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Ch. 16 - Re-discovering/Facilitating Intimacy in Borderscapes of Higher Music Education

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Section IV – A Passage to Elsewhere

Chapter 16

Re-discovering/Facilitating Intimacy in Borderscapes of Higher Music Education

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Abstract

The chapter explores intimacy as a critical site of power and resistance. More specifically, intimacy is considered as an arena in which social and political identities are negotiated, while inclusions and exclusions are continually established or disputed. I will argue for the adoption of a politics of intimacy that aims towards a more nuanced and less reductionist higher music education that can help us articulate the complexity of spaces of proximity as greatly as we live it. Such a reflection offers us opportunity to adopt a variable filter that sheds light on certain characteristics of borders, freedom, and the ways political power gives advantages to some people while failing others. The chapter concludes with a call to use research and practice in higher music education to understand intimacy between the self and the Other as a fresh approach to social transformation of educational borderscapes as it creates spaces in which people can express and deepen their interpersonal relations in ways that would not be possible merely through instituting rigid conventional music educational practices and policies.

I am sick
Of having to remind you
To breathe
Before you suffocate
Your own fool self

Forget it
Stretch or drown
Evolve or die

The bridge I must be
Is the bridge to my own power
I must translate
My own fears
Mediate
My own weaknesses

I must be the bridge to nowhere
But my true self
And then
I will be useful

Excerpt from *The Bridge Poem*
by Donna Kate Rushin (1981)¹

Introduction

The main focus of this chapter is directed towards what I refer to as the silent politics of intimacy that revisits Jorgensen’s incentive for music education philosophy not to “ignore the alternative voices of different others that have always been present, even though rendered largely silent and marginalized.”² Specifically, the essay challenges the “culture of power”³ by utilizing the concept of intimacy as an essential perspective to look at aspects of power and resistance in higher music education as they turn into suffocating constraints delivering the bleakness of all kinds of borders that appear difficult to overcome. In the same vein, Jorgensen encourages music educators to “break out of the little boxes of restrictive thought and practice and reach across the real and imagined borders of narrow and rigid concepts, classifications, theories, and paradigms to embrace a broad and inclusive

view of diverse music educational perspectives and practices.”⁴

First, the chapter explores the concept of the “oral” being together in proximity and immediacy through music interactions in higher music education. In this context, the meanings of music interactions are seen as communal acts that can only exist in the present moment. The potential of higher music education to be a diagnostic of social issues and change rests on the degree to which it is communal and the type of interactions that it engenders. Furthermore, the awareness of borderscapes that goes hand in hand with the recognition of the rampant fear of the Other when being present together, in the here and now, is significant not only for music interactions but for music education, as well.

Building on this framework, the chapter explores intimacy as a critical site of power and resistance. More specifically, intimacy constitutes an arena in which social and political identities are negotiated, while inclusions and exclusions are continually established or disputed. I will argue for the adoption of a politics of intimacy that aims towards a more nuanced and less reductionist higher music education that can help us articulate the complexity of spaces of proximity as greatly as we live it.

The chapter concludes with a call to use research and practice in higher music education to understand intimacy between the self and the Other as a fresh approach

to social transformation of educational borderscapes as it creates spaces in which people can express and deepen their interpersonal relations in ways that would not be possible merely through instituting rigid conventional music educational practices and policies. One might say that the question of politics of intimacy points us towards “the core of our aliveness, which is the only thing, in my view, which art should serve,”⁵ as Simon Critchley put it.

Borderscapes as Sites for Exploratory Reflection for Higher Music Education

The potential of higher music education “to grapple with the central issues of life,”⁶ as Jorgensen claims, seems to rest on the degree that it is communal; that is, when academic learning is deepened by diverse experiences of mutual creative encounters beyond the college classroom.⁷ Thus, higher music education can become the forum for students to participate and show pedagogical responsibility not in “fictive problems and lessons”⁸ or “through playing to teach music,”⁹ but confronting contemporary problems of the real world, beyond academia’s conventional baggage of individuality and mastery. Without communal encounters 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.”¹⁰ Moreover, this exhilarating juxtaposition of space and time bares an openness that is

unpredictable, complicated, and elusive, unraveling hidden continuities and shaping new kinds of socio-musical and educational relationships.

The idea of the oral being-together of proximity and immediacy encourages encounters through and with music interactions that go beyond notions that identify higher music education merely as schooling or the instruction of mastery of a certain music subject. Paraphrasing Rancière, music interactions are considered as “a way of occupying a place and a time, as the body in action as opposed to a mere apparatus of laws.”¹¹ This implies to a large extent individual and communal awareness and recognition of what is conventionally repressed by what Delpit calls the “power culture”¹² as well as liberation from the concomitant fear of the Other when being present together. In this context, the Latin root of education, *educere*, means “to lead out, forth, away, shift” (from *ex-* “out” + *ducere* “to lead”).¹³

The idea of the oral being-together of proximity and immediacy branches out into realms related to a more recent discourse towards the re-examination and de-construction of the artistic experience within the context of borders and borderscapes. To put it more precisely, here borders are considered as regulative frames that are constructed through the process of the so-called “bordering.” According to Cooper and Perkins:

Bordering as a process is a form of sorting through the imposition of status-functions on people and things,

which alters the perception of that thing by setting it within a web of normative claims, teleologies and assumptions.¹⁴

Borders can consequently be thought of as being both the result of and the reason for polarities, differentiations, and divisions that reflect the multiple ways “political power gives advantages to some people while failing others.”¹⁵ Although the role of music interactions in forging social links either between or beyond boundaries can sometimes seem unproblematic or even emancipatory, under the assumption that music can be socially transformative, a reflection on borders may offer us an opportunity to adopt a variable filter that sheds light on certain problems of music interactions that exist in spaces of proximity and immediacy, especially in face of the refugee crisis and the success of authoritarian populist mobilization efforts.

Thus, inextricable from the issue of the oral being-together of proximity, is the concept of borderlands or borderscapes that are thought of as transition areas and contact zones, since borders often expand to form border regions that can be investigated.¹⁶ This description is not only valid for territorial or political borders but also applies to cultural, social, economic, administrative, educational, artistic, moral, and philosophical borders. Gloria Anzaldúa has proposed the following definition of borderlands in terms of culture and identity:

Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different

races occupy the same territory, where under, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy.¹⁷

Similarly, the notion of borderscapes is used as analogous to the term landscape: as landscape provides land with a cultural framework, so does borderscape encompass the culturally constructed nature, aliveness, and unsettledness of borders. Thus, the concept of borderscapes can have positive overtones as enactor of conditions of possibility while people’s “desires and hopes and languages and impulses”¹⁸ interrogate the limits of power in these contact zones.

It is worth bearing in mind that the notion of borderscapes represents a real human proximity field that, on the one hand, creates an experience of interconnectedness and, at the same time, a sense of openness to new and unexpected possibilities among peoples who have never met before. This reminds us of Søren Kierkegaard who wrote in *“Either/Or”*: “If I were to wish for something, I would wish not for wealth or power but for the passion of possibility, for the eye . . . that sees possibility ever.”¹⁹

Furthermore, the concept of borderscapes allows us to expose the ongoing tension and discomfort of being torn between gender, racial, ethnic, social, and cultural polarities, despite the popular tendency, in recent decades, to speak of increased globalization and unification. Borderscapes can “uncover the hidden

relations that block us from recognizing the powerful relationships between living things.”²⁰ In other words, the way of looking at and representing borders by overcoming spacial (natural, fixed) perspectives appears to have the capacity to dissolve polarities and transform connections. As AnaLouise Keating commented with regard to the advantages of border or “threshold” theories:

Threshold theories start elsewhere—with the presupposition that we are all intimately, inextricably linked with all human and nonhuman existence. . . . By thus positioning our radical interconnectedness, threshold theories contain but exceed the exclusionary ontological frameworks, the principle of negative difference and the either/or thinking found in oppositional consciousness and other Enlightenment based worldviews.²¹

Along these lines, the study of how borderscapes function promotes a greater understanding of the humane nature of higher music education, especially as university administrators increasingly promote normative policies and practices that are disguised in the language of diversity and socially equitable ways of learning. To that end, Jorgensen wrote:

I worry, particularly, about the appearance rather than the reality of democratic governance. Invoking allegiance to democratic principles without a corresponding spirit of inclusiveness, mutual respect, and

civility can be an evil because it disguises a lack of democracy under the mantle of humane principles.²²

Although the language of “diversity” shapes conversations on university and arts education, strategic educational scenarios to arts teaching and research practices are determined by budgetary constraints and market forces. Lesa Lockford views the deployment of diversity in the university through students’ participation in communities and organizations “as a social skill and as a ‘thing to have’ rather as a practice for implementing social justice.”²³ Moreover, Sarah Ahmed who grappled with the contradiction between institutions’ symbolic commitments to diversity and the experience of those who practice diversity in higher education asserts that institutional “commitments to diversity are understood as non-performatives: as not bringing into effect what they name.”²⁴

Along these lines, borderscapes provide a re-framing and re-consideration of dialectic contexts of diversity and their possibilities, towards new socio-musical meanings beyond the borders of what is culturally and socially permitted and prohibited or artistically justifiable. The rest of the paper proposes intimacy as a way that goes far beyond the simple celebration of institutional diversity as it deals with the “multiple and contrasting interests, desires and fears”²⁵ that exist in tension and dialogue in borderscapes.

Intimacy as a Way Towards Illuminating “All That Lies in Silence and Detail”²⁶

Coinciding with the emerging thinking about borderscapes in higher music education, as discussed above, is the issue of intimacy that can be brought forth when self and the Other meet, and yet this encounter does not attenuate meaning and authenticity for either of them. One might characterize intimacy as the sensitivity towards “rediscovering the essential—all that lies in silence and detail,”²⁷ using Achille Mbembe’s words. This suggests that the way of looking at and representing borderscapes needs to focus on aspects of interpersonal relations that are still important for individuals within borderscapes because they allow for new contents to be sought in our contemplations about a mutually understood exchange with the Others.²⁸

More specifically, intimacy expresses the desire of individuals to transcend their own selves to be “boundless”²⁹ and “continuous”³⁰—without rigid and oppressive borders—with the selves of Others. Thereby, intimacy can be thought of as a “primary internal coherence”³¹ among individuals or groups of individuals only when the Others feel like showing vulnerabilities that express nuances and thus becoming who they are. Therefore, one might say that intimacy is a vital corollary of human mutuality, resistance, and freedom. As Mbembe put it with razor-like accuracy:

Precisely because the postcolonial mode of domination is a regime that involves not just control but conviviality, even connivance—as shown by the constant compromises, the small tokens of fealty, the inherent cautiousness—the analyst must watch for the myriad ways ordinary people guide, deceive, and toy with power instead of confronting it directly. These evasions, as endless as Sisyphus’s, can be explained only in that individuals are constantly being trapped in a net of rituals that reaffirm tyranny, and in that these rituals, however minor, are intimate in nature.³²

It is worth noting, however, that while recent music education philosophy has reflected on issues of inclusion/exclusion and hospitality in relation to participatory music education and communal music creativity, it has paid little attention³³ to the significance of intimacy in this line of thought. With regard to higher music education, one might say that through intimacy socio-musical interactions in educational borderscapes can embrace more nuanced notions of individuality and communality that often unsettle what is “commonplace”³⁴ and “sensible.”³⁵ Christina Smith states that “with the disturbance of the sensible, what was once unspeakable enters language and the realm of possibility.”³⁶ In other words, intimacy can make it possible for 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.”³⁷ As the late African American author and documentary filmmaker Toni Cade Bambara said in 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.³⁸

By way of illustration of a post-colonial mode of domination in the art world for which the need for intimacy appears germane, I will posit the example of Documenta 14, Germany’s renowned modern art exhibition, which took place in 2017—for the first time in its history—not only in its traditional home, the German city of Kassel in the North of Europe, but also in the Greek city of Athens in the South. This is what Zefkili wrote in *Third Text* about problems that simmer underneath the surface when a small and marginalized local art scene was not given the opportunity to articulate itself and thus attain subjectivity when entangled with a foreign mega-institution:

Obviously, Documenta 14 did not have space for all the most interesting Greek artists and theorists. But given its working title [*“Learning from Athens”*], it has a certain responsibility

to “represent” Athens, even as a city—as a symbol in a certain momentum. And consequently, this Documenta 14 has a lot to think about how (and if) it challenges colonial and orientalist mechanisms (especially when using the anti-colonial element as a flag).³⁹

In the same vein, Zefkili poses the following questions:

So why does it come to learn from Athens? How does it converse with the local scene? In how many and which parts of the local producers of discourse does it give space and importance? In what positions and roles have the local art practitioners been used. . . . Which Athens will visitors from abroad see? To what extent will the charming mixture of antiquity, crisis, resistance and rebetika confirm or challenge their existing preconceptions?⁴⁰

Along these lines, intimacy in higher music education can help to articulate the evolving complexity of subjectivities in communal creative encounters beyond the college classroom without neglecting the needs of the individual as it takes the individual away from alienating economic, administrative, educational, and gender-based clear-cut lines, norms, and preconceptions. According to Lauren Berlant, 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.”⁴¹

What should be underscored here is that intimacy concerns dimensions of higher music education taking place at borderscapes, in which identities, divisions, and classifications are negotiated and not simply at sites of proximities, which are socially constrained to the self and a few “known” or “like-minded” Others—a community of familiar faces or “imagined community,”⁴² in Anderson’s terms. Paraphrasing the Czech philosopher and phenomenologist Jan Patočka who believes that what unites the Greeks in the demos is a “unity in conflict,”⁴³ one might say that difference or conflict—not just correspondence—is what binds people together in the encounter with intimacy between self and the Others. Importantly, it must also be noted that this inception of intimacy is epitomized by their mutual willingness to bend together towards these differences and conflicts. Patočka states that this antithesis embodies a freedom for new and unexpected possibilities (in human relations as well as in our relationship to the world) that hold clues vital for understanding who we are and how we can live together. Patočka writes:

[A]dversaries meet in the shaking of a given meaning and so create a new way of being human—perhaps the only mode that offers hope amid the storm of the world: the unity of the shaken but undaunted.⁴⁴

In the same vein, with regard to higher music education, intimacy can be thought of as a “shaking” that interrupts pre-established normative claims, policies, and assumptions about who we are as teachers and students and how we can be creative in

spaces of the oral being-together of proximity through music interactions. By insisting on the value of intimacy in education, the freedom to fearlessly express “this other, perplexing, creative, conflicting, paradoxical, infuriating truth”⁴⁵ can be safeguarded in the academia, because it is indeed what communicates our humanity and, thus, where music creativity resides. Likewise, Jan Patočka writes: “Man is meant to let grow in him what provokes anxiety, what is unreconciled, what is enigmatic, what ordinary life turns away from.”⁴⁶

Concluding Thoughts

The need to express ourselves, break silences, critique oppressive structures, disrupt dominant narratives, and validate familial and communal understanding are especially relevant during these relentlessly trying political times, especially in face of the refugee crisis and the success of authoritarian and xenophobic populist mobilization efforts. One of the fundamental tenets behind borderscapes and intimacy theories is that they contemplate a mutually understood exchange with the Others, when the Others feel like showing vulnerabilities that express nuances and thus becoming who they are.

In this sense, intimacy revisits Jorgensen’s and Yob’s incentive about the significance of “the spaces between taken-for-granted realities.”⁴⁷ With regard to higher music education, one might say that the kind of particularity and vulnerability

that one brings in the intimate encounter between self and the Others can dissolve commonplace boundaries as something new arises which is neither one or the other, but a space in between. As Jorgensen and Yob so rightly put it:

Rather than repudiate dualities, binaries, polarities, and dialectics, as Deleuze and Guattari are wont to do, we prefer to see somewhat messy and dynamic pictures in which the resulting tensions, conflicts, and exclusions may energize music education as ideas are discussed, debated, and contested in the public sphere. We are also as interested in the places where we cannot see the connections between things as in those in which the connections are evident.⁴⁸

Our understanding of intimacy as integral to formation of selves and subjectivities offers a fresh—though “somewhat messy and dynamic”—approach to social transformation of educational borderscapes. Intimacy creates spaces in which people can express and deepen their interpersonal relations in ways that would not be possible merely through instituting rigid public policies, conventional music educational practices, or the plea for certain ethical and aesthetic values.

Most importantly, the adoption of a politics of intimacy helps us identify situations and practices when the purpose of higher music education to socialize and integrate students into society is “being applied unjustly by imposing on, or colonizing non-dominant cultures.”⁴⁹ Intimacy unravels the discontinuity between giver and receiver in the metaphorical borders between those who are dispensing “hospitality” and thus control agency, on the one hand, and those who are receiving it, on the other. In other words, intimacy helps higher music education to go “beyond the containing pragmatism of the rewarded and ‘knowledgeable’ master who asks the poor and ‘ignorant’ Other to ‘feel welcome’ but really means ‘access free of charge,’” according to Lapidaki.⁵⁰

In sum, this essay is a call to utilize our practices and research in higher music education to understand intricate, unsettled, pulsating, and in-flux narratives that remain invisible because of the pervasive fear of the Other when being present together. As Vera Chok wrote: “It’s hidden histories, made-up sex lives, violence invisible to others. In forms, the plurality of our immigrant narratives is boxed up as ‘Other’ but we are here. I see you.”⁵¹.

Notes

- 1 Donna Kate Rushin, "The Bridge Poem," in *This Bridge Called My Back. Writings by Radical Women of Color*, 2nd ed., eds., Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983), xxi-xxii.
- 2 Estelle R. Jorgensen and Iris M. Yob, "Deconstructing Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* for Music Education," *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 47, no. 3 (Fall 2013): 52.
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- 4 Estelle R. Jorgensen, *Transforming Music Education* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002), 119.
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- 9 *Ibid.*, 370.
- 10 Luis Jacob, "Communities between Culture-by-Mouth and Culture-by-Media," *Public* 39 (Spring 2009): 90; for a more nuanced discussion on the "oral" being-together of proximity and immediacy, see Eleni Lapidaki, "Uncommon Grounds: Preparing Students in Higher Music Education for the Unpredictable," *Philosophy of Music Education Review* 24, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 65-83.
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- 14 For a comprehensive discussion about institutional borders and bordering, see Anthony Cooper and Chris Perkins, "Borders and Status-functions: An Institutional Approach to the Study of Borders," *European Journal of Social Theory* 15, no. 1 (November 2011): 57.
- 15 Franziska Schroeder, "Network[ed] Listening—Towards a Decentering of Beings," *Contemporary Music Review* 32, no. 2-3 (2013): 218.

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- 16 For a more detailed discussion of definitions of borderlands and borderscapes, see Alice Buoli, "BorderScaping: An Explorative Study on the North Moroccan/Spanish Border Landscapes," Doctoral Dissertation (Politecnico di Milano, Department of Architecture and Urban Studies, 2015), 55-57. Accessed April 1, 2018, <https://www.politesi.polimi.it/handle/10589/107249>
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- 18 Jean-Jacques Lebel quoted in Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2012), 98.
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- 33 Tia DeNora, "The Role of Music in Intimate Culture: A Case Study," *Feminism & Psychology* 12, no. 2 (2002): 176-181.
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- 47 Jorgensen and Yob, "Deconstructing Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*," 50.
- 48 Ibid., 51.

49 Julia C. Duncheon and William G. Tierney, "Changing Conceptions of Time: Implications for Educational Research and Practice," *Review of Educational Research* 83, no. 2 (June 2013): 256.

50 See Lapidaki, de Groot, and Stagkos, "Communal Creativity as Socio-Musical Practice."

51 Vera Chok, "Yellow," in Nikesh Shukla, ed., *The Good Immigrant* (London: Unbound, 2017), 44.

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Project Links

This chapter comes from a book titled *The Road Goes Ever On: Estelle Jorgensen's Legacy in Music Education*. The philosophical essays contained within focus on themes that have intrigued Estelle Jorgensen whose forty years of scholarship have strongly influenced music education research and practice: the transformation of music education in public schools; feminist and LGBTQ voices; mentoring; the unfinished search for new ways of seeing, hearing, and doing; multiple and intersecting musical identities; the tension between tradition and change; and activist practice in music education.

The complete book can be found at the following link: <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/jorgensen/>