

De-centering *Music*: A “sound education”

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Music, considered as a field of discourse, has important implications for how educators think and act within their classrooms. Based on the work of Ruben Gaztambide-Fernandez, Murray R. Schafer, and feminist music education scholars, this paper aims to delineate these implications and to propose “sound education” as an alternative. Instead of traditional Music-centered focuses on “appreciation” and “musicianship,” “sound education” proposes “listening” and “sound-making” as alternatives. Gaztambide-Fernandez’s notion of “cultural production” and Steven Feld’s “acoustemology” provide conceptual bases that ground these alternatives in ways which center on symbolic work and social interactions, while allowing for a broad understanding of relationality within ecologies of human and non-human entities.

Keywords: *sound, listening, cultural production, acoustemology*

Students in music education programs in many different parts of the world are usually expected to do an end-of-year presentation, concert, or performance. These presentations are expected to showcase the students’ progress and their teachers’ capacity to transform them into skilled musicians who can get up on stage and play. The expectations of administrators, parents, students, and teachers themselves about these performances are delimited by what they understand to be the boundaries that separate “music” from “noise.” These boundaries are of course not fixed and are dependent on the context: what might be considered music in a conservatory that cultivates avant-garde composers and performers might be considered “noise” at an elementary school. The reason for these discrepancies is that the term “music” cannot be separated from its contextualized uses and social situatedness. Moreover, it is important to remember that music is “not an ideologically neutral, cross-cultural array of sounding phenomena, but rather a [recent and local] constructed cultural category.” (Tomlinson 1999, 344). Although it has been argued that all of the world’s cultures have “music” (e.g., Blacking 1973), the term is used uncritically, without examining the implications

of using this Eurocentric definition. In contrast, there are other words that—although referring to similar sonic practices—have considerably different connotations and histories: *sangita* (Sanskrit), *ngoma* (Kikuyu) or *takiy* (Quechua). As ethnomusicologist Klaus Wachsman explains:

I could say to myself that those phenomena outside my own immediate culture to which I now attach the label “music” because I recognize and acknowledge them to be music, are merely so labeled because, rightly or wrongly, they seem to me to resemble the phenomena that I am in the habit of calling music in my home ground. I am used to thinking of a (more or less) certain group of phenomena as music; this group embraces a number of different properties that I cannot clearly define, yet I have no doubt that they belong to this group “music.” (1971, 384)

Do the Eurocentric origins of the word “music” and its de-contextualized application to other sound phenomena render the concept invalid or inappropriate for educators seeking to include music of different cultural traditions in their classes? I don’t think so. But acknowledging its particularity and the ways in which it is politically deployed in many societies is, in my opinion, of central importance.

In this article, I will address *Music*’ as a discourse in the Foucauldian sense: as “a way of constituting knowledge, forms of subjectivity, and power relationships” (Weedon 1987, 108) in order to critique the ways in which it prescribes and limits what is possible in Western-centric music education classrooms. Many associated terms and concepts, like *talent*, *musical*, *musicianship*, and *appreciation*, are used in everyday interactions by music educators in order to make decisions, justify those decisions, and make sense of their consequences. It seems important then that we examine these terms and consider how they serve our aims as educators as well as how they might undermine those same aims. Scholars in music education have long called for a critical examination of terms like *aesthetics*, *gender*, *race*, *democracy*, *citizenship*, *sexuality*, and even *education*. *Music* itself, however, has not received the same critical attention. Consequently, I find that for teachers committed to anti-oppressive education, it is important to understand the consequences of using concepts like *Music* in order to frame and justify educational practices.

In this paper, I want to question the role of *Music* in music education and to propose an alternative focus on sound. By doing this, I don’t want to imply that conceptualizing cultural practices as music is somehow counterproductive to the aims of an emancipatory education, or that using the word “sound” will somehow resolve these criticisms. However, I would like to problematize the uncritical use

of the term and highlight the unintended consequences, the missed opportunities. I think that focusing on sound could be a good way to de-center *Music* so that, while music in its different manifestations could very well have a role in music education, it does not necessarily have to constitute its center of gravity. In this way, sound could cut across the music/noise dualism in a way which blurs the boundaries between these categories and unseats music from its place of hegemony. However, in this paper I will avoid providing guidelines and describing explicit scenarios of a “sound education.” In what follows, I have gathered a few examples from other educators who engage in what I consider to be “sound education” practices, but I have left the description of this concept purposely vague so that music teachers who find this reflection useful can imagine applications suitable to their specific contexts.

I believe that the premium that is put on *Music*—over any other kind of “sounding” —actually does a disservice to students and to teachers. I’m not the first person to suggest this; I am basing this claim on Ruben Gaztambide-Fernandez’s critique of the arts (2013) and on the ideas of R. Murray Schafer (Schafer 1969; 1992; 2005), whose work in schools questioned the boundaries between music and noise through practices of listening and sound-making. I will proceed by reviewing the work of Gaztambide-Fernandez and what he calls the “rhetoric of effects” in order to understand how the discourses of the arts have come to constrain what is possible in terms of decolonizing, emancipatory pedagogies. Then, I will discuss music itself as a form of discourse in order to move to the notion of sound as an alternative framework. Finally, I will explore the related concepts of listening and sound-making as the two axes of what a “sound education” might be like.

Music and the “rhetoric of effects”

Before examining the concept of music itself, I think it is important to consider how the word is deployed in Western-centric societies for particular ends and by particular entities. As stated before, I do not think music can be considered ideologically neutral. Viewing it instead as a politically active discourse enables us to examine how it is put to use and what its effects are. One of Gaztambide-Fernandez’s (2013) contributions to this discussion is an account of how notions such as the arts are used in discursive practice through what he calls a “rhetoric of effects” (214). This is the kind of discourse that permeates situations like the end-of-year recitals I made reference to previously: a “music class” is expected to perform

something that can be heard as *Music* and this invocation of the concept brings forth a host of related ideas like aesthetics, beauty, pleasure, and the like.

The “rhetoric of effects” is based on the premise that injecting the arts into education—as if they were a tangible substance—can have measurable, positive effects on other academic and/or non-academic aspects of schooling.² The first problem with this “instrumentalist” argument is that defining what the arts are is extremely difficult to do and is open to debate, making it almost impossible to reduce them to independent variables. Ultimately, defining the arts requires imposing someone's definition of what the arts and their effects are. Defining the process in terms of the desired outcomes undermines the whole argument: “If one defines the arts a priori as involving certain ‘mental habits’ and ‘creative processes,’ for example, then concluding that injecting arts into the classroom will make students better thinkers or more creative, is a tautological fallacy” (219). Finally, any experience with the arts which does not conform to the idealized expectation of arts advocacy is tacitly ignored, thus flattening the complexity of our understanding of those experiences.

The second argument is the “intrinsic” one, summarized by the phrase “art for art's sake.” Proponents of this argument (e.g. Howard 2012; Reimer 1989) state that measuring the impact of the arts on math scores is pointless because the arts are their own justification: They are intrinsically valuable activities. However, Gaztambide-Fernandez points to the fact that liberal humanities in general and the arts in particular have been historically deployed in order to signal social distinction and to justify social exclusion (Bourdieu 1993, 221). Within the music education literature, many authors have pointed out how music education has been historically skewed towards the dissemination of elite bourgeois culture and the exclusion not only of women, but of racialized and LGBTQ people (Lamb 1994; Lamb and Dhokai 2015; Gould 2013; Bradley 2015; Koza 2010; O'Toole 2000). Moreover, the arts and particularly music have been central to European colonizing and evangelizing projects throughout history (Baker 2008; Bradley 2012; Vaugeois 2014). Thus, claims that the arts in education require no justification are buttressed by an assumed validity of a Eurocentric hierarchy of taste and contribute to the reproduction of social inequality.

What these two arguments in favor of the arts in the schools and their critiques illustrate is that the arts constitute a discourse that is mobilized by “particular people in particular contexts and in response to particular needs [and] to particular ends” (Gaztambide Fernandez 2013, 223). In other words, the discursive effects

that the arts can have is dependent on who is mobilizing those terms, in what context, and to what ends. These debates are always-already framed in a power matrix that determines which people—their discourses and goals—matter more. All this is to say that the arts—and by extension *Music*—are not neutral discourses and that they are deployed in a social and political field already fraught with uneven power hierarchies. Even more insidiously, the language of the arts and those social groups and institutions that have the means to mobilize it tend to neutralize the political effects of those cultural manifestations which push against the status quo. As philosopher Jacques Ranciere (2010) reminds us, the language of “the arts” frames any object or performance in a space in which cause-and-effect relationships are suspended (142). Thus, their political content can be evacuated and their effects neutralized within the frame of the “aesthetic.”

The problem with *Music*

Music education philosophers have long attempted to define music in terms of *what* it means, *how* it means, and *why*. Two prevailing music education philosophies in North America are the “aesthetic” (Reimer 1989; 2003) and the “praxial” (Elliott 1995; 2005), which differ dramatically in their definitions of music and how and why it is meaningful and important in education. On the one hand, the “aesthetic” rhetoric emphasizes the “appreciation” of formal aspects of a musical work and the expressive and emotional content embedded in its formal structures. On the other hand, the “praxial” rhetoric centres on musicianship and musical praxis as a source of “knowledge-in-action” and emphasizes the contextual and the procedural aspects of music. Many music education philosophers have questioned assumptions of both these approaches and their implicit biases against marginalized populations. Roberta Lamb (1994) argues that feminism as critique involves questioning basic assumptions and concepts and that these critiques must be manifold in order to challenge claims to “universality” or absolute “truth:” “so long as one critical position is assumed, basic categories within music—*music itself*—would remain unchallenged” (62, my emphasis). Despite this call to examine and critique *music itself*, in music education literature, to my knowledge, there hasn’t been a substantial critical examination of music as a discourse and its effects on the philosophy and praxis of music educators.

As the previous discussion illustrates, music is not politically neutral nor is it a cultural universal (Tomlinson 1999, 344). The term “music” conjures notions of

beauty and emotion, a distinctly European construction with historical roots in the eighteenth century. These notions themselves are inextricably entangled with the idea of aesthetics, a discourse which, according to Robin James (2013), is both "organized by white heteropatriarchy, and one of its instruments for organization." (109). Other authors who have traced the historical origins of philosophical aesthetics have identified their common origins with racist and sexist discourses—in Kant's work, for example—and how they constituted each other (Roelofs 2009). Whether or not these entanglements invalidate aesthetics as a discipline, it is important to unearth this relationship and problematize it, as some music education scholars have already done (Bradley 2012; Kertz-Welzel 2008; Regelski 2011). For music educators in particular, it is crucial to acknowledge, as Deborah Wong (2014) does, that "the bedrock structures of music [institutions] rely on [an] inter-constitutive relationship between music and aesthetics" (348). That is to say that when we invoke the concept of *Music* we do so through a system of knowledge, an episteme, which is from its inception Eurocentric, racist, heteronormative, and patriarchal. Any practitioner who intends to address oppressive structures must confront this heritage.

Although since its inception, the definition of music has been expanded by musicians, academics, audiences and institutions to include both non-Western and Western popular expressive sound practices, I consider that this ever-expanding definition works always in favor of hegemonic and Eurocentric institutions, and it only marginally and selectively benefits those who become integrated into its discourse. For a hundred years, the practice of ethnomusicology (including that of proto-ethnomusicologists) was based on an extractionist model in which a European scholar appropriates knowledge and "collects" (underpays for) samples of instruments, stories, and documents (like field recordings) and generates economic, social, and cultural capital upon their return. Only recently have ethnomusicologists started to question this model and its unjust implications (e.g. Feld 2000). Western popular music, particularly African-American music and derived styles have been grudgingly accepted as "music" by North American and European bourgeois societies only when their popularity made them too valuable for publishing and recording companies to ignore. First ragtime and jazz, then rock n' roll, and then hip hop, these genres were first rejected as "noise" and not-music only to be accepted later by music industries as marketable products, ultimately attaining the status of "classical" through discursive appropriation by elite commentators. However, this exaltation has always been selective. *Music* institutions and their

networks—normally outsiders to the communities that cultivate these styles—decide which performers and styles are more representative, more authentic, and thus more worthy of praise and resources.

Music education in turn has followed this trend by first rejecting all that was considered unmusical and dangerous to the project of cultivating “good children-citizens.” In the case of 19th century North America, distinctions between “good” and “bad” child-citizens were made in racialized terms, equating the white Protestant ethos with the ideal, and associating black and white working-class populations with the abject (Gustafson 2008). Likewise, “appropriate” and “inappropriate” music in schools often follow the same racialized patterns. African American styles are slowly and grudgingly accepted as suitable only when they are no longer relevant or representative of contemporary working-class black culture (like jazz or African American folk song). Other non-Western styles that are incorporated into school music are heavily censored and sanitized (like salsa, Native American, or Mexican music) or are purely instrumental and thus easier to dissociate from any contextual information that might be uncomfortable (West African drumming, Gamelan, North Indian instrumental music).

Is there an alternative framework? Scholars in other disciplines—notably visual culture studies—have argued for moving away from the language of the arts in order to address some of these issues (Tavin 2003). Gaztambide-Fernandez (2013) proposes the notion of a “rhetoric of cultural production” to replace the “rhetoric of effects” and discourses centered on the arts. The rhetoric of cultural production is premised on a view of the arts as a form of cultural practice in which culture is defined as *what people do* as opposed to culture *doing something to people*, acknowledging that “*it is actual people, under real social circumstances in particular cultural contexts and within specific material and symbolic relations that have experiences involving symbolic materials and forms of cultural production*” (226, italics original). It is a perspective that recognizes that cultural experiences are neither good nor bad, but complex and unpredictable (225). It is concerned less with whether certain processes or outcomes can be called artistic or not and more with the kinds of interactions and the qualities of the relationships that are enacted through creative symbolic practice (229). In this sense, it parallels Christopher Small’s definition of “musicking” as social action (Small 1998). However, “musicking” has the disadvantage of implying the unexamined pre-existence of “music” in order for someone to “do music.” In so doing, musicking fails to interrogate *music itself*.

The cultural production approach puts the emphasis on the particular contexts, people, materials, and relationships in which these kinds of practices occur. Unlike the rhetoric of effects, it takes as its starting point the notion that: "symbolic work is part of everyone's everyday life and that, as such, it should be front and center in education" (Gaztambide-Fernandez 2013, 226). What is crucial to this approach is that, instead of focusing on how the arts can improve the lives of children and youth, it acknowledges that "the lives of *all* students are always-already imbued with creativity and symbolic work, whether it involves something called 'the arts' or not." (227). As Paul Willis (1990) argues, all human beings, and young people in particular, are constantly creating and recreating their own identities through everyday cultural expressions like language, fashion, social rituals, bodily expressions, and music. Moreover, a move away from the discourse of the arts could have the benefit of evading some of the assumptions and institutional entanglements that ensnare any cultural practice once it is labeled "artistic."

Sound

Admittedly, the distinction between music and noise has been questioned for the past fifty years at least. John Cage famously broke open the distinction with 4'33", a piece that was premiered at a venue in the middle of a forest. When Cage sat down, opened the piano, and remained still for four and a half minutes, the sounds of the forest would have flooded the attentive listening disposition of the audience. What was it that made those sounds *Music*? One could argue that Cage's point was that all sounds are musical when properly attended to. But regardless of whether this was the point, it was arguably the sociocultural framework (a music festival, a music hall, a recognized composer) that enabled the audience's disposition to *listen for* something musical. What they heard was the sounds of birds and trees. What made those sounds musical was not *in* the sounds themselves but in the listening disposition of the audience, made possible by an elaborate cultural and material framework. Likewise, contemporary composers straddle this line with an avant-garde attitude of challenging audiences and transgressing borders. What makes their sounds *Music* is, again, not in the sounds themselves but in the elaborate and complex social, economic, and cultural frameworks that surround these events and enable a "musical" disposition to hear those sounds, in those particular settings, as *Music*.

As recording and mechanical reproduction technologies became more accessible and vulnerable to manipulation, black and Latino youth in inner cities of the United States started experimenting with scratching, sampling, and other techniques of sonic manipulation. They integrated these techniques with rhythmic poetic speech into what today is known as hip-hop. Of course, this style of sonic expression was not accepted as *Music*³ by the music industry until it was so economically valuable that it became profitable to exploit it. Eventually academics, critics and cultural institutions followed suit. Like contemporary composers, hip-hop artists often incorporate “noise” into their compositions: speech, radio broadcasts, gunshots, sirens, and other sounds. Interestingly, many practitioners understand hip-hop to be a multi-modal form of expression that includes kinesthetic, sonic, linguistic, visual and economic components;⁴ some refuse to regard hip-hop as “just music.” Music educators have had trouble incorporating both contemporary Western Art music and hip-hop into music classrooms, perhaps because of the ways that these styles blur the boundaries between music and noise. And although musicologists have engaged with both genres in depth, many have done so with the aim of legitimating and incorporating these styles into the realm of “real music.” The interdisciplinary field of sound studies, however, does not have this same agenda and is thus better positioned to question the categories of music and noise.

Music education has only very recently begun engaging with sound studies (Abramo 2014; Chapman Hill 2018; Thibeault 2017), which has become an increasingly important and transformational influence on other music-related fields like musicology and ethnomusicology. This is somewhat ironic, given that one of the most important pioneers of sound studies in the 1970s was R. Murray Schafer, a Canadian composer who taught and wrote extensively about music education and was the first to theorize about the soundscape. While very innovative and groundbreaking, Schafer’s music education approach—in my view—favored the instrumentalization of sound as a way into music, thus reinforcing a dualistic form of thinking that privileges *Music* over sound and noise (Schafer 1988; Chapman Hill 2018). Yet others have construed sound, listening, and hearing in opposition to image, seeing, and watching (Abramo 2014), thus reenacting what Jonathan Sterne (2012) calls the “audiovisual litany.”⁵

Sound studies is a field which differentiates from music studies in that it takes all sounding phenomena as its area of study, including music recording technologies and music itself (Eidsheim 2015; Erlmann 2004; Pilzer 2012). Musicologists’ and music educators’ reticence to engage with any sounding phenomena that do

not qualify as *Music* (a definition that is problematic, as we have seen) has made apparent a great void in scholarly inquiry which has been eagerly taken up by sound studies. Many music scholars, particularly ethnomusicologists, have begun taking sound studies very seriously, sometimes even abandoning the category of “music” and adopting the more expansive field of “sound” as their area of study (Wong 2014). I believe that music education practices could benefit from taking on this more expansive view of sound and a de-centering of *Music*.

My intention with the idea of “sound education” is not to instrumentalize sound in order to get to the “serious” matter of music, nor to privilege listening and sound-making over other ways of sensing and acting upon the world. The idea instead is to question the hegemony of *Music* over sound and noise and—perhaps more importantly—to question the distinction itself: What is it that makes music *not-just-sound* and what makes sound *not-quite-music*? I consider that the exercises contained in books like *HearSing* (2005) and *Sound Education* (1992) by Schafer, as well as *noisetown* (2017) by Douglas Friesen, straddle the line between music and noise, question the hierarchy that divides them, and choose to dwell in the space in-between. These exercises are exploratory and collaborative, they purposely blur the boundaries between teacher and student roles, and they encourage a creative questioning of categories and boundaries.

Listening

In lieu of appreciation, Schafer emphasizes listening throughout his work. His exercises and writings on the topic reveal a particular understanding of listening as a skill that can be developed and refined and which—in his view—is fundamental to developing a musical imagination (Schafer 1986; 1992). He consistently blurs the line between musical and non-musical listening by exploring space, movement, materiality, and the soundscape. In contrast, definitions of listening within traditional music education are—for obvious reasons—always understood in relation to *Music*. Whether it is defined as a particular kind of skill-set that enables “aesthetic experiences” (Reimer 1989) or as a constructed, context-specific cognitive “process” (Elliott 1995), listening is always thought of as a *musical* practice. What these approaches lack—including Schafer’s—is a more historical and nuanced definition of *listening* as a particular discourse within particular kinds of “auditory cultures” (Erlmann 2010; Ochoa Gautier 2014; Rinsema 2018). Listening, from a cultural

production perspective, requires a critical awareness of auditory cultures and an openness to different modes of acoustic attending.

For the purposes of education, an epistemology of sound is necessary in order to think about the educational aims and possibilities of listening. Ethnomusicologist Steven Feld (2015) has theorized about this through a conjoining of acoustics and epistemology—“acoustemology”—which he describes as a different kind of knowing-in-action.⁶ This concept takes as its starting point “the assumption that life is shared with others-in-relation, with numerous sources of action [...] that are variously human, non-human, living, non-living, organic, or technological” (15). This relational ontology is consistent with a cultural production approach and expands its focus on relations towards the non-human and non-living. Acoustemology works in the same vein as Schafer’s “acoustic ecology” and “soundscape,” but from a specific understanding of positionality and historicity. Feld states, “unlike acoustic ecology, acoustemology is about the experience and agency in listening histories, understood as relational and contingent, situated and reflexive” (15). The benefits of an acoustemological understanding to a cultural production approach to music education should be clear: “Knowing through relations insists that one does not simply ‘acquire’ knowledge but, rather, that one knows through an ongoing cumulative and interactive process of participation and reflection” (14).

An acoustemological orientation allows for the inclusion of everyday listening practices, whether related to music or not. Music listening is a human practice and a tool of sociality; we build, maintain, and contest relationships through our listening practices (DeNora 2000; Bickford 2017). Non-musical listening practices also structure a great deal of our lives: the voices of parents and siblings, the sounds of everyday chores, the sounds of plants, animals, non-living beings like oceans and rivers. All of these sounds play a huge role in how we understand others and ourselves in-relation. However, all this valuable information and the skills that enable this “ongoing cumulative and interactive process of participation and reflection” are left out of music-centered classrooms. But this does not have to remain the case: music educator Douglas Friesen (2017) asks students questions like “What was the earliest sound you remember hearing?” and “What sounds from your life are now lost?” (25). Questions like these are intensely personal and affective, enacting what Elizabeth Gould (2009) calls a “music education of connections [...] in terms of desire” (51). An acoustemological, cultural production approach to music education centers questions like these and the possibilities of connection and desire that they produce.

By listening indiscriminately to sounds (whether *musical* or not), we may open up the classroom space to include, explore, analyze, and creatively manipulate those sounds that are most important to students' lives: the voice of a deceased relative, the sounds of a house pet, the music of a TV ad, or a parent's favorite song. The point of listening in a "sound education" class would be to learn how to pay attention to relevant sounds, analyze, describe, and appropriate them, in order to produce relevant cultural objects (e.g., performances, compositions, installations, recordings). If the focus becomes these kinds of sounds, decisions regarding relevant, authentic, or culturally appropriate repertoire become unimportant. What is relevant and appropriate becomes whatever sounds are available in the school, in the neighborhood, in the city, or at students' and teachers' homes. By de-centering *Music*, students and teachers may find their way to questioning the category itself and the ways it is constructed: Why is this sound considered *Music* and not that? Why is this type of sound more "musical" than this one? What are the social/economic/political/cultural conditions that enable and reproduce these distinctions?

Sound-making

David Elliott's praxial philosophy of music education highlights sound-making and emphasizes the practical, embodied practices of "musicing" (Elliott 1995): performance, composition, and improvisation. The focus of his approach is on *musicianship*, a term that encompasses practical and technical skills as well as listening skills, auditory frameworks of understanding, and habits of listening and (re)sounding which are always local and "practice-specific." Like "appreciation," however, "musicianship" is thoroughly centered on music to the exclusion of any sounds or practices that are not deemed *musical*. Privileging music-making over other kinds of sound-making implicitly sets up an uneven playing-field where some forms of sound-making are deemed more *musical* than others, where some forms of cultural capital have more currency than others.

I find this centering on music problematic for the reasons already stated above. But there are other practical reasons to avoid music-centered education in certain settings. North American music education in public schools tends to privilege instrumental music performance, an endeavor that demands a considerable amount of labor and resources. Achieving proficiency on orchestral instruments requires painstaking dedication, concentration, and individual practice. The cost of these instruments as well as the time and energy required to achieve basic competency

on them are luxuries most children don't have. The living conditions of many families—especially in high-concentration urban areas—make a daily practice routine with an orchestral instrument (e.g., a trombone) practically impossible.⁷ Notwithstanding its impracticality, instrumental practicing is not necessarily the best use of time for a school-aged child. As Gaztambide-Fernandez (2010) puts it: “in the narrow, individualistic sense we have come to conceptualize it in modern music training, [practice] is a selfish, egotistic, paranoiac, defenseless, waste of time” (65). Practice requires isolation, expensive equipment, and an adequate space. From a “sound education” perspective, practice detracts from opportunities for collectively working through sound within an ecology of relationships: peer-to-peer, student to teacher, human to non-human.

Admittedly, there are other music-making practices like group singing (choral or otherwise) that don't require special equipment. There are also experiences associated with making music out of found objects or self-built instruments that are easier to play and more affordable. Many prominent researchers have advocated for the benefits of informal and socialized music learning. These practices avoid many of the pitfalls of traditional band and orchestral ensembles. However, I contend that as long as music educators invoke the notion of music, we are conjuring up a hierarchical field in which Western Art music and its traditional ensembles are at the center and these “alternatives” are marginalized. This hierarchy is not merely a social construction; it is materialized in the institutional structures and cultures of conservatoires, universities, and concert halls. What happens when a student goes through one of these non-traditional music education systems and decides to become a professional musician? Which conservatory or university will admit a student who builds invented instruments, composes digital music and beatboxes, but doesn't play an orchestral instrument or read Western notation?

I am not arguing that a sound-education paradigm would change any of these conditions or solve these problems. But I do think that de-centering *musicianship* in favor of sound-making could potentially enable music educators to transcend some of the limitations and constraints of music-centered approaches. Sound-making avoids the distinction between musical and non-musical sounds, allowing for a more even field in which students, as sound-makers, could be encouraged to explore the parameters of sound, their possible combinations, the practice of coordination, of contrast, and the like. Admittedly, these inquiries are all part of music educators' instruction already, but when it doesn't matter whether the sounds produced are musical or not, the threshold becomes much lower and the field of

inquiry becomes wider. Here is Schafer's (1994) exercise number 74 from "Sound Education," using a sheet of paper: "How many different sounds can you make with it? Tapping, waving, shaking, snapping, tearing, wrinkling, rolling, striking, crushing" (105). Eventually, this exploration could turn into a "composition" that includes rhythm, pitch (using different paper weights), lyrics, form, dynamics, traditional or invented notation, etc. It could also lead to a "sound installation" or "performance piece." All of these end products could be classified as *musical* or *artistic* depending on who is doing the classifying and in which context. But each could also be just an interesting sensorial experience. By removing the expectation of making sounds that are musical, teachers can open up space for more exploration and experimentation. As a result, a "sound education" classroom might well circumvent the dualism of music/noise itself. Within this framework, sound materials could combine recorded radio advertisements, spoken word, the sound of coat zippers, and a violin player in order to explore expressive possibilities and create meaningful works from the sound materials available.

Sound-making is an everyday practice; by virtue of being alive, all living entities are sound-makers. Even non-living entities are sound-makers: rocks crash, rivers flow, wind blows, thunder roars. An acoustemological approach to sound-making takes sounds produced by humans as part of an already sounding, living soundscape. It requires an engagement with relationality, here understood as "both a routine condition of dwelling and one that produces consciousness of modes of acoustic attending, of ways of listening for and resounding to presence" (Feld 2015, 15). While music tends to isolate itself in concert halls where no sounds other than those considered *musical* are allowed, an acoustemological disposition views human sound-making as part of and in relation with all other sound-making entities: human and non-human, living and non-living. The Kaluli people of the Bosavi forest in Papua New Guinea consider the melodies of their vocal genre *gisalo* to be given by the *muni* bird (Feld 1990). R. Murray Schafer's "Patria" cycle comprises a series of works meant to be performed at dawn or dusk, inside a forest or by a lake, incorporating the sounds of the environment as well as the rising sun or a specific constellation (Schafer 2002). Educator Douglas Friesen (2017) suggests in his book *noisetown*, "play traffic sounds back at the traffic" (16). All these sound-making activities might well sound *musical* to someone, but from a "sound education" perspective it doesn't matter whether these interactions sound like music or not. Notions such as *talent*, *musicianship*, or *appreciation* wouldn't be

relevant to the matter of participating in the creation and manipulation of a local soundscape.

In the rhetoric of cultural production (Gaztambide-Fernandez 2013), practice and musicianship are secondary to an engagement with everyday symbolic materials. This approach is less concerned with aesthetics and skill and more with the symbolic exchanges and the social relationships that emerge from creative processes. Sounds can be musical or not, pleasant or unpleasant, and everything in between. Their value lies not so much in the skills required to produce them but in the ways that they are used creatively in order to engage in meaning-making that is relevant to individuals' lives. A "sound education" approach would not have to be about "sounds" as opposed to "music." Within a cultural production framework, musical and non-musical sounds are all part of a field of available cultural resources to be attended to, analyzed, discussed, re-produced, re-purposed, or re-combined. Thus, distinctions between art and popular, Western and non-western, music and noise become irrelevant. All sounding phenomena are fair game. This de-centering of music has the advantage of possibly enabling music educators to transcend the hierarchy of musical styles that organizes which sounds are deemed more musical than others and avoid some of the problematic requirements of traditional music education: the cultural capital to fully participate and benefit from it and the economic resources to access instruments and practice space/time.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have outlined the reasons why *Music* as a discursive mechanism presents a series of challenges to a practice of music education that is committed to anti-oppression, social justice, anti-racism, or decolonization. The historical roots of the term "music" in European modernism and its colonial underside inform the ways in which it helps white heteropatriarchy organize the sounds of the world into music and non-music "bins" (Koza 2010) in ways which coincide with hierarchies of race, gender, and sexuality. Thus, decentering *Music* in music education classrooms might open up possibilities for de-linking from these structures of oppression. Following Gaztambide-Fernandez's call to action, re-framing "music education" as "sound education" might present liberating alternatives for educators. It is important to note however, that a focus on listening and sound-making would not necessarily require abandoning music, but only decentering it, along with related practices like "appreciation" and "musicianship." The "rhetoric of

effects” associated with advocacy for the arts in education relies on “instrumental” and “intrinsic” arguments to justify the continued presence of music in schools (Gaztambide-Fernandez 2013). However, its flawed logic and its unfounded assertions reveal the degree to which these notions can be counterproductive to an emancipatory education project.

Sound education, by eschewing *Music*, would not automatically solve these problems. In tandem with other concepts like cultural production and acoustemology, however, it could provide interesting alternatives and detours from traditional music education. “Cultural production” provides a framework that emphasizes the everyday symbolic materials and practices of students while centering on relationships and symbolic work. “Acoustemology” helps frame listening and sound-making practices in ways which de-center the human in favor of an ecology of relationships that encompasses the human and the non-human, the living and the non-living. Whether we continue to use *Music* in education or decide to “do away” with it, it seems crucial that we rethink some of the basic assumptions we bring to our work. It is clear that it is no longer possible to think of *Music*, and by extension music education, as something “good” or even “neutral.” Perhaps what we can do for now is to, at least discursively, “do away” with *Music*. So, let's burn the bridges and never look back! Perhaps then, as we listen, the sound of a crackling fire will inspire a new song.

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Notes

¹ In this essay, I will use the form *Music* in order to refer specifically to the discourse that organizes our perceptions of sonic cultural forms with reference to Eurocentric perceptions of aesthetics. Whereas arguably any reference to music makes reference to this particular discourse, there is a long history of expanded definitions that attempt to escape the trappings of Eurocentric aesthetics. In writing this article, I have tried to differentiate, when possible, between *Music* in this particularly narrow definition and music in its expanded definition. However, I should make clear that I don't believe that these two abstract definitions can be separated in practice but are instead entangled in ways that reinforce hegemonic hierarchies of aesthetic and racial/gender privilege.

² On the question of “transfer” see, for example, Burton, Horowitz, and Abeles, 2000.

³ For many, and particularly for music education institutions, it still isn't *Music*.

⁴ KRS-One (2003) called these the nine elements of hip hop: breaking, emceeing, graffiti, deejaying, beatboxing, street fashion, street knowledge, and street entrepreneurialism.

⁵ The “audiovisual litany” includes dualistic distinctions like “hearing is spherical; vision is directional” or “hearing immerses its subject; vision offers a perspective” (Sterne 2012, 9).

⁶ This use of “knowing-in-action” is similar to Elliott’s (1995) in regards to musicianship.

⁷ See also Allsup and Benedict 2008.