Artistic reciprocity as course-based practice of crossing 'mono-artistic' boundaries in higher visual arts and music education

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Artistic reciprocity as course-based practice of crossing 'mono-artistic' boundaries in higher visual arts and music education

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While music education research has examined facets of inter-arts collaborations at professional level, there is little on inter-arts collaborations among students of different arts departments in the framework of common university courses. This *article* explores aspects of the learning of university visual art students and music students undertaking the course 'Inter-Artistic Creative Thinking*', which* concentrates on the stirrings and transformations of the role of the individual artist-student that are inexorably set in motion when learning occurs within an inter-arts collaborative environment. Topics addressed include artistic reciprocity through practical socialization and practice to 'make the familiar strange', inter-artistic creativity through sonic engagement, and ways to *facilitate novel musical, visual* and educational experiences and outcomes for both visual art and music university students beyond superimposed institutionalized specialisms.

Introduction

While music education research has examined facets of inter-arts collaborations at professional level, 'there is little on inter-arts collaborations in the university (tertiary) environment' (Blom 2012, 720). According to Blom, collaborations in higher education usually occur between music institutions and schools or communities (e.g., Lapidaki, de Groot, and Stagkos 2012; Soto, Lum, and Campbell 2009), when music professors create a musical play for schoolchildren (e.g., Poston-Anderson and de Vries 2000) and/or in improvisations with music, theatre and/or dance students (e.g., Sawyer 2006; Blom 2012), among others.

This article explores aspects of the learning of university music students undertaking the course 'Inter-Artistic Creative Thinking' with visual art students. The course encompasses 'Creative Encounters with Art and Music' (CR.E.A.M.) in the kernel of its syllabus, which is a series of projects that concentrate on how and what learning occurs within this inter-arts collaborative environment, on the one hand, and the stirrings and transformations of the role of the individual artist-student that are inexorably set in motion, on the other.

The motivation for this learning approach is based on the hypothesis that artistic reciprocity can occur through sonic sensibility and engagement in relation to visual space and urban ecology. As Voegelin (2010, 11) suggests, 'a sonic sensibility would illuminate the unseen aspects of visuality'.

In a time of uncommon change and isolation, this pedagogical approach focuses on how to create environments where more individuals can feel cherished, productive

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and fulfilled beyond artistic boundaries and roles that are dictated by professionalism in a particular field. Projects and strategies are also illustrated for tapping into one's creative potential and putting it to work in an 'open' and challenging learning environment that enables them to become critical of the reality of artistic 'creativities' outside the university (Burnard 2012, 2013; Lapidaki 2007). Along these lines, topics addressed include artistic reciprocity through practical socialization and practice to 'make the familiar strange', student empowerment in higher education, inter-artistic creativity through sonic engagement, and ways to facilitate meaningful interactions between sound and picture, leading to novel sound, visual and educational experiences and outcomes for both music and visual art university students alike.

Theoretical perspectives

Artistic reciprocity as practical socialization

What CR.E.A.M. is aiming at, and which follows from the practice of artistic reciprocity by means of sonic engagement, is to exemplify the learning and teaching principle of practical socialization in university education. The emergence of 'practice theory' in sociological literature (e.g., Wacquant 2004) calls for a special type of explanation of inter-arts creativity that has not been adequately treated in music and art education literature: specifically, that inter-arts creativity comes to be learned, transmitted and produced as a predominately collective activity in which members of this collectivity learn through a peer-to-peer or reciprocal approach. In this sense, inter-artistic practice is considered as a series of intellectual, mental, aural, visual and gestural exchanges among peers from various realms of artistic expression and education (Lapidaki, de Groot, and Stagkos 2012).

Loïc Wacquant, when speaking about the 'culture' in a boxing gym, asserts that individuals learn by embodying or 'somatizing' the meaning of the actions of the other members of a social collectivity (Wacquant 2004, 99). According to Wacquant, learning is 'not a dialogue between the sole teacher and his pupil but rather a conversation of multiple voices open to all the regular participants in the workout' (113). He stresses that 'if there are fewer than four or five [boxers practising in the gym], the "collective effervescence" effect is nullified and one disposes of too few models in action, or the models are too remote to spur you on' (123).

By having visual art students 'watching, listening to, and feeling the energy' (Stephens and Delamont 2010, 113), which music students imbue into the CR.E.A.M. projects and vice versa, the 'Inter-Artistic Creative Thinking' course helps them to access what they are often hesitant to consider and accomplish, although they want to, 'for fear that it will expose them to their limitations' (Cruz 2010, 23), which are mostly imposed on them by institutionalized specialisms. Through practical socialization (or socially engaged practice) among students from different art departments, we can help them learn from each other and thus make 'whole again the notoriously fragmented and disconnected images of the *Lebenswelt*', in the words of Zygmunt Bauman (cited in Dawes 2011, 143). Thus, they become self-contained, all-sided and autonomous, as they do not rely on other 'specialized experts', especially if, as painters, the students want to imagine, listen to and create the sound or music of a 'picture' or, as musicians, they want to imagine, see and create the 'picture' of the sound or music.

Artistic reciprocity as practice to '*make the familiar strange*'

It would seem that music and visual arts education students' academic preparation often neglects to provide them with educational experiences that anticipate the nature of their future lives as artists and educators. If we opt to transform the teaching environment for practical socialization and conversation of multiple voices in our music and art departments, I believe that recurring adverse diagnoses of visual arts and music education can be changed by creating new, unique inter-artistic pedagogical practices right from students' earliest encounters with the 'familiar' classroom setting in the university.

From early on in their education, music and visual art students should be encouraged to experience a variety of unfamiliar or uncommon roles, relationships and spaces that provide insight into their creativity. This will expand their intellectual and artistic capabilities and, thus, enhance their optimal experience (Freer and Raines 2005), confidence, agency and autonomy. The need to learn to 'make the familiar strange' is emphasized by Howard Becker (cited in Delamont, Atkinson, and Pugsley 2010, 3) as follows:

> I have not had the experience of observing in elementary and high school classrooms myself, but I have in college classrooms and it takes a tremendous effort of will and imagination to stop seeing only the things that are conventionally 'there' to be seen.

More specifically, the 'familiarity problem' in education calls for situated learning and collaborative practice. Instead of focusing on conventional student versus teacher relationships inside formal educational settings, an *unusual* setting that we propose is when learning occurs within an inter-arts collaborative environment between students of the music and the visual arts departments of a university. In this paradigm of collaborative creativity in an unusual or unfamiliar educational setting, we can prevent 'powerful cultural influence on behavior and imagination of those who occupy its spaces' (Thompson, cited in McCarthy 2010, 5) and help all participants seek out new musical, visual and educational meanings (Lapidaki 2007). As Castoriades (cited in Bauman 2012, 212) rightly pointed out:

> An autonomous society, a truly democratic society, is a society which questions everything that is pre-given and by the same token liberates the creation of new meanings. In such a society, all individuals are free to create for their lives the meanings they will (and can).

CR.E.A.M.: a local inter-artistic academic context

'Creative Encounters with Art and Music' (CR.E.A.M.) is a series of projects that is encompassed in the kernel of the syllabus of the course 'Inter-Artistic Creative Thinking', which is obligatory for both music and visual art students from the School of Fine Arts, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece. CR.E.A.M. focuses on how and what learning occurs within this inter-arts collaborative environment, on the one hand, and the stirrings and transformations of the role of the individual artist-student that are inexorably set in motion, on the other. CR.E.A.M unfolds through three projects that fifth-year music and visual art students have to accomplish that traverse their specializations in music and visual arts, respectively,

inspiring new ways of thinking, listening and experimenting across departments of the School of Fine Arts and, thus, enabling debates and conversations. These projects aim to facilitate meaningful interactions between sound and picture, leading to novel musical and visual experiences and outcomes for both music and visual art students.

CR.E.A.M projects

The first project – entitled 'White CR.E.A.M. Room' – debates the idea of listening to a picture depicting a visual space. More specifically, sound is considered as sublimated to a visual referent, the picture of a fantastic or imaginary all-white lecture room (Figure 1).

Listening to the space of the 'White Room' is seen as an interaction that invents and demands from the listener-composer a complicity and commitment as he or she attempts to narrate an imaginary acoustical environment and thus introduces issues, such as subjectivity, objectivity, communication, meaning or sense-making through sound compositions-improvisations.

The second project – entitled 'CR.E.A.M. City' – demands the student-artists to explore the city of Thessaloniki through the coupling of video and sound that manipulates the soundscape. Some of the themes that arise from this project are:

(1) picture-sound impressions that uncover the urban geography of Thessaloniki;
(2) city as picture-sound generator;
(3) sound-picture in discounted spaces.

Figure 1. "The White Press Room". Concept by: Vandejong Creative Agancy. Photography: Eddo Hartmann. Client: Volkskrant / OogLive.

In other words, this class project aims to help participant student-artists give the city's visual mass another sonic shape with inter-artistic (audiovisual) decisions and actions.

The third project – entitled 'CR.E.A.M. Documentary about a Creative Person or Situation' – demands a 5–10 minute visual documentation of contemporary artists in various forms of cultural expression living in Thessaloniki or projects taking place in the city that value and/or implement the symbiosis of images and sounds (e.g., educators, animators, film directors, media artists, pop musicians, VJs and DJs, among others). The aim of these documentaries is two-fold: (1) to inform student-artists about the diversity and individuality of artistic intentions and outcomes in the effort to create relationships between hearing and seeing; and (2) to give a common platform to local artists to explain their ideas and efforts towards an expansion of senses by means of their wide-ranging art forms.

Participants

The students who participate in CR.E.A.M. are music students of the Department of Music Studies and visual art students of the Department of Visual Arts. It should be noted that most of these students will become either music or visual art educators in schools.

The music students are in the higher semesters of their university studies, which are mostly musicological and music theoretical in nature. They have a solid practical base in music performance and craftsmanship, the greatest part of which they obtain in music conservatories or conservatory-type schools where individual classical instrumental tuition reflects formal learning practices, attitudes and values that originate from nineteenth-century European 'classical' (absolute) music. As Hargreaves, MacDonald, and Miell (2002, 12) claim, this value system 'implies that music is something, which exists "out there", in a sense, independently of those activities that bring it to life'.

With regard to the educational background of the fifth-year visual art students, one might say that it is similar in essence to the educational background of the participating music students; that is, their education is solely concerned with their performance and craftsmanship in the visual domain (e.g., painting, sculpture and photography). They also have little or no knowledge and practice of technology, computer animation and digital arts due to the current absence of systematic study in these areas in their department.

Method of practice

One of the key challenges of an academic course in inter-arts education, in which music and visual art students participate, is to enable visual art students to 'hear the picture' and music students to 'visualize the sound' in order to expand their creativity beyond the roles and specializations that the university and society assign to it. Thus, the teaching and learning approach utilized aims to disrupt, on the one hand, the perceived certainty by visual student-artists of a visual aesthetic and, on the other, the perceived certainty by music student-artists of a musical aesthetic 'without proposing a didactic position' (Voegelin 2010, 11).

Each semester the fifth-year music and visual artists-students who enrol on the course 'Inter-Artistic Creative Thinking' create teams of two to four students. It should be noted that the student teams that accomplish the above-mentioned projects are comprised of visual art and music students. The reason for having an inter-artistic group for each inter-artistic project is that the main intent of each project is each student's transformation experience of crossing her or his 'mono-artistic' boundaries through practical socialization with students of another art form. When learning from each other, music students turn their sensibilities to the visual space and visual art students to the sound space and thus focus on the new and changing 'landscape' of what was initially considered nothing more than just 'background' (Cascone 2004, 394).

Besides using journals as learning tools, each group's works and experiences are elucidated, discussed and critiqued by their peers and professor during three-hour weekly sessions (Wacquant 2004). The important thing about these sessions is the collegiality and sharing that grows as the sessions progress. By sharing and critically reflecting on their personal stories from their CR.E.A.M. projects, and through their videos, audio recordings and journals, visual art and music students create a bond that makes them feel that they are not so 'different' from each other. Thus, they realize they are capable of transgressing established frameworks of perception and breaking out of the intended educational isolation of artistic specialisms and professionalisms in the university, which reflect a desire for perpetuating the authoritative status of cultural elites in society.

Students also realize that their own practices are in line with educational and political theories as well as research on musicalization/sonification of visual arts and visualization of music/sound arts that they study throughout the semester. In addition, students' projects and parts of their journals that might not otherwise be seen and commented on by a wider public are collectively presented on CR.E.A.M.'s blog and Vimeo channel (http://www.mus.auth.gr/cms/?q=en/node/492).

Afterthought

One of the key challenges of an academic course in the Arts and Humanities is to enable students to expand their creativity beyond the roles and specializations that the university and society assign to it. Through CR.E.A.M., the course 'Inter-Artistic Creative Thinking' outlines an inter-artistic learning approach that arises from a complex range of factors – among them, changes in education, the art worlds, society and economy; the potential for interdisciplinary forms of expression and communication; and growing expectations among students that higher education should increase their potential for personal satisfaction and civic participation.

By emphasizing the importance of a way of learning and teaching through the constant creation of 'open' learning spaces of interactions, participations and collaborations that always surprise participant learners, we can fight the mere development of skills that risks becoming a rational and repetitive mechanism or a 'routine expertise' (Allsup 2013), which leads to a dominance of mastery as the single possible truth (Lapidaki 2013). Thus, higher education in the Arts and Humanities can give music and visual art students the opportunity to learn by keeping themselves in a constant state of awareness of many artistic realities and attentiveness to the creativity of others.

As the late 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' (Heaney 1997). Along these lines, academic knowledge and self-reliant practice of creativity can build a mutually enlightening relationship, which appears to confirm Baudelaire's observation that 'the arts aspire, if not to take one another's place, at least reciprocally to lend one another new powers' (as cited in Arnason 1982, 96).

Notes on contributor

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