

12 Translanguaging in Music: Exploring Transmusicking among Experimental Musicians

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Introduction

The link between music and language has been theorized and researched from multiple perspectives and in multiple fields for many years. Darwin's idea of a musical protolanguage (Darwin, 1871) has gained a lot of support in recent years from neurology and developmental psychology, with some researchers even stating that 'it is more productive from a developmental perspective to describe spoken language as a special type of music' (Brandt *et al.*, 2012: 1).

It is therefore not surprising that music has also been of interest to various scholars with respect to translanguaging. While many publications focus on translanguaging in lyrics, García and Ortega (2020) offer an innovative perspective by conceptualizing music as a literacy and thereby introducing musical meaning-making into the multimodal repertoires that individuals use to translanguage. In a study conducted by Ortega (2018), she demonstrates how after-school music programs may act as an educational third space for marginalized students, who are often perceived as 'struggling' to comply with the language policies of the school space (Ortega, 2018: 3). By participating in a music program, the children receive access to a community of practice in which they can creatively employ various literacies and develop a 'habitus of success' (Ortega, 2018: iii).

While the chapter at hand in no way seeks to question the positive effects that community music programs can have on school literacies, it seeks to offer a more critical perspective on what and whose music we teach in schools. Translanguaging as a pedagogical stance that 'disrupt[s] hierarchical orders' (García, 2019: 372) of languages in the classroom can obviously only have an impact in an environment where language is being

taught or at least used. While this is true for most, if not all, schools, the same can unfortunately not be said for music, as Ortega's work shows. However, once access to music education is established, I argue that a discussion of musical translanguaging should move beyond the proven benefits of musical training for language acquisition and the positive effects it certainly has on the self-image of many students. Instead, music itself ought to be viewed as a form of multimodal discourse that 'constitutes social practice and is at the same time constituted by it' (Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999: 92). Understanding music as discourse may subsequently prompt us to question the norms and values that shape the musical discourse in the classroom. But even before that, we are challenged to think about how meaning is created with and through music. To that effect, this chapter builds on the nexus between translanguaging and Christopher Small's term 'musicking' (Small, 1998) proposed by García and Ortega (2020). After laying out the theoretical sources that inform my understanding of translanguaging, I discuss the similarities to musicking and also point out the limitations of Small's concept. Since these limitations mostly concern those aspects of musical meaning-making that go beyond the immediacy of performance, I decided to conduct a small-scale exploratory study based on five in-depth interviews with experimental musicians whose practice involves moving in between and beyond conventional musical genres. The analysis is guided by a two-part question:

- (1) How do experimental musicians create musical meanings?
- (2) How does this meaning-making relate to translanguaging?

While it is, of course, far beyond the scope of the explorations at hand to develop a comprehensive theory of translanguaging and music, it becomes apparent in the interview data that musical meaning-making goes beyond musical performance. Inspired by translanguaging theory's view of music as a part of the semiotic repertoire that individuals use to language, I therefore argue that a transmusicking perspective on music ought to understand thinking and speaking about music and its social conditions as integral parts of any musical practice.

Theoretical Background

Translanguaging

Otheguy *et al.* (2015: 281) remind us that 'named languages are social, not linguistic, objects'. As well-known as this idea may be, it is still of great importance when attempting to describe how individuals make use of language. Specifically, it sheds light on the key difference between translanguaging and code-switching. Code-switching refers to 'the juxtaposition of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical

systems or sub-systems, within the same exchange' (Gumperz, 1977: 1). Referring to 'different grammatical systems', this definition implies an outside perspective on language. Linguistic features are attributed to certain grammatical systems, which creates a picture of a speaker mentally switching from one system to the other. Translanguaging, by contrast, posits that 'the mental grammars of bilinguals are structured but unitary collections of features, and the practices of bilinguals are acts of feature selection, not of grammar switch' (Otheguy *et al.*, 2015: 281). Translanguaging thus takes an inside perspective on language and looks at how individuals employ the entirety of their idiolect to make sense of everyday situations. While translanguaging has a specific interest in the language practices of multilinguals, this also means that 'the idiolects of monolinguals and bilinguals are not qualitatively different, only quantitatively different' (Otheguy *et al.*, 2015: 292).

One example of how multilinguals employ their linguistic repertoire in creative ways is provided by Li Wei (2016). In his study of how Chinese people use English, Li not only provides various examples of how features of the English language and symbols of American culture are interwoven into the repertoires of Chinese language users; he also points to the transformative and political potential of this practice. The meanings of words and signs are changed by translanguaging, and the English language becomes a 'resource that can be appropriated and exploited without allegiance to its historically native speaker' (Li, 2016: 2).

The origin of the term 'translanguaging' lies in education. Specifically, it can be traced back to the Welsh term 'trawsieithu', which was coined by Cen Williams (1994) to describe the simultaneous use of two languages in the classroom. In recent years, the field of application has expanded significantly; today, it covers areas as broad as 'everyday social interaction, cross-modal and multi-modal communication, linguistic landscape, visual arts, music, and transgender discourse' (Li, 2018: 1). Developing translanguaging into a 'practical theory of language' (Li, 2018: 1), Li takes a closer look at the two elements that make up the term. Becker (1995) explains the idea behind 'languageing' as follows: 'All languageing is what in Java is called jarwa dhosok, taking old language (jarwa) and pushing (dhosok) it into new contexts' (Becker, 1995: 185 as cited in García & Li, 2014: 8). When it comes to real-life applications of language, there are no fixed meanings. Every situation creates a new context which affects the meanings that language can have. Every situation prompts a re-negotiation of what a sign represents. Or, as Becker puts it, '[T]here is no such thing as Language, only continual languageing, an activity of human beings in the world' (Becker, 1991: 34 as cited in Li, 2018: 8).

Li (2018) argues that this concept of language invites us to rethink language as a situated and embodied practice. Furthermore, 'it highlights the importance of feeling, experience, history, memory, subjectivity, and culture' (Li, 2018: 9).

Regarding the prefix ‘trans’, Li points out two aspects. The first of them refers to the language use of multilinguals who ‘do not think unilingually in a politically named language even when they are in a “monolingual mode”’ (Li, 2018: 10). Secondly, Li points out that ‘[h]uman beings think beyond language, and thinking requires the use of a variety of cognitive, semiotic, and modal resources of which language in its conventional sense of speech and writing is only one’ (Li, 2018: 17). While the first point seemingly refers only to a specific group of language users, García (2009) points out that bi- and multilingual discourse practices are nothing unusual. Rather, they form the normal mode of communication that, ‘with some exceptions in some monolingual enclaves, characterizes communities throughout the world’ (García, 2009: 119). In her view, being bilingual is not limited to the mastery of two languages at a high skill level. Even minimal competence in a second language broadens the linguistic repertoire, and speakers are therefore to be expected to have ‘diverse and unequal experiences with each of the two languages’ (García, 2009: 121).

The second aspect of ‘trans’, according to Li, points to the importance of multimodality. Referring to neuroscience, Li argues that ‘language processing cannot be wholly independent of auditory and visual processes’ (Li, 2018: 12). Building on the multimodal characteristics of human communication in text, speech, image, sound and more, Pennycook (2017: 276) proposes the idea of ‘distributed language’. Considering the manifold sensory elements that come together to create any given situation, he argues that ‘repertoires are better considered as an emergent property deriving from the interactions between people, artefacts and space’ (Pennycook, 2017: 277). His concept of ‘spatial repertoires’ emphasises the importance of embodied experience and invites us to reflect on the semiotic content of non-linguistic signs and interactions.

Musicking

García and Ortega (2021) draw a connection between languaging and what Small (1998) refers to as ‘musicking’. The parallel construction of the two terms is apparent at first glance. Analogous to Becker (1991), Small states that ‘[m]usic, in fact, isn’t a thing, or even things, at all. [...] It’s an action, it’s something people do’ (Small, 2004: para. 4). Small’s conceptualization of music as an action rather than a thing or things is to be understood primarily as a critique of the traditional focus on musical works such as symphonies or operas in Western classical music: ‘[P]erformance does not exist in order to present musical works, but rather, musical works exist in order to give performers something to perform’ (Small, 1998: 8).

Building on his conviction that every person ‘is born with the gift of music no less than with the gift of speech’ (Small, 1998: 8), Small questions

the conventional hierarchies among the various participants of a musical performance. In the term ‘musicking’, the contributions of composers, performers and listeners are unified as ‘tak[ing] part, in any capacity, in a musical performance’ (Small, 1998: 9).

The concept has important consequences for thinking about musical meanings. Rather than thinking of a musical performance as an always less-than-perfect execution of the meanings that a composer has inscribed into a musical text, meaning is to be found within the relationships that are established by the performance. Small differentiates between three broad categories of relationships: the relationships of the physical space, those between the people taking part in the performance (in any capacity) and those between the sounds (Small, 1999: 16). An opulent concert hall creates a different social space than a jazz club. An improvising musician deconstructing a Broadway tune probably holds a different understanding of their relationship to the composer than an orchestra conductor who feels obliged to the concept of ‘Werktreue’. Lastly, there are the relationships between the sounds that Small broadly categorizes into ‘those relationships which occur in succession, over time, and those which occur simultaneously’ (Small, 1999: 17). These three sets of relationships are themselves interrelated and create vastly complex and multidimensional nets of relationships which metaphorically represent how the participants relate to each other and the world. Engaging in musicking is to take part in a social ritual that can express those complex relationships all at once: ‘Those taking part in a musical performance are in effect saying – to themselves, to one another, and to anyone else who may be watching or listening – This is who we are’ (Small, 1998: 134).

The gestural quality of music that allows the participants in a performance to physically experience the complex relationships that make up their identity is the key difference between music and language, according to Small (1998: 59). While music does not have the analytical capacities of verbal language, it serves as a way of knowing the world as well as passing on values or ‘concepts of relationships’ (Small, 1998: 132). The idea that musical performances serve as a metaphor for what participants imagine to be ‘ideal relationships’ (Small, 1998: 13) also prompts Small to think critically about music education. Asking ‘Whose music do we teach, anyway?’ (Small, 2004), he recommends music teachers to worry less about whether the monumental works of the Western tradition will survive and continue to be appreciated and instead to find creative ways into musicking that bear meaning for the students.

Small’s concept of music as a ‘here-and-now communication’ (Small, 1998: 58) holds obvious similarities to the idea of languaging. If we accept that the meaning of music lies in the relationships that are established in a performance, then no musical work can ever have the same meaning twice because no performance can ever be repeated in the exact same way. Or, to paraphrase Becker, musicking is to push old music into new

contexts. In contrast to the idea of music as a collection of great works that stand for themselves, musicking also emphasises the importance of ‘feeling, experience, history, memory, subjectivity, and culture’ (Li, 2018: 9).

Expanding to the realm of translanguaging, Small’s thick description of the influence that a physical space has on the meaning of a performance is also connected to Pennycook’s (2017) idea of spatial repertoires. The meaning of any musical performance emerges from the relationships among the people, the sounds and the space that are established by the performance.

While Small’s theory of music explains how identity – thought of as a set of relationships to others and the world – is explored and celebrated through musicking, it tells us little about how individual listeners, performers or composers develop repertoires of musical understandings that help them make sense of the diverse and interconnected fields of musical and non-musical practice they encounter in their lives. Born (2012: 266) criticizes theories of music such as Small’s for not moving beyond the ‘immediate socialities of musical performance and practice’. In her view, the concept of musicking does not adequately account for the importance of ‘wider identity formations’ (Born, 2003: 266) such as race, class or gender and the role of institutions that create the social conditions for music.

At this point, it is helpful to revert to the field of applied linguistics: translanguaging theory goes beyond languaging by integrating linguistic and non-linguistic ways of knowing into a ‘unitary collection of features’ (Otheguy *et al.*, 2015: 281). Furthermore, it explores how institutionalized language policies may be subverted and transformed by translanguaging, which thereby transgresses the situated communicative act and moves onto the wider social and political plane. Considering the theoretical shortcomings of musicking when it comes to the complex interrelations between taking part in a musical performance and the wider social context, translanguaging may offer inspiring approaches for further developing musicking into a practical theory of music.

Methods

The development of such a theory is, of course, far beyond the scope of this chapter. Inspired by Ortega’s (2018) concept of musical literacy, I instead embarked on a small-scale qualitative study with the aim of gaining more insight into musical translanguaging. In May 2021, I co-organized and participated in a 4-day experimenting session involving 10 experimental musicians, leading up to a live performance on the last day, which was streamed online. The event offered an opportunity to study the musical interactions of a relatively large group of artists with highly individual and complex musical repertoires as a participant

observer. As I approached the experience with a research interest on top of an artistic interest, all members of the ensemble were informed about the project and signed a consent form.

Throughout the 4 days of experimenting, rehearsing and planning the performance, field notes were taken and artefacts such as sheet music or visualized brainstorming sessions were documented. Furthermore, eight participants who played some form of musical instrument in the ensemble were asked to participate in interviews about their musical repertoires. The remaining two participants were responsible for videography and sound engineering. Five members agreed and participated in interviews of between 41 and 57 minutes in length.

While the field notes and the performance video would certainly have made for an interesting exploration into the ensemble's musicking, for theoretical reasons I decided to focus my analysis on the interviews. As the discussion of translanguaging and musicking theory has shown, the analytical capacity of musicking seems to reach its limits in the areas beyond the immediacy of musical performance that concern the artists' wider identity formations. Triangulating the interview data with the field notes and the performance footage would have been beyond the scope of a small-scale explorative study. The field notes are therefore used only to introduce the ensemble and provide a context for the reader, which will hopefully promote a better understanding of the subsequent interview analysis.

Following Grounded Theory Methodology after [Charmaz \(2006\)](#), the initial analysis followed the process of open coding, which involves breaking down the data into segments and labeling them. Recruiting co-workers as well as members of coding groups with no professional relationships to music to analyze the interview data independently helped me to suppress my preconceptions as someone who is very close to the field. Through constant comparison within and between the interviews, the initial codes were refined to focused codes and, over time, conceptual categories emerged.

Findings

Introducing the ensemble

Before I proceed to presenting the interview data, I will provide a short impression of the 4-day musicking session and the way in which the ensemble worked. This will, hopefully, make it clear why I deemed this context to be promising for learning about musical translanguaging and will shed some light on the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewees, who have all been part of this experience.

The members of the ensemble originate from several countries and three continents and have diverse musical backgrounds, from classical

music to jazz, improvised music and sound art. These classifications stem either from the musicians themselves or refer to their formal education. In their capacity as professional musicians, many of them perform in other stylistic contexts as well. Their age ranged from 25 to 48 years old at the time of the event. Nine were male and one, female. In the three days leading up to the live performance, the ensemble engaged not only in various forms of group improvisation and collective composition but also in group discussions, physical activities and games with the aim of developing a group identity and a collective artistic vision. The resulting performance that was streamed online on the fourth day consisted of prerecorded video material with elements of storytelling, a group improvisation on a theme that had emerged in the rehearsal process, a composed piece featuring the ensemble playing along to a prerecorded washing machine, and a free improvisation with the video feed replaced by live visuals featuring digitally manipulated material showing the ensemble playing the first improvisation.

In order to find accurate terminology to describe the ensemble's practice, I turn to Bailey (1992), who distinguishes between idiomatic and non-idiomatic improvisation. 'Idiomatic improvisation, much the most widely used, is mainly concerned with the expression of an idiom – such as jazz, flamenco or baroque – and takes its identity and motivation from that idiom' (Bailey, 1992: xi). The term 'idiom' makes a clear reference to language and is useful when thinking about musicians' repertoires. Thinking of musical traditions or genres as idioms entails that they comprise a specific vocabulary as well as conventions on how that vocabulary is put together to create musical meanings. While Bailey uses the term 'non-idiomatic improvisation' to refer to a kind of improvisation which does not adhere to the rules of a specific musical idiom, famed avant-gardist Anthony Braxton uses the term 'transidiomatic' (Panken, 2003). Since elements of musical idioms such as melodies, rhythms, harmonies, sounds and 'sound-logos' (Diederichsen, 2008: 109) are widely used in the musicking of the ensemble, Braxton's term seems more fitting. Moreover, since improvisation is only one form of musical interaction in which the members of the ensemble engage, the ensemble's practice might be best described as transidiomatic musicking.

Interview analysis

In the following section, I present three distinct but interconnected ways in which the interviewees describe the formation and application of their musical repertoires. I then go on to present data from two typical interviews to show how these categories present in the individual cases of two musicians with contrasting backgrounds in musical training, cultural belonging and migration histories. The two examples have been chosen because the interviewees focus on different aspects of musical

meaning – namely the aesthetic and the political – and thereby saturate the conceptual categories from different angles. While the remaining interviews offer three more very distinct narratives of musical identity, the same aspects of musical meaning-making could be found in all of them. To protect the identities of the interviewees, pseudonyms are used.

Michael is 30 years old, male, Swiss and an academically trained jazz drummer and bass player holding a degree in music education. In the context of the ensemble, he played drums, bagpipes and various objects that were repurposed as musical instruments.

Jason is a 27-year-old male who grew up in Hong Kong, studied music in the US, Switzerland and Germany and is an academically trained classical saxophonist and free improviser. In the context of the ensemble, he used a computer, a megaphone, his voice, video manipulation and various objects as musical instruments.

Despite their different backgrounds, the ways in which these two participants describe the formation and application of their musical ‘language’ can be assigned to three categories. I have named them ‘musical individuation’, ‘artistic literacy’ and ‘social semiosis’. Individuation describes the formation of identity. [Hargreaves et al. \(2002: 2\)](#) propose a distinction between ‘identities in music’ and ‘music in identities’. The former term refers to how identity is constructed in the musical context, such as whether one identifies as a musician or not. The latter term describes how music is used as a ‘means or resource for developing other aspects of our individual identities’ ([Hargreaves et al., 2002: 2](#)) such as cultural and gender identities. In the context of systemic psychoanalysis, [Stierlin \(1988: 13–14\)](#) describes individuation as a process of relating to structures outside the self. According to this idea, individuation can either occur in accordance with or in opposition to the structures that the subject comes upon. [Jung \(2014, originally published 1928\)](#) further emphasises the transformative potential of individuation on a societal level: ‘Every advance in culture is, psychologically, an extension of consciousness, a coming to consciousness that can take place only through discrimination. Therefore, an advance always begins with individuation’ ([Jung, 2014: 59](#)). In the context of this analysis, I understand musical individuation as a process of relating to the social conditions of musicking and thereby constructing a musical identity that remains in a continuous state of becoming. Narratively constructing their musical identities in the interviews, all interviewees entered a complex process of self-positioning inside and outside the marked territories of terms like ‘jazz’, ‘improvisation’ or even ‘music’.

UNESCO defines literacy as ‘the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute’ ([UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2020](#)). In order to make sense of the musical situations they encounter and to communicate successfully, the interviewees continually

develop their artistic literacy. This involves thinking about music and developing an understanding of the meanings that are generated in specific musical contexts. It also involves developing effective means to communicate and perform their identity constructs within musical interaction. When talking about their understanding of music, the interviewees repeatedly brought up the multisensory nature of musical performance as well as the role of their bodies as an integral part of their music. Consequently, the artistic literacy of the interviewees must be viewed as a transliteracy that spans various ways of knowing about the world and manifests, for example, in the fluent use of diverse instruments and media, the recontextualization of everyday objects as musical instruments and the application of a musical logic to non-musical areas like language, video, and body movements.

Making sense of musical situations and engaging in them with communicative techniques, the interviewees enter social semiosis. The meaning of a musical interaction – and whether it is even understood as music at all – is constructed socially by all the participants and is strongly dependent on their wider social identity formations. Conventional attributions of social meanings to acts of musicking such as categorizing them into genres play an important role for all interviewees: on the one hand, they are perceived as helpful when it comes to connecting people with similar interests. On the other hand, they are described as limiting and even problematic; for example, when universities force students to specialize in a specific genre or when the financial support of institutions depends on identifying as a representative of a genre. Some interviewees also describe what might be called musical third spaces: social spaces where a collective re-semiotization of musical signs becomes possible and a common language can be found through playful interaction.

Michael

The interview with Michael was conducted in Swiss German. All excerpts have been translated into English by the author.

Talking about his education, Michael describes studying jazz as a process of emancipation that led him away from the genre: ‘It really could have been another style of music just as well, but because I have studied jazz and maybe come from there, and it was important as a teenager as well, the emancipation from it was very important’ (Michael, interview, 22 June 2021).

Throughout the interview, he positions himself as a voluntary outsider to the jazz scene and even describes the constant turning away from his current activity and the rejection of a deep identification with a genre or discipline as an artistic practice: ‘[it is] the interest in liminal spaces and celebrating the attitude of an outsider that definitely separates me a little from the typical jazz scene’ (Michael, interview, 22 June 2021).

Both ‘emancipation’ and ‘outsider’ in a positive sense served as important *in vivo* codes for further analysis. With respect to the conceptual categories that I have developed, Michael describes an individuation process opposing the social construct of being a ‘jazz musician’ and becoming part of the affiliated ‘jazz scene’. Instead, he constructs a positive narrative around being an outsider. In the context of his artistic literacy, he develops a strategy that keeps him in tune with this identity, which consists of constantly ‘turning away from what I am currently doing’ (Michael, interview, 22 June 2021).

In another excerpt, Michael talks about the meaning of practicing his instruments: ‘I think what I am very interested in is practicing, and that is strongly connected to the instrument. Exercise, repetition – this ascetic and spiritual approach of practicing, I think, is extremely interesting and an almost philosophical path’ (Michael, interview, 22 June 2021). And he adds: ‘I think the fact that it happened to be with an instrument for me is a bit of a coincidence’ (Michael, interview, 22 June 2021).

When it comes to practicing his instruments, Michael’s understanding of his actions goes far beyond the realm of music. Instead, the meaning of practicing is constructed as a fundamental human experience and spiritual engagement that stems from the commitment to the process. Once again evading a strong identification with the social construct of being a musician, he points out that he might just as well have found these meanings in other activities.

Explaining why he chose the drums and the double bass as his main instruments, Michael again goes beyond music in its conventional sense: ‘I really need this physical connection, this clarity of movement and sound, maybe even the visibility of movement and sound’ (Michael, interview, 22 June 2021). And he adds: ‘It’s not just about the movement to execute what is supposed to sound but instead that a movement can have many other meanings and importance that might not manifest in the sound’ (Michael, interview, 22 June 2021).

Music has to do with the joy of physically interacting with his instruments for Michael. This personal connection leads him to an understanding of movements as an independent part of music. The movements that can be seen by the audience and felt by the performer are as important to the musical meaning as is the sound that emerges from the instrument.

When it comes to musical idioms and other conventional understandings of music, Michael mentions that it is sometimes difficult to apply for funding when the music cannot be categorized easily in terms of genre. But he also describes the social conventions around what certain sounds mean as an artistic resource. In the following excerpt, he talks about showing a recording of his music to his students:

Often, when I show them some of my music, they are a little surprised and often also a little disappointed because they go, like ‘No idea what this

is'. Really, they can't make sense of it, and as soon as they hear their well-known jingles or a processed version of their meme-sounds, they are suddenly enormously alert. (Michael, interview, 22 June 2021)

Using idiomatic or, in the case of jingles, even emblematic musical material serves as a way of connecting to listeners who might otherwise find it difficult to access the transidiomatic musical space that Michael creates in his musicking.

Jason

Jason states very early in the interview that he doesn't 'limit music to only music':

I observe what is around or exists around me and use it as a resource for me. I see emotions as something very important to relate to. So, music and art is always/or a lot of times related to my own emotion, my own thinking. (Jason, interview, 25 June 2021)

As a member of Hong Kong society, Jason describes the connection between his music and the political protests in his hometown. Reflecting on his role as a citizen of Hong Kong living in Europe, he finds himself perceived by others as 'the Hong Kong dude, an Asian dude, a Chinese dude in the West still talking about something that is already dead'. He has therefore developed a sense of 'mission to remind people' in Europe of the ongoing political struggle in China and the value of free expression. Jason connects his musical style, which he describes as 'harsh noise', with his political message. Interestingly, he recounts becoming interested in this style of music first and then being prompted later by a musical mentor to ask himself what he was trying to express: 'Why the fuck do you want to be loud? Why the fuck do you want to be aggressive? Why the fuck do you want to push people to the limits?' (Jason, interview, 25 June 2021).

In becoming political through art, Jason did not simply use art to spread a message; he instead used politics and emotion to shape and inform his music. He mentions that the 'political art came at the very right moment' (Jason, interview, 25 June 2021). This example shows that the musical aesthetics cannot be separated from social and political meaning. To Jason, being an artist is not so much about dealing with music; it is about dealing with the world through music. He describes how he felt lost and experienced stress during the period when he was already fascinated with harsh noise on an aesthetic level but did not yet know what it meant for him to be doing it. When it comes to musical instruments, Jason is also very aware of the socially constructed meanings that they carry: 'Musical instruments like saxophone, like violin or accordion and all, kind of introduce a role of itself before anything. So, when you play a saxophone, there is already expectation' (Jason, interview, 25 June 2021).

Having gone through professional training as a saxophone player himself, Jason is very much aware of the social semiotics around traditional instruments. Individuating against these preconceived notions of how a saxophone is supposed to be used, he decided to integrate non-traditional instruments such as a computer and a megaphone into his repertoire. Furthermore, he also refers to improvisation, choreography and dramaturgy as musical instruments.

Speech and visual content are important tools to Jason because they achieve a level of explicit meaning that is impossible to achieve with traditional instruments. Jason uses audio samples of politicians' speech, political protests or nature sounds as well as corresponding or contrasting video material as integral parts of his music:

You have one deck suddenly on some, some kind of rain sound or bird sound and on the other deck you have Charlie Chaplin speaking from/ from the dictator, *The Great Dictator*, and then jump back to Deng Xiaoping speaking about, you know, some kind of, some kind of speech in the '80s about China and then go into sound about the Hong Kong protests. (Jason, interview, 25 June 2021)

The sonic possibilities that can be achieved with a computer regarding pitch, volume, timbre and material, which Jason refers to as 'extended virtuosity', are much broader than can be accomplished with traditional instruments. He further states that every musical performance is multimodal and that visual content makes the music 'sound better'.

Jason refers to improvisation as a tool to find a common musical language. Through improvisation, he can connect multimodal material into a cogent message as well as develop and negotiate a collective performance with others. Through improvisation, he also broadens his understanding of what music is and what can serve as a musical instrument. 'I'm just playing music and they kind of, you know, in the circle all the time, is kind of nonsense, but sometimes we find something that makes sense, then it makes sense together' (Jason, interview, 25 June 2021).

Discussion

From the interviews conducted with experimental musicians who move between and beyond named musical idioms, we can learn about how musical meaning is constructed using a diverse but unitary repertoire of literacies. The material that makes up music cannot be reduced to melodies, harmonies, rhythms or even a category as broad as 'sounds'. Body movements, images and videos, as well as the cultural identities and political beliefs of the participants of a musical performance, are not a sideshow to the main event. Instead, the interviewees make use of these non-musical elements as musical resources to shape the quality and

meaning of their art. Musical meaning-making hence reaches far beyond the immediacy of performance, and the musicians' thinking and speaking about their practice cannot be separated from the practice itself. When Jason, for example, talks about the expectations connected to the use of an instrument like the saxophone, it becomes clear that the symbolic power of musical genres limits the possibilities of expression before a single note is played. Whatever he may do with the saxophone will be understood in the context of the meanings that the saxophone as a traditional instrument associated with certain genres already carries. And when Michael talks about appropriating idiomatic material that stems from 'meme-sounds', we might be reminded of Li's (2016) description of Chinese language users integrating English words into their repertoire. Just as in Li's example, the original meaning of the musical material may change significantly in the new semiotic environment. However, at the same time, the material stays recognizable and creates a relationship between two seemingly separate grammatical systems.

The interview data show that musicking, as a way of knowing about oneself and the world, is not independent from other ways of knowing. Those who take part in a musical performance engage in the experience with all their senses, histories, emotions and thoughts, which may lead them to construct entirely different meanings and to focus on different aspects of a musical situation. In the diverse social spaces of a globally connected society, people are likely to develop highly individual musical idiolects that cannot be accounted for by categorizing them as named musical idioms, i.e. musical traditions or genres. While translanguaging may rightly subsume musical practice into its theoretical framework by viewing it as semiotic practice, the close link between language and music makes it possible to look at it the other way around as well. In the narrative performance of musical identity that is showcased in the interviews with Michael and Jason, languaging becomes part of a transmusicking practice.

Ortega (2018: 233) introduces the term 'transmusicking' to illustrate that just as languaging does not belong to the system of language, musicking does not belong to the system of music. While her study has already shown that children in a community music program do not view different musical idioms as separate domains, the explorations at hand may shed some light on further aspects of transmusicking.

- Transmusicking goes beyond the immediacy of musical performance and includes thinking and speaking about music and its social conditions.
- Instead of focusing on the authentic reproduction of a named musical idiom, a transmusicking practice is about developing a musical idiolect.
- Transmusicking brings diverse identities to social consciousness and constructs alternative ways of knowing the world. In this way, it promotes social transformation.

- Instead of deciding on a conventional musical idiom and thereby subjugating every participant of a musical performance to a set of rules and values, transmusicking artists engage in feature selection to construct a situated common ‘language’.
- In a transmusicking practice, the multimodal and social characteristics of music are not simply accepted but become integral parts of the performance. From the rehearsal process to the location of the performance, to the pricing, the funding and the shoes the musicians wear, everything is part of the musical meaning.

Of course, these aspects of transmusicking are only a modest beginning. In the spirit of Grounded Theory Methodology, more expansive studies would be necessary to explore the phenomenon of transmusicking from different perspectives. The five interviews that I conducted are not only few in number but also focus on a specific group of people. In their capacity as professional performers with experimental approaches to music, the interviewees were likely to provide interesting insights into musical meaning-making. But that does not mean that transmusicking is reserved for this special case of musicking individuals.

Furthermore, the interview data could have been triangulated with the field notes and the performance footage of the four-day musicking session. As mentioned earlier, this would have been beyond the scope of a small-scale exploratory study. For future research, it might prove interesting to compare the meanings that individual musicians as well as the members of the audience associate with the same musical performance to see how their interpretation is shaped by their respective musical idiolects. To make a meaningful contribution to how we understand the ‘meanings of performing and listening’ (Small, 1998: subtitle), transmusicking would have to be developed into a theory of how individuals create musical meanings in the superdiverse (Vertovec, 2007) and transcultural (Welsch, 2017) social space of the 21st century.

Concluding Remarks on Education

I will end this chapter with a few thoughts on music education. Just as a translanguaging stance in pedagogy does not mean that we stop teaching socially accepted ways of languaging, a transmusicking stance does not mean that learning about genres should be banned from the classroom. Rather, it may inspire us to reflect on how we teach music and musical idioms. Instead of treating musical genres almost like natural occurrences, as closed systems with fixed meanings, we can treat them as what they are: social constructs and cultural conventions. We can value the aesthetic pleasures and/or the communal experiences they offer and, at the same time, reflect on the norms and values that they bring with them. We can discuss these social and political aspects with our students, but we may

also look for critical ways of musicking by appropriating, recontextualizing and ultimately re-semiotizing conventional musical vocabulary. Focusing on the development of a musical idiolect does not mean that we do not want to challenge our students. Rather, it means that we take them seriously as musical subjects and contribute to their humanization in a Freireian sense. Understanding music as multimodal discourse can make us more sensitive about what we actually teach when we teach music. It can prevent us from unconsciously reifying social power structures, for example by ignoring racial and gender stereotypes connected to the reception histories of many genres. It provides us with a way of thinking about music as a semiotic resource that can be employed creatively and critically to construct multimodal narratives of identity.

Speaking to a crowd of music teachers, Christopher Small tells them not to worry so much about whether certain ways of musicking may survive. Rather, we should trust that musicking, a human behavior as essential as languaging, will continue to take new and unexpected forms as society continues to change. The 21st century might continue not only to diminish the importance of the great works – which have long become just as commodified as any other form of popular music – but also to pose more radical questions about what it means to music. In the era of mashups, meme culture and artificial intelligence, most traditional musical skills and even the idea of authorship might continually lose importance. Instead of desperately clinging to our guitars, pianos and drums, I believe it is important for music educators to keep an openness and curiosity about emerging transmusicking practices. Even if they might put our ideas of musical competence and quality into perspective.

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