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Reimer Responds to Elliott

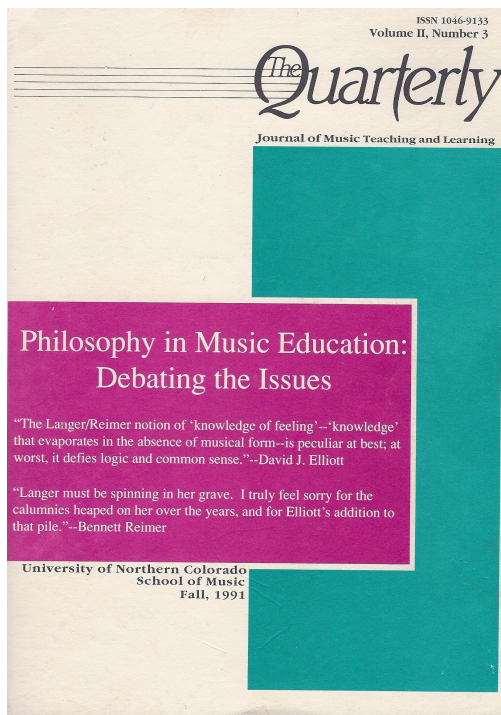
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Reimer Responds to Elliott

By Bennett Reimer

Northwestern University

Into each would-be philosopher's life, it would seem, some rain must fall. Many if not most philosophers go around with a psychic umbrella handy, given that people foolhardy enough to publish to the world their philosophical thoughts must be ready to pay the consequences in having to fend off the attacks of those who find those thoughts not in congruence with their own and therefore obviously deficient.

For over 20 years since the publication in 1970 of the first edition of *A Philosophy of Music Education* (APME), I have dwelt largely in sunshine. There have been a few drizzles now and then but for the most part my philosophical skies have seldom been cloudy, and I have enjoyed the fact that tens of thousands of music educators and others have found the book useful, helpful, and convincing. In one sense that's been delightful for me: who, after all, enjoys stormy weather? But in another sense there has been far too little philosophical discussion in music education, and I have missed the pleasures of a lively community of colleagues specializing in the kinds of ideas that intrigue me, and with whom I could have shared the benefits of stimulating debate. Because no such community has existed our profession has had little experience with the kind of intellectual interaction that elevates, enlightens, and rejuvenates its participants. We have instead been subjected to occasional downpours, such as the present one, in which philosophical criticism is delivered with as much finesse as a dumped bucket of water.

So to respond to Elliott I've had to whip out my umbrella from the closet where it has been gathering dust. In the case of Elliott this is the third time I've had to grab for that umbrella, so I'm getting pretty good at it. The first time occurred when he submitted a critique to *The Quarterly* and I was sent a copy so I could respond. I immediately did

so and mailed it in. Then, a second critique by Elliott appeared in the *Philosophy of Music Education Newsletter* (2:1, October, 1989), covering pretty much the same ground. So I whipped out a second response, for the *Newsletter* (2:2, March, 1990). Then, I was told that Elliott had decided to "edit" the critique I had responded to for *The Quarterly*. When I received it (the essay printed above) it was some dozen pages longer than the original, and, inexplicably, the most blatant distortions and misconstruals I had pointed out in my response to the original had been papered over. So I'm now at it once more, and readers will understand, perhaps, that I am just a little bored and just a little disgruntled at the prospect. Nevertheless I feel it is important to deal with the matter again because at least a few of the many philosophical tangles he presents continue to need to be straightened out.

Elliott's present essay raises clearly a number of issues relating to intellectual criticism. The attempt to criticize or assess another's thought, as it has been embodied in a book or essay, is inherently complex and fraught with possible hazards. First, the critic must thoroughly understand the work he or she is dealing with, which is usually not entirely possible. Second, extrapolations from what an author has said need to be made, and these can be in consonance with those the author might make but can also veer off in directions the author might not or certainly would not have taken. They can even be contradictory to what the author believes. This can occur because the author has not been entirely clear about the issues, leading the critic down mistaken paths; or because the critic, having his or her own axes to grind, puts an author's ideas onto paths suiting the positions of the critic; or because, to make critical points, the critic pushes the extrapolations in directions and to extremes

“My entire point is that the classical point of view of conceptualization and its association with mind is becoming obsolete, allowing us, finally, to recognize musical thinking as genuinely mindful.”--Bennett Reimer

easily criticized. That is, an author's positions can be reduced to absurdity, or at least illogicality, and then shot at for being absurd or illogical.

I find, in Elliott's essay, all of the above hazards in full regalia. For some of his misconceptions and misapplications I think I am at least partly to blame because I was not able to be as clear as I would have liked to be, out of my own weaknesses in thinking and writing. In other cases the arguments he makes against my views represent, simply, another way of looking at the issues rather than a criticism, as such, of my position on the issues. This is perfectly acceptable and inevitable in a field which consists entirely of a multiplicity of views. Obviously we all feel our views are correct or we wouldn't take them, but we also recognize that our views are likely to be only relatively correct rather than absolutely so (unless we think we're Napoleon) and that the differences existing among views is what makes for lively, fruitful debate.

Unfortunately, differences in view are often not presented as such, but as combatants for territory where, it is assumed, only one view can possibly exist. I find many instances of this also in the essay, and I regret it because it would help all of us concerned about these matters if alternative points of view were allowed to be just that, so we could ponder the alternatives as a way to achieve progress in our own thinking. Elliott seems driven to throw alternative views against mine as if they were in combat, when in fact they can quite comfortably coexist as different and sometimes complementary ways to understand complex phenomena.

Finally, there is the situation of flat-out, straight-ahead misrepresentation or *reductio*, and I regret to find so many of these in his essay (one is too many) as to be bewildering, both as to how to untangle all of them from their convolutions, and as to why he gets himself into them in the first place. This

gives criticism a bad name and we should not be happy when it occurs.

I wish I could trace all the levels of critical commentary in Elliott's essay through each instance in which they occur, but I'm afraid that would make my response far longer than his critique, would entrap the reader in a very tangled conceptual (I dare to use that word) web indeed, and would simply take too much time. So I will choose a few issues to discuss, hoping the reader will assess those I do not in light of his or her understandings of my positions and of the efficacy of Elliott's critiques of them.

First, and as a key to much that follows in his essay, Elliott claims that philosophical commitment is static, therefore likely to become obsolete eventually, and that our commitment requires regular rethinking. What he is implying is that APME (this refers to the second edition in question) represents a static commitment on my part, that this commitment is in the nature of a dogma and therefore must sooner or later become obsolete, and that we must then recommit ourselves to still another dogma which will then, just as inevitably, also become obsolete. This formulation is repugnant to my own thinking, as evidenced by the magnitude of growth and change from the first edition of APME to the second one. But one thing I did insist on keeping from the first edition was my explanation of the hazards entailed in using aesthetics in building a philosophy.

(T)he field of aesthetics must be approached in a highly selective way. It would be beside the point (and quite impossible) to investigate indiscriminately the writings of every aesthetician in history, or every aesthetician of this century, or every aesthetician alive today, looking for leads to a philosophy of music education. Instead, the search must start with an acquaintance with the field of music education: its problems, its needs, its history, its present status. Aesthetics must be used by music educators to serve their own purposes. Otherwise they are likely to lose themselves in the history

“When Reimer states that music is ‘nonconceptual in essence’, we must consider the possibility that his philosophy offers a misleading view of the nature and value of music and music cognition . . .”--David J. Elliott

and problems of aesthetics, never to emerge with a workable philosophy. A philosophy should articulate a consistent and helpful statement about the nature and value of music and music education. Only those portions of aesthetics useful for this purpose need be used. Aesthetics must never be the master of music education—it must be its servant. (p. 15)

Our commitment in formulating a philosophy of music education should not be to a dogma, but to an ongoing process of clarification, and our rethinking should not be of that commitment, but of the contents and issues we are trying to cope with. I've stated this view often, in APME but also more recently: “Aesthetic educators need no discipleship to a particular person or point of view. Instead, they seek compelling insights about the value of music, organize those insights into the most coherent and convincing philosophy they can, and try to use that philosophy as their guide for teaching. Aesthetic education, therefore, is not founded on a static, revealed body of truths and proper actions; rather, it is based on an attitude that truth consists of a growing and changing conjunction of carefully examined ideas about what music is and does.”¹

The point of Elliott's comments about philosophical commitment is precisely to set up philosophizing as the posing of dichotomies that can only be resolved by one view replacing another, and that accounts for the tone of his essay as being an exercise in pitting views against one another. For example, Elliott makes a big to-do about the fact that aesthetics is historically embedded in particular sets of ideas and events. Of course. But that says nothing about the reality of the growth of aesthetics far beyond its ancient history, and its modern positions and interests so transformed from their “fine art” precursor ideas as to render those older ideas hopelessly quaint. Elliott's quote about how the nobility in eighteenth century Europe used the “prestige function” of fine art to

mark themselves off from the crowd, and his other references to the social history of aesthetics, are about as germane to contemporary aesthetics, and to my own view of music and music education, as eighteenth century science is to contemporary quantum physics. And it would come as a bit of a surprise to the thousands of people laboring in aesthetics to hear that the incredibly diverse views they represent are actually only a single concept about “fine art.” That concept itself, and issues relative to the intelligence of art-making, and issues of the functions of aesthetics as a field, are all grist for the mill of contemporary aesthetics, a mill grinding on and on (sometimes to the dismay of someone trying to keep up with it all). And in particular, the nature of artistic functioning, including the relation of craft to expressive form, are legitimate issues to be explored within the broad realm of aesthetics. One of Elliott's citations to “the recent philosophical literature of artistry” about which I am apparently unaware, is, as a matter of fact, a doctoral dissertation (Rao) on which I labored intensively and that reviewed the literature exhaustively.

Elliott's discussion of aesthetics is representative of the way he treats many if not most issues he addresses. He so narrowly and specifically focuses his vision, concentrating on this or that single dimension and its particular difficulties, that the larger issues never emerge. Yet he is willing to dismiss whole areas of thought because somewhere along the way there are or were flaws. In the matter of aesthetics he concentrates on one aspect, neglecting the fact that, in the twentieth century, as Ralph Smith reminds us,² aesthetics includes not only the speculative branch, which tries to synthesize (Dewey, Langer, Goodman are examples) but the analytical, which addresses a variety of aesthetic concepts (expression, criticism, style, etc.) in an attempt to probe their complexities (Hospers, Beardsley, Dickey, etc.) In addition, scien-

tific aesthetics has become a major dimension of the field, with a host of studies in the psychological branch (Munro, Arnheim, Kreidler, Gardner), the sociological branch (Becker, McFee) and the anthropological branch (Berliner, Chalmers). (Many other names could be added, of course.) But with all this diversity of scholarship an underlying premise remains persistent—that the arts always have been, and remain, a source of a special, satisfying way for humans to experience. As Hans and Shulamith Kreidler put it in their *Psychology of the Arts*, “. . . what determines the value, estimation, fate, and survival of a work of art is in the last count the experience it arouses in its perceivers.”³

Readers who systematically keep up with important journals in aesthetics (*The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* and *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* are two basic ones), and the ongoing flow of new books on philosophical dimensions of the arts, will be immediately and keenly aware that Elliott's position about the state of aesthetics represents a distinctly minority view that is not at all in the mainstream of contemporary thinking. That thinking is very diverse and is spread along a continuum from, at one end, skepticism about long-held views (the position he would like to think is more central than it is) to the other end which continues to probe the complexities of traditional views. In the mainstream is the attempt to broaden understandings without either abandoning the painstakingly built ideas of this century or accepting them uncritically. For readers not current about the aesthetics scene today, I would strongly recommend a look at two recent books that give a fair representation of the flavor of recent thinking. For aesthetics as a field, the small book by Marcia M. Eaton, *Basic Issues in Aesthetics* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 1988) is an excellent overview. For aesthetics as related to education the new anthology edited by Ralph A. Smith and Alan Simpson, *Aesthetics and Arts Education* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1991) gives an excellent picture of the salient issues. These, and a host of other recent publications, will give some perspective on the particular view Elliott is espousing. But they will not explain the narrowness or rigidity with which he espouses it.

In addition to the issue of what constitutes a defensible aesthetic position, Elliott implies that all functions and aspects and valuations of art are to be given equal weight, and since there are so many of each, no distinguishing features of art or values of art can be identified as more central than others. But I am far more persuaded by the essentialist challenge to probe for those conditions, or symptoms, or parameters, that help us understand why we recognize art to be something other things are not. We must recognize that other periods of history than our own and other cultures than our own have different belief systems about music. (This is something I believe should be taught to children as part of music education—an aspect we've neglected unconscionably). But I am convinced that this does not exempt us from having and honoring our own system of beliefs and trying to clarify what those are. That, I take it, is the use of philosophy, and it is what engages me (and most other philosophers) in the enterprise. It is simply a cop-out, I think, to utter a truism—that music is a multidimensional, multicultural phenomenon—and figure one has said something useful. Something, after all, makes all that stuff *music*, and the stimulation shared by the thinkers who have pursued that elusive quality is the joy of doing philosophy. The pursuit will never end, of course, but each culture, as it struggles to define itself, is obligated to engage in it.

Now a word about Susanne Langer, about whom Elliott makes a great deal more than I do in basing his rejection of an entire philosophical view on long since recognized and often repeated inadequacies in her ability to explain the relation between art and affect. Langer must be spinning in her grave. I truly feel sorry for the calumnies heaped on her over the years, and for Elliott's addition to that pile. If there is anyone we should be grateful to for pioneering work to free aesthetics from Romantic, narrow, “expression of emotion” theorizing, it is she. Her efforts were heroic, and she got herself into all sorts of trouble for being innovative, as, for example, in trying to redefine how symbols work and having the word thrown into her face, as Elliott continues to do in his tortuous badgering of her seminal

attempts to bring some clarity to the idea of symbolic transformation. His serpentine arguments about how art cannot “symbolize” feeling without the feelings already being accessible, are dissolved immediately by Francis Sparshott, who dismisses the issue by explaining that “According to her theory, it is just because the artist’s (and other people’s) repertory of ‘knowledge’ of the possibilities of feeling is not available as knowledge but exists as a sort of empathetic capacity that art is necessary to symbolize the modes of sentience. The conundrum that her critics pose for her, that we cannot know that art does this unless we can already recognize the symbolized modes of sentience, so that the symbolization is unnecessary, is readily solved: all that we know is that the work of art before us gives form to *some* form of sentience; *what* form that is we can say only by describing the work.”⁴

The astonishing imaginativeness of Langer’s contribution, to say nothing of its breadth of application to the specificities of all the arts, opened major new avenues of thought and also provided aestheticians with opportunities to pick apart some of her imperfections. An apt retrospective on Langer is given by Howard Gardner in his latest book *To Open Minds*,⁵ in which, in his description of his college education, he says:

By far the greatest impression was made on me by the two books . . . the Platonic dialogue *The Meno* . . . and the slim treatise *Philosophy in a New Key*, in which the philosopher Susanne Langer described the analysis of symbolic forms that was becoming a dominant theme in modern Western epistemology. . . . Building upon centuries of philosophical analysis, and drawing as well on results from studies of human psychology (including even developmental psychology), Langer argued that the ability to traffic in symbols—like words, pictures, diagrams, and works of music—is the hallmark of human cognition. Moreover, while acknowledging that mathematics differs from other forms of human knowledge, she did not fall prey to the standard Platonic (or Pythagorean) ploy of placing it upon a unique pedestal. Instead, she put forth a more balanced and humane view, where artistic forms of thinking are as valid as mathematical or scientific forms: the difference lies in the kinds of symbol used and the kinds of cognitive process engaged by these symbols. I was particularly struck by Langer’s analysis of music as concerned, not with feelings *per se*, but with the

“forms of feeling”—with the tensions, dynamics, and contrasts that permeate our emotional existence but cannot be adequately or accurately captured by words or mathematical symbols. Perhaps this “formal” formulation explained the powerful hold music obtains over so many of us. Though I certainly did not appreciate all the implications of Langer’s work, I sensed an important contemporary effort to lay out the vehicles of thinking and of the arts and—her special twist—to base the analysis upon studies of human behavior that had scientific status.

Langer’s monumental struggles, with all their missteps, dangling ends, and frustrating circularities, helped set in motion a train of scholarship pursued vigorously by hosts of others since her time. Another thinker who struggled (earlier) with many of the same problems Langer tackled was John Dewey, who, despite the brilliance of his contribution, which must surely be counted among the most important in the history of aesthetics, left them unsolved, so that others have had to pursue them further. The crux of that pursuit, as I understand it, is to get closer to something that, in APME (p. 130,131), I suggested may ultimately not be achievable—a full explanation of the precise relation of the sounds of music to our inward experience of them. The issue was well put by St. Augustine (A.D. 354-430) who said, “I realize that all feelings of our spirit, in their various dispositions, have their own modes in voice and song, which are stirred up because of some secret affinity with them.”⁶

What precisely, is the secret of that affinity? Of all the scores of writers throughout history who have tackled this issue, Langer, I think, was the most prolific in her suggestive prose as to the nature of that relationship. But, of course, ideas about it have moved on and aestheticians and others since her time have tried out, for starters, “arousal,” “metaphor” (in at least a half-dozen meanings), “morphology,” “isomorphism,” “exemplification,” “embodiment,” “indwelling,” “figurative possession,” “emotions functioning cognitively,” “feeling vested and perceived,” “experiential structure,” “collaboration,” “possession,” “archetypal contents,” “essentic forms,” “aesthetic images,” “regional qualities,” “fictive character,” “pure process,” “humanly organized sound,” “deep structure,” “affective consciousness,” “image schemata,” “psycho-

“Elliott claims that I insist that a listener must not consider social, historical, moral, political, etc. concerns in music. This is patently absurd . . .” -- Bennett Reimer

physical embodiment,” “subject-reflexive behavior,” “autonomic nervous system arousal,” “iconic mimicry,” and, out of sheer frustration with it all, “some freak in the human animal” (Leonard Bernstein).

Elliott takes me to task for not being entirely clear about the matter. I confess my guilt. I am not, unfortunately, the first person in history to have solved the secret St. Augustine identified. So I settled for giving a list (p. 52) of some of the ideas suggested from the large, convoluted literature on the subject. Of this I continue to be convinced, as are the vast majority of scholars in the present day literature: that music does relate uniquely in some as yet undefined (or undefinable) way to inner experience; that we treasure that relation and (largely), therefore, music; that music heightens the quality of our lives by offering occasions for creating and sharing inner experiences we find satisfying, broadening, deepening, challenging; that such experiences occur in a multitude of ways and settings ranging from the concert hall to the street fair to the protest march to the worship service to the crooning of a mother to her baby to the rock concert to the harvest dance and even to Grand Ole Opry; that the more that education helps people share such experiences from a broader diversity of music and complexity of music the more such education can be conceived as musically educative. We can argue, on and on, the finest points and most excruciating subtleties of the interface between musical sounds and human experiences, but I find no reason whatsoever to await their (unlikely) resolution before suggesting that there are things we can do as music educators to enhance the possibility of that interface taking place.

With these broad issues having been sketched, I want to mention a few specifics from Elliott’s review that beg for a response.

He faults me for using as synonyms “aesthetic,” “musical,” “artistic.” I was aware of the hazards of doing this, but, wanting to make the argument more accessible to those thrown off by the word “aesthetic,” compro-

mised in that direction, and I explained why I was doing so in the preface. Perhaps that was a tactical error. But surely he must recognize that it was a tactic, because he goes so far as to use as an argument against it an example I myself use in the book to distinguish between the experience of nature and of art (he uses the experience of a sunset—I use the experience of a farm scene). He concludes, exactly as I do, that what separates art from nature is the presence or absence of human agency and artistry. But notice that in his discussion of this point, he uses as criteria for the experience of a sunset, or a painting, precisely those he has laboriously attempted to discredit in the previous pages of his essay—aesthetic criteria. “Any phenomenon,” he says, “natural or human-made, can be examined in terms of its sensuous, formal, or ‘beautiful’ qualities. A sunset, for example, can be looked at solely in terms of its colors and so on.” Having rejected standard aesthetic thinking in the preceding (and following) material, he blithely employs it when it suits his purposes, ignoring the fact that he destroys his own argument in the process. (That argument, by the way, is not so neatly supported by the references he cites, which deal in complexities far beyond the unshaded view he offers.) His assertion that “The weight of modern scholarship . . . presents a major challenge to Reimer’s aesthetic concept of music” is simply preposterous, in that the “aesthetic concept” is not mine, of course, but represents, as I have pointed out, the wide mainstream of contemporary thinking about the arts, as Elliott unwittingly demonstrates by his many self-contradictions on this point sprinkled throughout his essay.

In another misunderstanding, Elliott claims that I insist that a listener must not consider social, historical, moral, political, etc. concerns in music. This is patently absurd and pushes the position I argue (and which I give a diagram for on p. 28 as contrasted with the diagram I do *not* agree with on p.24) into an indefensible corner. I believe that context is an essential aspect of the ex-

“ . . . MEAE maintains that all music everywhere ought to be approached by making ‘external’ considerations subservient to internal ‘aesthetic qualities.’” -- David J. Elliott

perience of music (and all art). What I argue is that context by itself, separated from its artistic use, is, so far, nonartistic. That is a far cry from the formalism he imputes to me—a position about which I am critical in the book. (Formalists, of course, criticize me for being overly critical of formalism.)

Elliott also so exaggerates my concerns about the technical-critical aspects of music as to suggest another absurdity—that I would regard a pianist’s style or a violinist’s vibrato as “nonaesthetic” or “nonmusical.” Really. Any music educator living in this world knows precisely what I mean by my criticisms of an overly technical approach to teaching music, and I’m sure Elliott also knows what I mean. He just can’t resist throwing a few rabbit punches.

[The following two paragraphs were written in response to Elliott’s original critique. His present version changes several wordings which I demonstrated to be misrepresentations. The basic points I make here remain valid.]

Elliott’s discussion about the status of music as conceptual or nonconceptual starts usefully and ends in a partial quote so blatantly misrepresenting my own view as to have shocked me. In the book I suggested that, in order to distinguish musical experience from those experiences dependent on the use of symbols in their conventional sense, we should understand concepts to entail symbol use (I used two standard definitions). This allows us to contrast concepts and percepts. Percepts, I suggested, are nonconceptual according to how that term has traditionally been defined. A clarinet tone is an instance of a perceptual construct, and it performs in our mental structure as a “nonverbal cognitive unit” (Elliott’s term). As he correctly says, we must use such units in listening to Beethoven’s (or anybody else’s) music. (He is quite unaware when he says this, of course, that he is completely contradicting his previous arguments about aesthetic experience and musical engagement and “multicultural” criteria.) So we do not disagree about all this, and my use of a traditional defi-

nition of “concept” as a way to clarify the distinction that artistic thinking is mindful on its own terms seems to me, despite his discomfort with it, extremely useful.

His quote from Glucksberg, meant to be critical of my view, is precisely the view I argue: “. . . neither the content nor the processes of thought need be verbal.” My position is that thinking in art is genuinely mindful, rational, intelligent, logical, cognitive. To my dismay, Elliott quotes me as saying that the arts “do not involve reasoning or intelligence or the intellect or logic or rationality or even *thinking* as these have been understood.” What he leaves out is the first part of my sentence, which says “No wonder subjects such as the arts, which are nonconceptual in essence, have been considered secondary or even trivial in that they” (here his quote starts), and then he leave out the last part of the sentence which says (after “as these have been understood”) “by this limited and outdated position as to the nature of cognition.” There are no ellipses before or after his quote to indicate that something was left out. What was left out, of course, is the point that the traditional understanding of how concepts work makes the “basic” subjects in schools the conceptual ones, and the arts have suffered greatly from such thinking. I find it incomprehensible that he criticizes me for not regarding musical experience as cognitive, when that is precisely the point I argue (and have argued in many other places in addition to APME).

What has not been done thoroughly yet, by me or anyone else, is to explore the many insights and applications to practice in the burgeoning literature on cognitive diversity. As a member of the planning committee of the 84th NSSE Yearbook *Learning and Teaching the Ways of Knowing* (1985), (mentioned on p.11 of APME), along with Elliot Eisner and Robert J. Sternberg, I had the opportunity to help formulate a conception of multiple cognitions resulting in a challenging set of essays covering the cognitive modes of the aesthetic, the scientific, the interpersonal, the intuitive, the narrative/paradigmatic, the formal, the practical, and the spiritual. While this book will not

be the last word (it is, more likely, among the first) it is an important step toward recognizing that cognition has been too narrowly defined as being conceptual, in the sense I define this in APME, and that aesthetic cognition is a *bona fide* way of knowing. This idea will be taken further in an NSSE Yearbook I am co-editing with Ralph Smith, which will focus on the arts as cognitive (*The Arts, Education, and Aesthetic Knowing*, University of Chicago Press, 1992). So when Elliott says I “embrace” the classical view of a concept, and that this view is becoming obsolete, he is turning me around 180 degrees. My entire point is that the classical view of conceptualization and its association with mind is becoming obsolete, allowing us, finally, to recognize musical thinking as genuinely mindful.

Elliott’s discussion of concepts terribly muddies the points I have tried to make. It also so glosses over the positions of the sources he quotes as to verge on misrepresenting them, in that most are either not remotely discussing the issues pertinent to my explanation or are dealing with minute analyses of concepts underlying my general use of the term. For just one example, Smith’s analysis cited by Elliott of “exemplar” representations—a “faded pair of blue jeans” for “pants”—in no way contradicts my explanation. The reason I raised the point about concepts in the first place gets hopelessly lost. He has the temerity to point out as a criticism that conceptual learnings influence musical experience. But he nowhere mentions any of the curriculum work I’ve contributed which is heavily based on a conceptual organization of learnings precisely because concepts are such powerful learning organizers. I’ve gone to extraordinary lengths to clarify, however, that verbal learnings are not equivalent to musical experiences—they aid in getting us closer to the essentially nonverbal experience music exists to provide. Unfortunately, the pervasive understanding in the field of education is that cognitive functioning requires the use of concepts as verbal, symbolic media—see Bloom’s Taxonomy, *Cognitive Domain*, as the best case in point. Because music does not essentially consist of verbal conceptualizations music has not been understood as one of the “cognitive” (read “basic”) subjects. Now that we are beginning to argue successfully that cognition consists of far more than conceptualization as that term is massively understood, we would be “shooting ourselves in the foot” not to take full advantage of that argument. (A helpful explanation

of these matters is given by Elliot W. Eisner in his article “On the Relationship of Conception to Representation,” *Art Education*, March, 1983, in which he explores the implications of the fact that “The identification of language with the use of words, and words with thinking has, of course, undermined the place of the arts in education. . . .”)

Based, ironically, on the traditional use of concepts as a means of reference, Elliott raises a dead horse from the grave to flog it about—whether music “refers” (that is, “acts as a symbol for” in the conventional sense) to feelings and therefore whether Reimer is, therefore, a closet “referentialist.” This, I am sorry to say, is just silly. That there is a relationship between sounds and experiences of them (still undefined or undefinable as previously mentioned) has nothing to do with referentialism as I painstakingly define it (even with a diagram). I do find it amusing that Elliott manages to accuse me of two entirely contradictory and, in my opinion, flawed views—formalism and referentialism—in the same essay. I must be doing something right.

Related, and similarly stretched to the breaking point, is the material about the question of how music “educates” if it does not tell us about something outside music. Well, the point is that our experience of music is somehow (the great “somehow” we can’t explain) *in* the music and our engrossment in it. A whole chapter (5) tries to explain this. And to suggest that we would have to be constantly engaged in listening to music to claim we have “knowledge of” it surely is pushing things beyond seriousness. Such a view of knowing “is peculiar at best; at worst, it defies logic and common sense,” says Elliott. I surely agree. Do we have to be in a state of constant eros for love to be a pervasive factor in our lives? (Well, that doesn’t sound too bad, actually.) Do we have to be in spiritual communion as in worship for spirituality to be an aspect of our lives? Surely we are not so compartmentalized. Our wholeness includes all the diverse, particular experiences that occur in living, and the attempt to help each specific experience to be of higher quality according to its kind is what we generally call “education.”

That is why music education is unique even though it is a member of a larger family called arts education, and why music educates uniquely even if it operates within the same cognitive domain as the other arts. The arts, I argue in the book, are not redundant. Each allows us to achieve a kind of cognition.

Taken together there are characteristics in common among those cognitions. But there is no such cognition “out there,” separate from that which each art affords uniquely. “Aesthetic cognition” and “aesthetic sensitivity” are only concepts—that is, they refer to a class of possible experiences. They do not constitute those experiences. Elliott says that what I want to improve is not musicianship, not musicality, not artistry, but aesthetic sensitivity. What I argue, in fact, is that you can’t improve aesthetic sensitivity to music *except* by improving musicianship and musicality and artistry. Ditto for sensitivity to any other art. Education in *each* art uniquely contributes to the totality of what all the arts offer. Leave one out and you don’t get what it has to give. I’ve been saying this for more years than I care to remember, and it is not a little disconcerting to read that a concept such as “aesthetic sensitivity” is so misconstrued or misrepresented as to be made to substitute for the actualities out of which it takes its meaning.

But having said all this I do confess that my lifetime as a musician and music educator has indeed colored my view of the arts. Langer’s position that an understanding of music is the key to understanding how the other arts work is one I find particularly compelling, and it pervades every aspect of my philosophy. Colleagues in other arts education fields have noted this, justifiably, and I am prepared to live with this orientation and to defend it philosophically. That’s what I meant in saying that “The position about art being taken in this book is essentially a ‘musical’ one” (p. 119). As with other claims I make, Elliott twists this one around severely. I could understand the criticism that my musical orientation limits my view of the other arts, but it is not possible to understand the reverse. My philosophy, read by people outside music education, clearly presents a music education point of view extrapolated to arts education, and, as I say, I accept that. What I find deplorable is to have my point of view presented inaccurately, and then to be criticized on that basis.

All these and other distortions (and there are so many of them as to overwhelm the valid clarifications) lead Elliott to conclusions that seem to me unfortunate. “. . . APME,” he asserts, “does not seem to provide a secure philosophical basis for the organization and conduct of music education.” Putting aside the obvious fact that no single book can possibly do that but can only contribute toward it (and that he says not a word in the

entire essay about the whole chapters I devote to the conduct of music education), I would argue that our history gives evidence contrary to his view. A great deal of what has actually occurred in music education over the past three or so decades (which Michael Mark has suggested we call the period of aesthetic education)⁷ has, in fact, been conducted according to and understood as being based upon principles stemming from my work and that of many others who share a more or less common philosophical orientation (as Elliott recognizes in his introduction). So this philosophical view has exerted, to a higher degree than philosophy ever has in the history of music education, an important influence on how we have conceived of our profession and attempted to conduct ourselves accordingly.

Our task now, I think, is to continue to be open to changes in this philosophy that would represent improvement. A great deal has happened over the past dozen or so years in aesthetics, education, psychology, research, philosophy in general, some of which I attempted to incorporate in my revision. But it would be impossible for any one person to do all that needs to be done in this regard. The job is massive.

But it is precisely because so many new ideas can be and need to be incorporated that I believe this philosophical view is alive and well. A philosophy begins to wither when important new insights can find no room in it. Contrary or alternative views are not the issue—these always exist and have existed, of course, since the inception of this philosophy in the late 1950s. Viability is a function of growth potential. I have the conviction, about the philosophical orientation I have tried to explain in APME, that it has only begun to fulfill its potential. Elliott’s critique reinforces that conviction.

Notes

1. Bennett Reimer, “Music Education As Aesthetic Education: Past and Present.” *Music Educators Journal*, 75:6, February, 1989, p. 26.
2. Ralph A. Smith, “The Changing Image of Art Education.” *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 21:2, Summer, 1987.
3. Hans Kreidler and Shulamith Kreidler, *Psychology of the Arts*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1972, p. 6.
4. Francis Sparshott, *The Theory of the Arts*. Princeton: Princeton University press, 1982, p. 321.
5. Howard Gardner, *To Open Minds*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1989, p. 41,42.
6. M.T. Clark (Trans.), *Augustine of Hippo: Selected Writings*. New York: Paulist Press, 1984.
7. Michael L. Mark, “A New Look at Historical Periods in American Music Education.” *Council for Research in Music Education*, Bulletin No. 99, Winter, 1989. 