

HUMANE MUSIC EDUCATION

F O R T H E

COMMON GOOD



EDITED BY

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TOWARD THE DISCOVERY OF
CONTEMPORARY TRUST AND INTIMACY IN
HIGHER MUSIC EDUCATION

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THIS CHAPTER EXPLORES THE PREMISE THAT HIGHER MUSIC education needs to fight feelings of ineffectiveness, apathy, ignorance, and detached reflection—shared by individual students and teachers—especially in the face of recent mass refugee migrations and practices of authoritarian populist mobilization.¹ One manifestation of these feelings in our liberal educational institutions is the desire to transcend the limitations of the living experience and the longing for immediate contact among individuals across educational, social, and political divides and borders.

First, this chapter explores new perspectives on our understanding of sociomusical contexts of nearness (or the “oral being-together” of proximity), unpredictability, and power relations in higher music education.² These are also important qualities of music interactions and thus expand the notion of openness to communities and the Other that characterizes a current trend of music institution reforms and policy initiatives in Greece and elsewhere, as will be expounded in the next section. Furthermore, the chapter discusses how the emphasis on measurability, standardization, and homogenization these reforms incur may steer the music teaching profession further away from music education’s long-standing goals in favor of administrative and standards-based classifications that “base educational accountability on economic advantage.”³

Building on this framework, the chapter proposes that contemporary intimacy and trust can help us reimagine “the pillar of learning to live together,” one of the four pillars of learning, that best reflects, along with the pillar of learning to be, “the socialization function of education,” according to the UNESCO publication *Rethinking Education: Towards a Global Common Good?*⁴ It is worth noting, however, that while the writers of *Rethinking Education* have been concerned with “developing an understanding of other people and an appreciation of interdependence” in this line of thought, they have paid little attention to the significance of intimacy.⁵ This notion may amend the UNESCO publication’s discussion of cultural diversity as it can help us articulate and recognize new levels of complexity, fullness, and the multidimensionality of lived realities.⁶ More specifically, I will argue for the adoption of a politics of intimacy that aims toward a more nuanced and less reductionist higher music education that understands the oral being-together of proximity as a site that in instances of crisis allows Others to continue to express themselves when watched without the fear that their vulnerabilities will be taken advantage of.

In this context, I will briefly describe the widening participation in the creativity-based program Community Action in Learning Music (CALM) as a pointed and unique form of reimagining the community-building potential of higher music education, which is based on intimacy and trust.⁷ CALM is devised to help students—both in the university and in neglected Greek and Cypriot learning communities—to enrich their experiential learning through a student-teaching-student approach.

The chapter concludes with a call to use research in higher music education to understand complex changing, vibrating, and fluctuating intimacies that might open new and more comprehensive ways of thinking about the complexities and contradictions that exist. As the late Irish poet and Nobel laureate Seamus Heaney said when interviewed by Henri Cole, “You have to grow into an awareness of the others and attempt to find a way of imagining a whole thing.”⁸

Higher Music Education and Openness to Communities

In the face of the refugee crisis and the success of authoritarian populist mobilization efforts, the potential of openness to communities in higher music education that characterizes a current trend of music institution reforms and policy initiations in Greece and elsewhere appears problematic. More specifically, music institution reforms and policy initiatives treat education

as a “learning management system” that is “ultimately about serving the needs of institutions, not individual students”—disguised in the language of socially equitable ways of learning.⁹

Furthermore, in the context of the refugee crisis, we are constantly confronted with the question, What can we do for the refugees? Nevertheless, we have seen that our liberal institutions appear to be insufficient to respond to the challenges that have arisen with the flows of refugees and migrants. The refugees have risked their lives in hazardous journeys to escape certain demise, only to often find themselves trapped in precarious conditions in refugee camps. At the same time, the European Union is struggling to balance their immigration and asylum policies between a professed commitment to upholding human rights and growing pressures from increasingly popular and vocal nationalistic movements. As Nikita Dhawan put it, “How do we instrumentalize these inherited, flawed tools, such as ‘human rights,’ in order to promote and protect vulnerable individuals and groups for whom these tools were not originally intended?”¹⁰ And with regard to our music education students, as normative practices of everyday bordering, “a form of sorting through the imposition of status-functions on people and things,”¹¹ have seeped into universities, the question might be, How can higher music education help students become effective in the real world, to help facilitate a change?

If we agree—paraphrasing the late Bennett Reimer—that the nature and value of music education for all people are determined by the nature and value of their interactions with and through music, then “music education—like people’s music interactions—cannot be catered, delivered, or taught inside a norm.”¹² In other words, communicative practice in communal contexts plays a significant role for music interactions as well as music education. Hence, “one might say that without communal contexts music education in higher institutions would somehow have to exist without a relationship to the people next to them, or without the ‘oral’ being-together of proximity and immediacy.”¹³

The idea of the oral being-together of proximity with and through music interactions is based on a more recent discourse toward the reexamination and deconstruction of musical experience that places it within the context of issues of borders, freedom, and “the ways political power gives advantages to some people while failing others.”¹⁴ Although educational practice and research suggest that the purpose of educational institutions is to socialize and integrate students into society, the issue of borders

still exists as an economic or functional issue. What exists are contexts of economic utilization or educational contexts designed to impose status-functions, which are “mostly being applied unjustly by imposing on, or colonizing non-dominant cultures.”¹⁵ Boris Groys wrote, “Every action that is directed towards the stabilization of the status quo will ultimately show itself as ineffective—and every action that is directed towards the destruction of the status quo will ultimately succeed.”¹⁶

Access to and experience of this oral being-together of proximity requires slowability, incalculability, serendipity, and unpredictability, which are important qualities not only for music interactions but also for the biotope of music learning and teaching, qualities that the neoliberal system does not know how to control.¹⁷ This also concurs with what the Danish philosopher and theologian Knud Løgstrup suggested when he noted that “the other person be given ample time and opportunity to make his or her own world as expansive as possible.”¹⁸ Regarding music education, T. Ray Wheeler explains Løgstrup’s ethical issue about slowability and boundlessness as follows: “That is, allowing our students to explore how a particular knowledge, skill, or social interaction changes them as a person: how it impacts their individual world. This concept is at the heart of good teaching.”¹⁹

Moreover, the insistence on the importance of slowability, unpredictability, and unexpected outcomes of human interactions is a matter of reconstructing the homogenous, normative, and measurable mastery-based teaching, learning, creating, and assessing.²⁰ This presupposes that we understand the abovementioned temporal qualities in education as part of the human interaction side of teaching that is characterized by Jacques Derrida’s notion of “aporia” (uncertainty or paradox) and Hannah Arendt’s notion of the “frailty of human affairs.”²¹ Building on this framework, the rest of the chapter proposes reimagining the possibility of education on the basis of contemporary intimacy and trust that can serve as the basis for a new kind of learning community.

Intimacy

The interconnection of the oral being-together of proximity, unpredictability, and power—essential for music interactions and, thus, for higher music education—implies the relationship that individuals embrace with themselves as “self” beyond boundaries as they want to transcend their own selves to be continuous—not just rub shoulders—with the selves of

other people.²² Along these lines, the adoption of interpersonal intimacy is considered as an approach that is able to embrace more nuanced and less reductionist notions of how higher music education may connect with, become part of, or be totally detached from our sense of individuality and communality. This is what Roscoe Mitchell, one of the most important composer-improvisers of our time as well as a major musical thinker, said concerning the importance of individuality for music creativity: “I don’t stand to benefit when everybody is just trying to be like everyone else. All of us are highly individualized beings.”²³

It is worth noting, however, that while recent music education philosophy has reflected on hospitality and the Other in relation to community, cosmopolitanism, and participatory music making, it has paid scant attention to the significance of intimacy in this line of thought.²⁴ In this context, intimacy is considered as a “primary internal coherence” among individuals or groups of individuals.²⁵ It is an approach to proximity and unpredictability that in instances of crisis allows Others to continue to express themselves without the fear that “they are watching us, and if they see our vulnerabilities they will take advantage of them.”²⁶ As the late African American author and documentary filmmaker Toni Cade Bambara said in her keynote at the Journey across Three Continents film festival in Detroit, on March 13, 1987, “To be entrapped in other people’s fictions puts us under arrest. To be entrapped, to be submissively so, without countering, without challenging, without raising the voice and offering alternative truths renders us available for servitude. In which case, our ways, our beliefs, our values, our style are repeatedly ransacked so that the power of our culture can be used—to sell liquor, soda, pieces of entertainment, and the real deal: to sell ideas. The idea of inferiority. The idea of hierarchy. The idea of stasis: that nothing will ever change.”²⁷

In the same vein, this is what the Greek art critic Despoina Zefkili wrote in *Third Text* in relation to *Dokumenta 14*, Germany’s renowned modern art exhibition, which takes place every five years in Kassel, Germany, and in 2017 ran in two cities for the first time in its history (Kassel in the north of Europe and Athens in the south): “Indeed, lots of local artists and critics feel the pressure of this foreign body in the city [Athens]. A body that, nevertheless, exercises the power of a big institution, although it identifies with the oppressed subjects, emphasizes the poetics of the body, and adopts the role of the ignorant (‘We are ignorant’ said the artistic director of *Dokumenta 14*, Adam Szymczyk, at the opening of the Public Program)

or even the role of the victim (self-victimisation as a way to cope with local criticism, which has been exercised in very problematic conditions).²⁸ Zefkeli's article precisely describes a space of nearness of a small marginalized local art scene to a foreign mega-institution to which the need for intimacy appears pertinent as it "challenges colonial and orientalist mechanisms."²⁹ More specifically, intimacy helps us articulate the complexity of spaces of nearness as greatly as we live it and unpack well-established concepts such as openness, narrative, story, and "giv[ing] voice to the others" or the multiple identifications that are used too much, too often, not only by curators of the dominant or "revolutionary" *Dokumenta 14* but also by philosophers of music and arts education.³⁰

For through intimacy something other than mere one-dimensional information is being transmitted—something more intangible yet more real. As the video artist Tavi Meraud writes, "Intimacy is that sphere of reality that is not quite the real of the mundane given, and yet could be considered to exude a more intense reality."³¹ To understand recent social and political transformations concerning the notion of borders—educational and political—one needs to focus on aspects of interpersonal relations, such as intimacy, that are still important for individuals within the spaces of proximity because they allow for new contents to be sought in our contemplations about a mutually understood exchange with the Others, when the Others feel like showing vulnerabilities that express nuances and thus becoming who they are.

Therefore, intimacy in higher music education can offer the advantages of collectivity without neglecting the needs of the individual as it takes the individual away from identity politics as well as educational, economic, and administrative clusterings. As Lauren Berlant rightly put it, intimacy exceeds the boundaries of what is sanctioned by institutions, creating "much more mobile processes of attachments" that might enable a reimagining of hegemonic fantasies of the normative.³²

At this point, I should make clear what I do not mean by *intimacy*. It does not simply concern dimensions of music education taking place at spaces of proximity, which are socially constrained to the self and a few known or like-minded others. On the contrary, what is most at issue in the encounter with intimacy is the coexistence of the concomitant components of "curiosity, vulnerability, empathy, and, perhaps most importantly, a recognition of irreducibility" in the proximity of self to the Other.³³ One might

say that the mutual willingness to bend together toward or immerse oneself in each other's differences is the foundation of intimacy.

Moreover, this coexistence of curiosity, vulnerability, empathy, and recognition of irreducibility, which make the meaning of intimacy multi-valent and vague, is what can serve as a kind of sifter through which certain problems of the intersection of the oral being-together of proximity, unpredictability, and power relations can be examined more carefully or brought into light. For instance, in spaces of intimacy, according to Julia Obert, when curiosity is not accompanied by vulnerability (a willingness to lay oneself "undone by each other," using Judith Butler's words), then the desire to "know about the Other's world" can very easily turn out to be a desire to consume or a desire to have.³⁴ Similarly, one might say that vulnerability without curiosity can become self-centeredness and narcissism. Obert writes with razor-like accuracy that intimacy can be framed "as a kind of epistemology: it enables us to know our own coordinates, but only insofar as the constantly shifting geometry of our world's Others allows."³⁵

Therefore, the element most crucial to intimacy is this: that intimacy cannot exist without the acceptance that one can never fully feel another's suffering, although one thinks that one is devoted to learning about the Other, caring for the Other, or/and laying oneself undone by the Other. This realization of irreducibility expresses a genuine desire of an intimate response—instead of fixity—that reaches beyond educational, political, or gender-based reductions and boundaries. As Sarah Ahmed claims, "the over-representation of the pain of others is significant in that it fixes the other as the one who 'has' pain, and who can overcome that pain only when the Western subject feels moved enough to give."³⁶

Trust

Trust as an ethical and political orientation to the Others, even to the closest of friends, can help us acknowledge and accept (as discussed above) recognition of irreducibility that defines the limit or condition of an intimate relationship in the proximity of self to the Other. Thereby, trust in the Other is considered as central to developing interconnections across difference and thus can serve as a self-encouragement to stimulate openness to unpredictable or unfolding circumstances. In relation to music education, one might also say that trust in students stimulates them to put their pre-conceived ideas about music teaching and learning at risk, especially when

confronting themselves with people they are unfamiliar with and to reflect on the experiences and feelings that made them take risks. This is how Løgstrup defines trust from an ethical perspective that appears germane to education:

Trust is not of our own making; it is given. Our life is so constituted that it cannot be lived except as one person lays him or herself open to another person and puts him or herself into that person's hands either by showing or claiming trust. By our very attitude to another we help to shape that person's world. By our attitude to the other person we help to determine the scope and hue of his or her world; we make it large or small, bright or drab, rich or dull, threatening or secure. We help to shape his or her world not by theories and views but by our very attitude toward him or her. Herein lies the unarticulated and one might say anonymous demand that we take care of the life which trust has placed in our hands.³⁷

Furthermore, trust is related to the political empowerment of “institutional nonentities” or those “who have no specific capacity,” what Jacques Rancière called “the power of anybody.”³⁸ According to Rancière, democracy is “a form of dis-identification, and also a form of trust in the capacity of anybody with no specification.”³⁹ Along these lines, I believe that we should aim toward the empowerment of the collective capacity of those who lack specific capacity not only in politics but also in education.

With regard to higher music education, in order to exemplify how the trust in the emancipatory potential of students' creative practice can construct an intimate space that directly influences the relation between different forms of “we” and “you,” I will briefly discuss the widening participation, creativity-based, sustainable (since 2000) music educational program Community Action in Learning Music (CALM), which I coordinate at the Department of Music Studies, School of the Arts, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece. CALM utilizes a student-teaching-student participatory process that can be considered as a bridge where music teaching and learning meet in a direct and fascinating way. More specifically, music education students at the music department, on the one hand, who are not yet members of the institutionalized group of music teachers, and students of approximately more than 150 neglected schools and learning communities, on the other hand, who are deprived of having their own voices heard through formal music education, expression, and participation, teach each other and learn from each other.⁴⁰

These schools and communities are mostly located in economically disadvantaged areas, urban or provincial, and their student body by and

large is predominately comprised of children of economic immigrants and refugees. More specifically, each semester twenty to twenty-five students in their fourth or fifth year enroll in my course “Music Education,” which encompasses CALM in the kernel of its syllabus. These students create teams of two to four students. For one semester, each student team adopts a class at a high-risk school or community in order to explore musical and pedagogical pathways that engage all participants in meaningful music making. At this point, it should be noted that the university students are not confined by mentor teachers’ practices, since the schools and communities where they themselves choose to go do not have music teachers. As Dorothea Anagnostopoulos, Emily Smith, and Kevin Basmadjian claim, “for our part, we viewed the mentors as limiting interns’ learning-to-teach opportunities and promoting ineffective practices.”⁴¹

Empowering students from the university and students from the high-risk schools and communities to build intimate encounters with each other via the music creativity that collectively takes place in the classrooms—without the fear that they are being watched and judged by their familiar teachers—gives them the opportunity to become open to experiences that effectively unsettle them from time to time and to invent modes of music interactions that transgress the standards and norms of conventional educational encounters.⁴² Moreover, when teaching each other, students are challenged to move across formally distinct areas of both social and educational hierarchies. As Vicki Lind so rightly argues: “When students perceive they are ‘doing’ a service rather than learning alongside their community partners, they often see themselves as being at the top of the social hierarchy. In contrast, programs that are built upon the fundamental belief that communities are ‘asset rich’ and that learning is reciprocal can reinforce the concepts of equality by allowing students to see and value those around them.”⁴³

Concluding Remarks

This chapter is a call to utilize our practice and research in higher music education to understand complex, changing, vibrating, and fluctuating intimacies that might open new ways of thinking about the complexities and contradictions that exist on the common ground of proximity shared by different people or different forms of “we” and “you,” especially in the face of recent mass refugee migrations and authoritarian populist mobilization attempts. Intimacy and trust help us, on the one hand, to see very

different types of actors or processes of collectivization that emerge and, on the other, to realize that the concept of the common good should be far more responsive to differences and nuances. According to Boris Groys, “we no longer believe in universalist, idealist, transhistorical perspectives and identities. The old materialist way of thinking let us accept only roles rooted in the material conditions of our existence: national-cultural and regional identities or identities based on race, class, and gender. And there are a potentially infinite number of such specific identities because the material conditions of human existence are very diverse and are permanently changing.”⁴⁴ This implies that the common good should not stunt or distort the mutually understood exchange with the Others—especially in instances of crisis—when the Others cannot show their vulnerabilities that express nuances and thus become who they are, out of fear that they are being watched and that their vulnerabilities will be taken advantage of. Thus, the development of knowledge that is considered by the writers of *Rethinking Education* as a common good—along with humane education—would acquire new kinds of participatory educational processes as well as research approaches to diversity that promote intimacy and trust. To act in a spirit of intimacy and trust as a constant responsibility to the Other helps educators to confront “the common fate” of individual human beings that is stamped by “the radically contingent, transitory, precarious conditions of their existence,” as Boris Groys wrote.⁴⁵

Simply telling and researching stories and histories in higher music education research is not enough. The idea that we believe that the Others live life in a straight line, like a story, a narrative, seems to me to be restrictive and, more than anything, a kind of intellectual convenience disguised in the language of socially equitable ways of “learning about” or “giving voice” to the Others. We can only learn when time (as unpredictability) and space (as the oral being-together of proximity and immediacy) are colliding into a kind of explosion of pure intimacy and trust, while all around there are borders, identifications, clusterings, and crises. As Nick Cave put it so brilliantly, “I feel that the events in our lives are like a series of bells being struck and the vibrations spread outwards, affecting everything, our present and our futures, of course, but our past as well.”⁴⁶

Music education, like music interactions, cannot change the world. However, by providing opportunities to experience the complexity of intimate spaces of proximity of the self to the Other, music education can help all students to briefly connect with the Others’ finer selves, which are

endearing, frail, unpredictable, frightened, noncompliant. And perhaps that will give them consolation, encouragement, and—more importantly—time to become who they are.

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Notes

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