Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education
August 2026. Vol 25 (4): 1–5. doi:10.22176/act25.4.1

Moments of Transition: When and Why Perspective Matters

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All theoretical writings derive from embodied, emotional, socio-cultural perspectives. As Judith Butler (2005) writes: "The 'I' has no story of its own that is not also a story of relation—or set of relations—to a set of norms" (8). Focusing on these relations and what they both advance and inhibit enables one to simultaneously share and question their perspective.

In my reading, a unique feature of the articles in this issue is how the authors directly incorporate their own socio-cultural perspectives, particularly those outside of traditional music teaching and learning settings. These authors illustrate the inseparability of immigration status, technological platforms, and d/Deafness from questions about who has the opportunity to matter within music making and pedagogy. They also ask how commonplace actions, including listening and assessment, function differently when viewed through new perspectives. As such, the authors in this issue align with Butler's (2005) observation: "To question the norms of recognition that govern what I might be, to ask what they leave out, what they might be compelled to accommodate, is … to become an occasion for posing the questions of who one is (or can be) and whether or not one is recognizable" (23). The authors' unique perspectives encourage readers to consider who and what—

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including immigration policies, exclusionary technological conglomerates, and pervasive performing, listening, and assessment practices—inhibit recognition within music education.

How individuals communicate their perspective can range from clear narratives to conflicted moments. Making sense of their own lives, as well as history more broadly, necessitates that humans tell cohesive stories (Bruner 1990). Yet, there can be a tendency to get lost in structured storylines that omit the messiness of lived experience and moments that could have transitioned otherwise. Nassim Nicholas Taleb (2007) explains what he terms the "narrative fallacy," stating, "We continuously narrate past events in the light of what appears to make what we think of as logical sense after these events occur" (71). One explains a jury verdict, election outcome, or student's devotion to music—or lack thereof—in light of events that most easily support it. Yet, life rarely progresses smoothly from point A to point B. Hannah Arendt (1967) emphasizes the "contingent character of facts, which could always have been otherwise" (70). Focusing on pivotal moments that might have proceeded differently allows this contingency to come forward.

Rather than clear storylines, the authors in this issue tend to highlight one or more what I term "moments of transition." I understand a moment of transition as an instance in which an author articulates or implies contingency—that events could have occurred differently. These include junctures in which the author or their imagined musician-educator must choose among divergent paths.

The most profound instance of such a moment, and the one that inspired this editorial, appears in **Hamidreza Niknampour's** piece "An Autoethnography of Immigration Policy and Doctoral Study in Music Education in the United States." Niknampour explains that while he was revising the initial submission, an active war broke out between the United States and the Islamic Republic regime in Iran:

> This development affected the paper in more than a personal sense. The war intensified the uncertainty already described throughout these vignettes. At the same time, it also altered the scholarly context of the manuscript itself. A paper concerning the experiences of an Iranian student in the United States, revised during a moment of open war between the two states most directly structuring that experience, could not proceed as though this development were external to its argument. The war therefore entered the paper not because I designed this article as a commentary on military conflict, but because the conflict had become part of the very context that made the analysis legible.

In this moment of transition, Niknampour could have chosen to maintain his initial ideas and omit the changing global context. More broadly, Niknampour

examines the specific impact contemporary US immigration policy had on his doctoral experiences. Drawing on the concepts of precarity and forced mobility, he details misalignments between expectations for future collegiate faculty and the opportunities available to international students.

Yet, contemporary governments are not the only entities that police students' and musicians' actions. In "Technofeudal Music Production and Distribution: How 'Streaming Realism' Changes the Popular Music World, and Music Education Interventions" **Holt Stuart-Hitchcox** draws on Yanis Varoufakis' concept of technofeudalism to detail how tech oligarchs influence and ultimately restrain contemporary musicians' practices. Illustrating a moment of transition in which a technology firm may govern artists' music making, Holt writes:

> The music genre in which I work has one or two "editorial playlists" on each primary streaming service, and these playlists provide artists not only with a large portion of their streams, but also with the cultural capital to seek radio play, record deals, and the like.... Artists often listen to playlists they want to be featured on, sampling what is being 'picked up' and modeling their songs accordingly. Artists also sometimes send platform-employed playlist curators (generally well-known members of the industry) samples of unreleased recorded music for opinions, using these opinions to help make their release decisions. Oftentimes, songs that receive negative feedback from these gatekeepers can then be seen as "dead"—if the digital industry will not adopt them, they are regarded as not being worth release expenses, despite the costs already incurred during recording.

While I mourn the act of abandoning one's cultural creation prior to sharing it with a broader public, given time and resource constraints, it is logical that in such moments of transition musicians choose to abandon songs received negatively by key gatekeepers. Furthermore, Stuart-Hitchcox explains that technology companies economically exploit most musicians while creating significant profits superstars and music distributors. In order to move beyond an understanding of streaming as the sole form of contemporary music listening, Stuart-Hitchcox proposes students attend live concerts, engage with physical media such as records and CDs, and take field trips to collegiate radio stations, which often play music that is not commercially successful.

Addressing a different form of pervasive musical exclusion, in "Songwriting as a Form of Artistic Citizenship" **Katja Sutela**, **Laura Vaarala**, and **Silva Belghiti** examine the music making of d/Deaf individuals. Exploring the work of the Finnish musical duo VisualVoice, which uses Finnish Sign Language in its songs, the authors detail the challenges of promoting more inclusive music education

practices. In my reading, a key transitional moment in the piece involves the possible relationships between lyrics and sign language. Rather than translating song lyrics directly—word for word—into sign language, the participants had the freedom to use similar signs that they believed conveyed the embodied intention of the lyrics. The authors explain, "By rejecting linguistic equivalence, Silva and Laura foregrounded difference as a creative resource, rather than something to be resolved or smoothed over. This suggests that socially engaged art can be increasingly potent when it acknowledges friction and when it refuses to collapse diversity into normative ideas of cohesion.... Rather than assuming a shared communicative framework, the collaboration required participants to recognize distinct modes of knowing (visual-spatial, tactile, gestural, auditory) and to work within the tensions between them." Understanding signing as a valid form of artistic expression affirms d/Deaf individuals' identities and contributes to the social inclusion key to artistic citizenship.

Also focusing on intersections of performing and listening, in "The Constitutive Role of the Recipient in Improvisational Co-Creation Processes: A Theoretical Exploration from Phenomenological and Ontological Perspectives" **Davoud Tavousi** proposes cultivating receptive creativity. Offering a moment of transition, Tavousi writes: "This study intervenes precisely at this point of omission, opening a debate on whether musical creation can truly be attributed exclusively to musicians. By problematizing musical production as the sole locus of creativity, the study argues that an artificial separation of production and reception fails to account for the conditions under which music exists." Tavousi ultimately explains listening as relational and context dependent. Promoting further moments of transition, he encourages teachers and students to engage in questions such as: "Which improvisational trajectories appear coherent to me? Where do I lose orientation? Which pauses feel meaningful, which empty?"

Eugene Seow likewise emphasizes the role of listening, but from a contrasting perspective. In "Decolonizing Aural Skills Assessment in Higher Music Education: Epistemic Authority, Evidence, and Judgment" he considers how pervasive collegiate aural skills assessment practices may undermine decolonization efforts through standardized, narrowly defined constructs that exclude certain musical practices. Describing what I interpret as the potential for a moment of transition, Seow imagines: "an assessment brief may: (1) explicitly state the listening construct and musical frame presupposed; (2) permit multiple evidence modes

aligned to that construct (e.g., embodied reproduction, audio demonstration, relational ensemble response alongside notational representation); and (3) require moderation discussions to reference audible features in relation to the declared construct rather than defaulting to rubric shorthand." The decision to engage in such assessment practices would pivot collegiate educators away from prevailing norms. In Seow's words: "These moves do not abandon criteria; they render their epistemic commitments explicit."

Perspectives matter, and pivotal events, both large and small, inevitably inform scholarly writing and reading. Returning to the wise words of **Hamidreza Niknampour**: "Yet to omit any acknowledgment of the war would risk presenting the manuscript as though it existed outside the geopolitical conditions it seeks to examine. In this sense, the war did not simply interrupt my scholarly work; it altered the frame within which that work now had to be read, revised, and presented." For me, the articles in this issue provide opportunities to pause and reflect on how my social situatedness informs my evolving philosophical perspective. Butler (2005) summarizes: "Moments of unknowingness about oneself tend to emerge in the context of relations to others…" (20). I thank the authors for sharing their diverse perspectives and moments of transition, which facilitate the unknowingness and new relations key to reflective music teaching and living more broadly.

References

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Richerme, Lauren Kapalka. 2026. Moments of transition: When and why perspective matters. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 25 (4): 1–5. https://doi.org/10.22176/act25.4.1