendent humanistic thought), the recognition of the changing play of discursive forces, and the critique of universalism, contrast with the "negative" orientation of the Hegelian dialectic and the Enlightenment notion of a transcendental subject - the bearer of knowledge, truth and progress (Peters, 1999). These critiques provide rich cross-disciplinary platforms to explore values and forces impacting on areas suck as music. They help us see the musical subject as a sight of contestation which exemplifies the traditional dominance of objectified, distanced "score dominated" notions of music. We can take Deleuze's analysis about what is "actual" and temporal in speech and use that to help us understand music which, like speech, brings sounds into temporal space. A particular conception of music is connected to the idea of the statement, what I would call *the first musical space* (the point of contact between music makers and listeners).

## The first musical space

This more immediate conception of music recognises what is active and generating in the musical process. The *first musical space* is what is temporal, improvisational, of the moment, intentional and affirmative in music. Welsch (1997) urges us to explore the boundaries and connections of our established disciplines, for these analyses help to clarify and define the working plane of action and knowledge. The characteristics of *the first musical space* exemplify the "edge" of the musical experience, the element of communication, moment of force, internalisation and derivative of sound, dis course, will and intent. The *first musical space* is often more overt in instances of live improvisation, rock music, free jazz, street festivals, and active interpretative performances, as such events emphasise and value the moment of change and intention in music.

The idea of the "active" musician who is aware of his or her immediate context and praxis, has been affirmed in recent debates on the philosophy of music education. Elliott (1995) advocates an active approach to music making, one that is conceived as performing, improvising, composing, active listening, arranging and musical directing. His ideal active philosophical and practical world of music making emphasises "procedural knowledge" (knowing how) and a "praxial" or reflexive curriculum (1995: 14). Other music education thinkers such as Bowman (2000) and Stubley (1998) emphasise the corporeal, bodily and ethical aspects of the immanent music experience. Even though still in the early stages, this thinking is commensurate with more affirmative forces at work in music education.[1] These forces are in various degrees, pitted against the traditional "aesthetic" view of music education as derived from philosophical aesthetics and the separation of rational thought and art (see Welsch, 1997).

The dominant conditions which have shaped the form of Western European music and subsequently "colonised" musical cultures around the world, contrast with, or exhibit a different typology to what I have called the *first musical space.* That is not to say that the characteristics of the *first musical space* have not been present, but other forces have dominated the musical culture. In a similar way, the philosophical proposition and dialectical phrase have a different typology to the "statement". Formalist aesthetics, and its accompanying institutional structures, which I shall call the *second musical space,* has dominated the sphere of music and music education since the Enlightenment, when the classical movement exemplified by composers such as Beethoven and Mozart began to treat instrumental music as an aesthetic object, and work within a relatively fixed schema of tonality, nuance and formal structure (Alperson, 1991; Elliott, 1995). The musical subject, along with the musical work, became a transcendent entity, a holder of musical knowledge, originality, musical essence, intelligent form and creativity. This became increasingly more obvious in the 19th century when certain composers (such as Liszt) became popular cultural icons, and the music concert stage became an important mass cultural event.

## Musical metanarratives and the second musical space

The aesthetic tradition has dominated modem Western music education for some decades now and is reflected in the recent theories of Reimer (1989) and Swanwick (1988). The *second musical space* has created an emphasis on the formal objective properties and quantitative and qualitative analyses of written music, and thus established an ideologically dominant musical canon of great composers and significant works (Nettl, 1995). The hegemony of formalist aesthetic theory in music study has only recently been challenged in diverse areas such as musicology (Subotnik, 1996; Kramer, 1995), ethnomusicology (Nettl, 1995), music education (Elliott, 1995; Bowman, 2000) and cultural philosophy (Welsch, 1997). The negative effect of forces from this hegemonic tradition have been highlighted in recent critiques on the cultural conditions of musical education. Following from Lyotard (1984), and the "incredulity toward metanarratives" of the postmodern condition - that is, a suspicion of grand themes dominating cultural knowledge and practice - we can see that many of the "reactive"[2] forces of the *second musical space* have combined to form contemporary metanarratives in musical culture. These include the belief in the qualitative dominance and favour of certain musics to the detriment of the musical "other" (Netti, 1995; Mansfield, 1997), the superiority of music conceived as visual scores (Small, 1978), the gate-keeping of music teacher background by tertiary institutions (Roberts, 1999) and the dominance of elite performances of a few highly trained and talented musicians (Mansfield, 1997).

A closer examination of contemporary pop, rock and jazz music reveals (as in a great deal of music) combinations of both the *first and second musical spaces.* These contemporary genres, for instance, are readily modelled on simplified versions of harmonic and melodic structures in classical music, thus taking on aspects of the *second musical space.* There are significant differences however between the *balance* of musical spaces in classical music and more modem contemporary forms. Much pop, rock, and jazz music has a stronger emphasis on the "moment" (perhaps with the exception of highly commodified forms of recorded pop and tightly scored jazz), and it is common to find a heightened awareness of audience response, body reaction, improvised gestures and rhythmic pulse in performances. Perhaps one of the most obvious differences in manifestations of the *first musical space* between contemporary and classical music, is the level of reflexivity observed in the changing contexts of the contemporary. This enhanced reflexivity is indicative of a music that is more actively involved in the forces of cultural value and transformation.[3]

## Some "little" musical narratives

In my view, the affirmative forces which help constitute the form of the *first musical space* need to be made explicit in music education. For it is in their silence that reactive forces have been able to

prevail, thus eliminating critical musical stories from public hearing, disabling, marginalising and delegitimating music in education. Restoring balance would involve seeking a more detailed understanding of the "little stories" of active interaction in contemporary music groups. The following brief examples are recent insights and instances from my own work in contemporary jazz/rock groups which begin to provide some insight into the contextual hermeneutics of the *first musical space.*

1. My work in jazz/rock/pop bands in Auckland's pubs and clubs requires the musicians and audiences to engage in contact across the *first musical space.* As band members continue to experience styles and cross styles in action, they develop spheres of active understanding in areas such as:

- Grooves: players in the band begin to intuitively understand what a "groove" is, and its role in the overall impact of a performed piece. This involves the drummer and bass player "locking" into a shared repetitive groove, which is rhythmically connected. Understanding grooves in action involves listening and responding to different patterns over time and associating them with expressive, sensuous meaning and body response.
- Inner hearing in action: players audiate musical "shifts" (melodic, rhythmic, harmonic) during the process of performing (e.g. for the purpose of establishing grooves and shifts in expression in performance). This involves a combination of acute listening and intuitive communication with group members.
- Improvisation: a reflexive musical art, which is practised and worked through conditions of play (especially during performance). Extended improvisations require a combination of relaxation and focus states, which involve being aware of both spontaneous performance action and audience response.
- Audience communication: band members and audiences are familiar with the casual and interactive side to jazz/rock/pop musical performances. A general "openness" to an audience through body language, responding, giving feedback, involvement, talk, eye contact, dance, humour and music content form style and play in these musics. The human connections formed by these actions provide opportunities for other multiple layers of musical meaning to emerge in the performance moment.
- Contextual meaning: band performances invariably involve talking and "chatting" with audiences, finding common boundaries and establishing a common understanding with the immediate environment of the event.[4]

2. The following "little story" from one of my band experiences, also demonstrates some of the interactions that work at the edge of the *first musical space.*

> The band played recently at a wedding function. In the first set, the musicians played well but the crowd seemed untainted by the music and virtually appeared to ignore it. Then a couple of significant events happened. Firstly, an elderly lady asked if we knew the old standard "As Time Goes By". Band members grumbled under their breath for some did not know the tune and it was a far cry from the "cool acid jazz" we had just been playing. When I began playing it on the piano the old lady's face immediately lit up and several others turned to the band for the first time. This was our first direct contact with the crowd. Following this, the bride's younger son appeared with his blues harmonica. We played a raunchy blues number for him to solo over. This completely won the crowd over. For the rest of the night it did not matter what we played, we were "the greatest" as far as the wedding participants were concerned (Lines, 2000: 27).

The examples above illustrate the changing contexts of the first *musical space.* Music as a social art, is a connection of forces which create new forms and changing meanings. The *first musical space* has no specific boundaries. In this way, music becomes expressions of the "aesthetization of life" (Welsch, 1997) be it: dancing, feeling, fun, legitimation, togetherness, romance, meditation, style, fashion, or just thinking about music itself (the latter being a feature of the *second musical space).* The sharing of music is an expression of sound and meaning. In this sense, music-making and appreciating may help participating subjects find a changing, flexible "voice". Further, the

recognition of a shifting "musical meaning" in performing and teaching can be pedagogical strategy. The way the band accepted and adapted to our harmonica "visitor" in our gig, provides an insight for music educators and their methods of student involvement.

## Some suggestions and strategies

How can music educators begin to affirm the *first musical space?* How can we begin to realise music as a transformative art intrinsically connected with cultural change? The following suggestions may be useful for school teachers and could form a beginning for the development of their own ideas, according to their multiple contexts:

- investigations about music, genres chosen by children, and the connections and layers of meaning are explored.
- training on instruments as part of a school-community collaboration (community collaborations stimulate musical connections).
- using role models, e.g. parents, community musicians, special teachers, media (TV Video/Internet/CD) to stimulate interests, foster interests.
- engaging music with other activities, e.g. dance, fun, celebrations, themes, stories, productions.
- using pop music in a more creative and accepting way. How? - by bringing media into the classroom, studying the lives of role models (pop artists), using some songs, creating dances, group responses to songs.
- empowering children through music by introducing composition and improvisation into the range of experiences. Children get to make more choices, foster more interests (by getting sound ideas from all sorts of places), see the need for themselves to build performance skills, and begin to use group composition as a unique way of learning and sharing ideas in a sound medium.

The temporal and ideological character of music as exemplified in the *first musical space* has intrigued many great thinkers. Nietzsche (1956), Adorno (1974) and Deleuze (1983) all resort to music and musical metaphors to aid the thinking and understanding of culture, force and epistemic relationships. Yet music education an institutions have remained static and distant from a real plane of music making in contemporary communities, fixed as it were, on the *second musical space.* In their radical critique of logical reason and transcendent objectification, the Continental thinkers who inspired this article, provide some insight into the understanding of the music process and music education. If music is to become a transformative and culturally dynamic art in Western culture, we need to articulate the ground where music and ideas meet in music education and be prepared for the music of the moment.

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## Notes

1. The concept of "affirmative force" is explained in Deleuze 's *Nietzsche and Philosophy,* 1983.

2. Reactive forces are different to active forces of the will to power. See Deleuze's *Nietzsche and Philosophy,* 1983.

3. The transformative power of music can be seen as analogous to Nietzsche's transformative notions of the will to power and the eternal return.

4. The idea of recognising contextual meaning in music is becoming increasingly important in music education theory. David Elliott (1995) provides some interesting insights on this matter in *Music Matters.*

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