Refusing Narratives: Functional Literacy and Determinism

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Introduction

> What I propose … is a reconsideration of the human condition from the vantage point of our newest experiences and our most recent fears. This, obviously, is a matter of thought, and thoughtlessness—the heedless recklessness or hopeless confusion or complacent repetition of 'truths' which have become trivial and empty—seems to me among the outstanding characteristics of our time. What I propose, therefore, is very simple: it is nothing more than to think what we are doing. (Arendt 1958, p. 5)

At the time Arendt wrote the above the Soviets had just launched Sputnik I. While many saw this as a "great propaganda feat," "nothing to worry us" and "something to tell us to keep on our toes," (National Aeronautics and Space Administration 1957), others spoke of respect, awe and "terror caused by the discovery of Russian scientific supremacy," Arendt entered the conversation from a different perspective. She viewed the brink of the space age with great apprehension as well, but viewed it as a philosopher might. For Arendt, this newest experience and recent moment of fear was proof of man's desire to escape the "imprisonment to the earth" (1958, p. 1).

Arendt's (1958) thinking through of the human condition begins with this societal desire to *escape* that condition; an end point which, Arendt felt, spoke to man's "alienation from the world" (p. 209). Arendt was interested in the public sphere of politics and political action, and as such she paid particular attention to those behaviours that weakened these engagements. As one notes from the above quotation, thoughtlessness, for her, was particularly vexing. In this quotation, Arendt doesn't simply speak of thoughtlessness in passing, but

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names thoughtlessness as recklessness and confusion; indeed as the most outstanding characteristic of being human. As I think through the field of music education and consider the concept of alienation and the myriad of trivial and empty "truths" that have been and continue to be repeated, I wonder if it is "recklessness" or "confusion" that I find most vexing. With a deep sigh, I realise it's probably a bit of both.

I have, for some time now, been interested in the ways in which our discipline of music education has come to be; the condition of how and who we are. Irresponsibility, perplexity, a desire to escape our condition, the repetition of events that we believe move us forever forward to an end point never quite articulated; these are the issues that concern me. This interest in our discipline is not one that reflects an accounting and retelling of the cumulative successes of our profession. Nor is this an interest in the celebratory possibilities of what music has to offer. This is an interest that reflects the shame I have come to feel as I interrogate my own culpability in the alienating processes of music education.

Giddens (1991) suggests that shame is tied up into the fear of abandonment; thus, because shame is essentially "about the adequacy of the narrative by means of which the individual sustains a coherent biography," shame can be considered in relation to the "integrity of self … and self-identity" (p. 65). I embody this shame, recognising that this self (as a music educator) is also inextricably intertwined with the abandoned "self" of music education. My narrative as a music educator, representing or comprised of multiple narratives that coexist and contradict, has been constructed in part or largely by the narratives of music education. My coherent biography, then, is also inextricably intertwined with the coherent biography of music education. But, it is also my educational experiences that lay outside the confines of music education that afford a counter narrative, one that continually pushes me away from music education and yet always pulls me back.

There's not one definitive moment to which I can trace this shame. I do, however, remember realising that the narrative that seemed most prevalent for both music educators, and general educators, was a story that told the purpose of music education as a story of utility; either in service of the other disciplines, or one of legitimacy anchored in methods and efficiency, "mastery of techniques" (Giroux 1988, p. 84), skill acquisition of note reading and writing, and vague notions of appreciation and improving the human condition through "multi-cultural" engagements (Gould 2009; Kelly 1997). Coming out of 15 years in an elementary music classroom as a self-proclaimed "Kodaly teacher" (masters degree in Kodaly) and "Orff teacher" (Level III certification) only solidified my belief in the power of sequencing reading and writing skills as the primary function of an education in music. However, I had just entered the doctoral programme in Curriculum and Teaching at Teachers College Columbia University and found myself the only music teacher among general educators. Along with my new general education colleagues, who really only "knew" about music education either through their own experiences or music teachers with whom they had taught, I dove deeper into the National Standards documents of the disciplines of mathematics, language arts, science, and history. Immediately, and with sickening realisation, I recognised

that this narrative of utility and skill acquisition in music education was not the same narrative evolving in general education. In those disciplines, there were pedagogical disruptions that were being informed by philosophical and sociological research; disruptions that were challenging the primacy of self-surveillance, coercion, privilege, gender, race, and class. These disruptions challenged the focus of skill acquisition and the mastery of techniques in mathematics, proof of assertion in the sciences, the marginalisation and othering taking place in controlled reading systems, and literacy as defined simply by the ability to read and write (Benedict 2006).[1]

The disconnect and shame grew with the realisation that these same disciplines and these same doctoral colleagues were, in their work with integrated curriculum and humanities units, assimilating the story that was being told by music educators without the same philosophical, theoretical and sociological inquiry they had incorporated in their own disciplines. Examples of "integrated" activities, such as creating song lyrics to the tune *She'll Be Comin' Round the Mountain* that explain commutative, associative, and distributive laws (Campbell et al. 1992, p. 177), or even an activity in which you play the first line of Sammy Davis Jr.'s version of *Something's Gotta Give* in order to illustrate Newton's first law of motion (Armstrong 1994, p. 78), pervade the literature.[2] Troubling yes, but as I have recently been grappling with the depth of John Locke's political theory it is a third example I offer that is most problematic. To teach John Locke's concept of Natural Law, one half of the class can chant "natural law, natural law, natural law, natural law …" while the other half repeats: "life, liberty, happiness, life, liberty, happiness" (p. 77). The first activity indicates that students will come away with a deeper understanding of commutative, associative, and distributive laws. However, incorporating a "music" activity that is essentially linguistic doesn't really demonstrate how writing song lyrics will ensure an entry point into the application of algebraic understanding. The second activity suggests pulling a few phrases from a song that allegedly will illuminate a deep and abstract concept, and the third is nothing more than the memorisation of a phrase that belies, and almost purposefully obfuscates, the profundity of one of the most influential political theorists and philosophers of the Enlightenment.

These few examples, and we are all aware of others, illustrate how easily and readily the narrative we tell and live at face value—this narrative of utility, methods, and efficiency that seemed fixed, *a priori,* always already moving us forward toward the end—was and continues to be accepted not only by music teachers but by many teachers in the general disciplines. It was thus that I saw myself observed through the eyes of others; I felt shame and alienation.

[1] For more details see the U.S. National Standards documents in the following disciplines which can be found online: National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, National Council of Teachers of English, *National Science Education Standards*, *National Standards for History*.

[2] A quick web search for lessons that integrate music and literacy, music and mathematics, music and language arts/phonics produce around 5,960,000 examples.

The Narrative of Functional Literacy

Several authors (Freire 1970; Gould 2009; hooks 1994; Kelly 1997; McLaren 1989) have drawn our attention to the multiplicity of literacies; literacies including functional, cultural, progressive, and critical (Kelly 1997). Yet, while multiple literacies may coexist, and even contradict each other, music educators have been preoccupied and even relied upon the primacy of functional literacy. Activities and lesson plans for teaching note reading abound for music teachers. Tossing a bean-bag onto a staff drawn on the floor encourages teamwork and competition. A quick game of treble clef twister will drill note reading, and candies such as M & M's can be used as notes (and subsequent rewards) on the staff. Reading and notating music (U.S. National Standard #5) is such a given in the lives of music educators that we rarely consider how much we depend upon this skill to establish the purpose of music education. And yet, such a functional end-point, so often decontextualised from musicking, hides and covers over how this reliance masks an ideology of coherence, linear progression, and functionality. And while it may seem that such a leap to ideology is gratuitous and even callous, thinking through the issue of functional literacy outside of music education helps to focus this argument.

McLaren defines functional literacy as "the technical mastery of particular skills necessary for students to decode simple texts such as street signs, instruction manuals, or the front page of a daily newspaper" (1989, p. 196). Indeed, for many, educating for functional literacy is considered a way in which to provide people with basic skills to exist in the world. And, while it may seem odd in this context to contemplate prison programmes, I believe the following helps to set the stage for considering the problematics of functional literacy in music education. The following example comes from the Arizona Department of Corrections:

> This particular program ... is designed to develop reading, writing, problem solving, and other skills necessary to function in a working environment. Any prisoner who fails to achieve functional literacy at the 8th grade level will not be released to begin the prisoner's term of community supervision until either the prisoner achieves an 8th grade functional literacy level or the prisoner serves the full term of imprisonment imposed by the court, whichever occurs first. (Arizona Department of Corrections, 2011, n.p.) [3]

Providing, even mandating, that prisoners achieve an 8th grade functional literacy level seems at the very least, beneficent, something one should do. However, functional literacy—slogan as education, pedagogies of exclusion, and "literacy for stupidification" (Macedo 1994, p. 9) has been challenged by critical theorists as a way to keep the status quo functioning. This functional narrative perhaps provides skills for a "working environment," but what kind of working environment? What kind of "job"? Problem solving skills may enable workers to solve those problems posed by someone else, but what of problem uncovering? This narrative ensures that relationships of power and exclusion remain intact, thereby subjugating and

[3] The Arizona Department of Corrections website (www.adc.state.az.us) provides many links to educational programs.

preventing people from engaging critically with what it means to know and name the world. Through this regime of functional literacy, people are called only to receive and consequently denied their "ontological and historical vocation of becoming more fully human" (Freire 1970, p. 64).

I use the above example to highlight the critical aspect that often goes unaddressed when considering literacy, and to suggest that this enactment and focus on functional literacy is often made manifest in our curricular and pedagogical models of teaching music. Functional literacy has always been music education's narrating subject; a hierarchical mode of production that forms who and how we are and can be, while all else becomes the object serving this subject. At the bottom of this hierarchy are students who may have reading skills and functional understandings of (Western) music, but for whom most, after finishing the formal process of schooling (indeed after finishing elementary school, the site of compulsory music), will very rarely revisit these "skills" again. And, at the top of this hierarchy are music teachers who embody the prevailing winds of ideology of what it means to teach and learn. With personal narratives that are often filled with descriptors such as "survival," "in the trenches," and what skills are needed for the "real" world, these teachers model what schooling is, what music is, and what "quality" music programmes are. As such, functional literacy (reading and notating) provides both salvation and control. While seemingly affording the space to engage with and know music, the functional narrative provides teachers with the justification that they are teaching a measurable skill and absolves them from grappling with broader ideological considerations. Note reading and writing provides control in a discipline that is difficult to pin down when it comes to articulating what an education in music actually "does" for someone. Consider, however, that this skill serves a very small majority of students who will participate in (certain) ensembles. There will be clear distinctions of power and exclusion in these ensembles. This is a working environment in which the music will often be decided for the players. It is a working environment in which, if they happen to be 3rd chair players, their musical life will consist of reproducing assembly-line whole notes and half notes. Problem posing consists of accurate counting and pitch and the working environment is one in which participation is determined by the slogan, "We are only as strong as our weakest player." All of which feels very similar and not too distant from being able to decode simple texts like street signs, so one doesn't get lost, and bottles and containers, so one doesn't poison oneself.

Success Narrative

Freire (1970) has written that education is suffering from narration sickness (p. 52). This narration sickness signifies the way we live our lives, it is one that presumes legitimacy to be that of the narrating subject of method and efficiency (functional literacy), of sequentially layering, cause and effect, of linear development, of "if we do this then we will get that." This discourse has not only tied us to particular social

functions, but has locked us into a fairy tale story that seems to have an origin, a middle, and someday, if we advocate hard enough and work long enough crafting policies that reflect single-minded purpose, a happy ending.

> If we view narrative and narrativity as the instruments by which the conflicting claims of the imaginary and the real are mediated, arbitrated, or resolved in a discourse, we begin to comprehend both the appeal of narrative and the grounds for refusing it. (White 1981, p. 5)

The narrative of music education is both real and imaginary. Real, in that events happen and are recorded. To demonstrate, a few examples from a basic "foundations course" inform us that Lowell Mason formed the Boston Academy of Music and music is ushered into public schools (1838), the Music Educators National Conference is established, Carl Seashore develops a music aptitude test, the Yale Seminar convenes (1963), as does Tanglewood (1967). These events, though, certain as they must be told, are filled with coexisting and contradictory possibilities, presenting conflicting versions. Consequently, in the process of choosing what and how to tell, a moralising authority imposes an ordering, separating real from imaginary which tends to frame a solution and resolution. Events are imaginary when they fail to support the official story, when their significance challenges the dominant discourse. Of course, events—setbacks, disruptions—take place that do resist the official story, but these are often co-opted into the dominant story. Or they're accepted as integral to the narrative in that they confirm the superior moral grounding of the real events, and thus actually function, as Macedo writes, to "dismiss the counter discourse that challenges the falsification of reality" (1994, p. 139). The story of the Mariachi movement in the U.S. perhaps best demonstrates these points.

Dating from the early 1500s, Mariachi music has always been part and parcel of the regional and traditional practices of the Mexican culture. It became an academic tradition when the University of California at Los Angeles Institute of Ethnomusicology founded an educational institution (Clark 1996). At present, Music Educators National Conference (MENC) has a Mariachi advisory board, and a Mariachi link on its website[4] that includes lesson plans, advocacy advice, sheet music, methods, and several workshop dates. Elsewhere, there are Mariachi consultants available for hire, and even methods courses available to learn how to teach Mariachi. Indeed, it seems that Mariachi programmes are not only "*giving* first generation Latinos in the southwestern United States pride in their cultural heritage" (italics added) but, in some cases, helps them stay in school as well (Canice Funke 2009).

However, (as the same source advises us) keep in mind that:

> Playing in a mariachi band is not just for anybody. The kids must meet certain grade requirements and attendance in order to earn the *privilege* [italics added] of participating in the program. After graduation, middle schoolers and high schoolers who keep up their grades and attendance can come back to Middleton Street to participate in the mariachi afterschool program. (Canice Funke 2009, n.p.).

[4] http://www.menc.org/gp/menc-s-mariachi-education-site

Mariachi is a real event, a real musical practice hundreds of years old. There is nothing inherently "wrong" in including Mariachi in a school music curriculum. But the use of it as an external reward system is in essence a dismissal of Mariachi as a counter cultural practice. I am not suggesting that every Mariachi music programme is suspect of being co-opted or used for ulterior gains. Indeed, there are many programmes that exist throughout the U.S. that are providing educational experiences that were not possible prior to the formation of a Mariachi programme.[5] However, when this music functions as a vehicle for the exploration of "musics that exist outside the classroom," it remains marginal. I would argue that this "illegitimate music" (in the sense that this music exists outside the parameters of western music) becomes, in many cases, sanitised in much of its classroom existence. Moreover, the disruption this music could pose to the canon, that is, a real alternative musical proposition that challenges a functional narrative, is extinguished by its tokenism, by the distance of the exotic, rare, and occasional.

Setbacks in our progress, bound by the parameters of our official story, do happen, but they are simply blips on our radar. Similar to Marx and Engel's concept of dialectical materialism, and based on Hegel's ideas that history is a series of competing events that clash, come together, and then move us forward towards an (in our case) unarticulated freedom, we always anticipate a better outcome, as something that can be used to further our accepted legitimacy in the educative process. Sure, there are roadblocks, but these are tied to the vicissitudes of education and move us towards an ideal that has been determined and established by forces driven by a vision of legitimacy. When challenges arise to the official narrative, or when music programmes seems on the brink of destruction, it just means we need to get back out there and advocate harder, maybe even change our extra-musical flavour of the month benefit,[6] write another policy statement, or circulate another petition.[7]

The success of this discourse, and narrative, depends upon our relationship with and to a governing moral authority, as well as the "degree to which [we] invest in the doctrinal system and expect rewards from it" (Macedo 1994, p. 17). Thus, once the story takes on a particular ordering it can only continue through lack of agency and our dependence and relationship to that authority. And, as White (1981) points out, this "kind of consciousness capable of imagining the need to represent reality as a history, is conceivable only in terms of its interest in … legitimacy …" (p. 13). Music educators are quite interested in legitimacy and live our stories as if our history unfolds before us. Living in this way, our progression is bound by cause and

[5] Indeed, the University of North Texas (http://unt.edu/) Mariachi program has been in existence since 2003, and has succeeded in improving reciprocal relations between the community and the university by valuing the cultures students bring rather than imposing university values and culture. See also (among others) the University of Washington and University of Idaho.

[6] One need only search the terms "music advocacy," or "benefits of music" to discover several websites that include lists of reasons (founded or not) in praise of an education in music.

[7] For example, as this book goes to press, several websites can be found that circulate the Petition for Equal Access to Music Education.

effect and our actions determined by a discourse in which rules govern what can and cannot be said or done; a continual forward motion toward a framing of legitimacy by an authority vested by us.

Setbacks are simply proof that we are moving forward constantly, perhaps in the time-honoured sense of two future-directed steps forward and one future-directed step back—all an unbroken chain. It's all success, it's all progress, and it's all a forward, purposeful path. But, a path to where? And what will happen when we get there? Discussion of ends and purposes is hardly a new conversation. Indeed, no conversation about the purpose of education is without the commensurate discussion of educational aims, goals, or ends. Of course, these ends differ depending on the theoretical or ideological frame from which they are articulated, but discussion of ends is hardly radical. I am suggesting, however, that music education is a culture whose worldview is teleological. We view our profession as one with a delineated beginning moving toward a very specific end. Forget educational purposes or ends as large as nation state, or social justice, or even aesthetic or praxial. I am suggesting that this "end" guides our every action and seems simply to come down to: when we get there it will all have been worth it. Success is our grand narrative. Success is the story of our story. It is our telos; our purpose and our end.

We embrace this mythical arrival point, and with it a whole bunch of myths that walk hand-in-hand. The myth of meritocracy, for instance—if we keep working hard, have the right attitude, prove our worth, our measurability, and thus our merit and by extension, legitimacy—when the time is right we shall have a place at the table. Of course, the issues of working hard at what, who is in control of what, and what exactly the "right" attitude is, often go untroubled, but that's part and parcel of myths. But even more troubling is the definition of arrival. Does arrival simply mean time in the schedule for the music classes we have always taught, a state mandated requirement for music classes? Do we really think we will ever be as valued as mathematics, history, scientific inquiry, or language arts? Is arrival going to give us what we so desperately need?

Seeing History

Eagleton (2007) reminds us that "It would not be hard to write the history of knowledge in terms of the kind of questions men and women have thought it possible or necessary to raise" (p. 13). What questions have we asked as a field that disrupt this linear progression? What kinds of questions have constructed and continue to construct a discourse of teleology, of movement forward towards an unarticulated end that provides meaning for our existence? What kinds of questions could disrupt the Westernised version of story and narrative that would afford the space for us to think through who we are outside of the parameters of origin, middle, and end?

I submit that music educators are a pre-modern people and as pre-modern people we don't need to ask meaning of life questions because our faith is secure. And having faith, as Eagleton pointed out, is a matter of relationship, not opinion

(2007, p. 26). Faith, myth, and fairy tale endings guide us as they did music educators before us: we do what is expected of us, we are unwavering in our belief, both living and searching for a narrative that brings meaning to our profession. As pre-modern people we look for signs, signs of the truth. As pre-modern people we don't articulate this end point because we believe, and when you believe it's heretical to address issues in and of themselves.

But just what is this belief? Faith in what? Arrival at what? And, how will we know when we get there, and what on earth are we going to do when we get there?

> Where the soul pretends unification or the self fabricates a coherent identity, the genealogist sets out to study the beginning—numberless beginnings, whose faint traces and hints of color are readily seen by a historical eye. (Foucault 1984, p. 81)

As Foucault points out, our task is not to disregard historical moments that we name and have been named as beginnings. What we need, Foucault suggests, is "history to dispel the chimeras of the origin. [We] must be able to recognize the events of history, its jolts, its surprises, its unsteady victories and unpalatable defeats—the basis of all beginnings, atavisms, and heredities" (1984, p. 80). Or as Estelle Jorgensen has said, we need to excavate.[8]

One such historical moment in the music education profession, as it unfolded in the United States, is the Seventh Annual Music Supervisors Conference held in Minneapolis, Minnesota in 1914. What bears noting about the events of the conference, and in the subsequent recording of this conference in the first issue of the *Music Supervisors' Bulletin*, was the clarion call for efficiency and method juxtaposed by the counter discourse of longing and disappointment felt for the lack of space afforded for conflict and inquiry. This journal issue both documents the events from the Minneapolis meeting as well as invites attendees to reflect on the events of the conference, evidencing the emergence of a moral ordering that begins almost 100 years ago. In this journal, we read of the need for the standardisation of methods and efficiency to be "one and the same" so that one could do "effective work" and not be "turned loose in a sea of conflicting opinions."

> Efficiency should be our motto. Efficiency in the methods and mechanics of music teaching should long ago have been reduced to a system so that the work could be done effectively and the road made clear to develop the art side of music.
>
> Every conference emphasizes the fact that we are far from possessing any plan whereby we can present a united front to the world, and we cannot hope to even convince people of our worth and sincerity until we do, to say nothing of doing much toward their musical uplift. (Giddings as cited in Impressions of the Seventh Annual Meeting, 1914, pp. 5–6)

Disruptions were present. Indeed Osbourne McConathy (1914) wrote of the disappointment he felt at what he saw as the disappearance of "warmth which gave such zest and interest to ... previous arguments on the floor" (as cited in Impressions of the Seventh Annual Meeting, 1914, p. 10). He spoke to what he perceived to be the vanishing space in which one could be "open and free" to express opinions, "no

[8] Jorgensen made this comment during her presentation at the 2008 Second International Conference on Narrative Inquiry in Music Education.

matter how far it may differ from the opinions of others" (p. 10). However present McConathy's voice may be in this particular 1914 issue, at present, his words seem particularly prescient.

Revisiting the first publication of a journal that eventually morphed into *Music Educators Journal* reveals a narrative process in which events, which were seemingly filled with "disruptions", "dissent", and "arguments," took on a moral ordering. However, it would be a mistake to engage with this inquiry so as to lay blame, or cast aspersions on one or a few journals. And while it is possible to note, to think through, how our existence in the past has become one that has inscribed our discipline, our very bodies, with the "right" way to behave and believe, Foucault (1984) believes that this process of descent is one that should reveal the normalising process and not one that "pretend[s] to go back in time to restore an unbroken continuity that operates beyond the dispersion of forgotten things" (p. 81). The goal of genealogy is not to replicate a linear progression, it is a process of opening up spaces to interrogate dominant discourse and forms of control. Its task, in Foucault's (1984) words, "is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history's destruction of the body" (pp. 81–83).

Narrative inquiry is one way to engage in disruptive practices, an act of resistance, as a process of descent perhaps. Yet, vigilance is required so that narrative inquiry that is rich and descriptive doesn't just become sonorous sounds (Freire 1970, p. 52). Narrative inquiry ought not to be moral ordering, but a process of realising discontinuities and disruptions. In thinking through Arendt's differences with Marx and Hegel as to the issue of human action and teleological processes, Yar (2000) points out that Arendt sees action as the capacity to "initiate the wholly new, unanticipated, unexpected, unconditioned by the laws of cause and effect" (p. 8). As a very small case in point, I was confronted by how conditioned we are by the laws of cause and effect during my daughter's rock/garage band programme. This is an in-school programme that functions separately from the required music class. Literacy in the rock band programme has more to do with figuring out the chords for the piece of music students chose to learn as a group then it does learning how to read or notate those chords. There is space, as well, for those who choose to write music of their own to perform at the final concert. During one such presentation I was struck by the lyric, "I want my life back" (Ryan, age 13), which fell on (in more than one way) deaf ears. I hastily scribbled a note on the programme wondering at the power and problematics of "developmentally appropriate practice" and the ways in which we have personally, and as a field, been conditioned to accept this linear progression through angst and alienation. What if, I wondered, we asked different questions, if our inquiry was one of the "language of possibility," the language of disruptions, of ponderings, the refusal of narratives and perhaps, "meaning itself" (White 1981, p. 2). What if we were always preoccupied with initiating the wholly new and unanticipated? It's doubtful that rock lyrics would change, or teenage angst dissipate, but surely our narrative might take on a different kind of ordering that wasn't continually linked to temporal movement, signifying "appropriate development" and "legitimacy" that always seem just within our reach.

Lingering Thoughts

> *Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,*
> *Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,*
> *To the last syllable of recorded time;*
> *And all our yesterdays have lighted fools*
> *The way to dusty death.*
> (Shakespeare's Macbeth, Act V, scene 5, 19–23)

Eagleton (2007) suggests that:

> meaning-of-life queries, when launched on a grand scale, tend to arise at times when taken-for granted roles, beliefs, and conventions are plunged into crisis .... If you are forced to inquire on a large scale into the meaning of existence, it is a fair bet that things have come unstuck. (pp. 31–32)

Perhaps music education is in crisis, perhaps things have come unstuck; one can only hope. In the U.S., conversations about popular musics' place and space are finally becoming part of the "legitimate" musics discussion, perhaps too often in the guise of using this music as a way to bring students into the music that really counts, but discussions are taking place. As are discussions of garage band models whose place, space, and pedagogy, as a way to deconstruct traditional rehearsal spaces, are slowly becoming a part of a larger conversation. Indeed, conferences and journals dedicated to issues of social justice and music education all perhaps speak to a community who see their world finally at crisis point.

Eagleton (2007) writes of characters, such as Willie Lohman, in *Death of a Salesman*, who willingly move forward to self-destruction, and how that movement defines not only the end, but what counts as the end.

> It is the heroic tenacity with which they stay true to their twisted images of themselves that counts in the end, even though it leads them to delusion and death. To live with faith—any old faith, perhaps—is to infuse one's life with significance. On this view, the meaning of life is a question of the style in which you live it, not of its actual content. (p. 92)

Style!? Imagine that our existence is one that boils down to style, rather than engagements that would embody the "wholly new, unanticipated, unexpected, unconditioned by the laws of cause and effect" (Arendt, as cited in Yar 2000, p. 8). Nietzsche believes that "the value of such a crisis is that it cleanses, that it forces together related elements and makes them ruin each other" (2006, p. 389). For Nietzsche, then, a conception of nihilism constructed as an anticipation of what could be—an acceptance of crisis as a condition for reconstruction—is not just hopeful, it is necessary. As I move through my own trajectory of understandings, I recognise my own confrontations with those ways in which my values have protected and prevented me "from despairing of knowing" (p. 385), and realise, as Nietzsche points out, that these were my "great antidote against practical and theoretical nihilism" (p. 385). What I mean by this is that, embedded in those values I held that provided signposts of knowing with certainty—black/white, good/bad, good teaching/bad teaching, quality programmes, so forth and so on—was the

protection from not feeling the loss, indeed, despair of having to confront what I did not know, or ways of being that spoke of stasis and the "complacent repetition of 'truths'" (Arendt 1958, p. 5).

We can no longer live as if the disruptions in our educative endeavours are simply roadblocks on the way to certainty, as if the disruptions of a counter discourse are simply proof that the journey is worthwhile. Nietzsche recognises this temporal world as one in which we continually confront in our own becoming our own demise. As this is hardly a desirable recognition of a state of being, he suggests that in order to counter this we might engage in imagining a world, a time, in which we will become; situating and making dependent our value in the temporal world on a world to be. For Arendt, though, the human condition is dependent on human agency and not teleological determinism. Indeed, as I come to the end of my own thinking through, I offer Arendt's words, not as a sign of hope, for hope is not a sign, or a buzz word, but words upon which we must take action: "The fact that man is capable of action means that the unexpected can be expected from him, that he is able to perform what is infinitely improbable" (1958, p. 178).

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