

Chapter 12

Revisiting the Cave: Heidegger's Reinterpretation of Plato's Allegory with Reference to Music Education

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Abstract Heidegger's essay *On Plato's Teaching of Truth* (1942), although a treatise in itself on education, can be a helpful text for music teachers wishing to challenge their own understanding of knowledge and what and how they teach. Through this insight into Plato's thinking, with Heidegger's qualifications and commentary, some fundamental concerns regarding the interpretation of truth/knowledge currently adopted in music education can be reexamined. If like Heidegger, we look again at the implications of this misreading, according to Heidegger, the neo-liberal curriculum has effectively adopted an error. With increasing pressure on universities to find new models of teaching, Heidegger through this essay confronts the educator with a set of ideas that ask of the music educator to re-configure the very concept of education and to re-align practice to adequately reflect the human condition.

Keywords Plato • The cave • Music education • Neo-liberal curriculum

12.1 Introduction

In his essay *On Plato's Teaching of Truth* (1942), Heidegger addresses some key issues facing those working in music education including; the categorization of knowledge; the imposition of predetermined learning outcomes and use of performance measures of achievement. Heidegger suggests that we see education as a process that is deconstructive, where educators provide an experience of learning that is authentic, one that engages students in their own knowledge building. Reading Heidegger's study of Plato's allegory, affords a challenge to the prevailing utilitarian mood in higher education, questioning the definitive terms of reference that are employed and offering music educators a means to reflect on the scope and

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dynamics of what is termed music education. In providing an overview, Heidegger argues that learning that is wholly governed by predetermined educational outcomes – inside the cave – might be contrasted by the act of students being allowed to exercise their own ideas coming to presence – by moving outside the cave beyond the reach of the ends driven curriculum?

Heidegger adds that knowing is not simply a matter of what it is that the cave dwellers see on leaving the cave. Seeing, Heidegger maintains, has been historically misrepresented, so that verification or truth as propositional knowing, that being knowledge that is in effect removed from experience, achieves pre-eminence. In this historical reading of the cave Heidegger discerns the difference between propositions – or representation of what is seen – and truth that which is gained through experience of the opportunity to know. The argument made by Heidegger is that students acquire a comportment (*Verhalten*) to different beingness (*Seindheit*) and hence different knowing through their presencing of things. These are some of the key points that will be discussed in this chapter and referenced to music education.

12.2 Heidegger/Plato and Truth: *Aletheia* or Correctness

In unraveling Heidegger's argument, it is necessary to establish what is meant by the terms truth or *aletheia* and essence. These terms have an important place in how we might comprehend what Heidegger refers to as the authentic in education. Iain Thomson (2001), referring to Heidegger's discussion of essence and truth, indicates that essence in Plato is a fixed pre-defined term whereas in Heidegger's essay, the word becomes a verb – to essence (*west*) or remain in play (*im Spiel Bleibt*) (Thomson 2001: 246). With reference to being, essence is placed by Thomson within a changing historical context which allows, essence, to shift meaning, laying a foundation for seeing truth as a shared understanding or knowing within a particular historical context. If a truth is shared or generally held over a period of time, then truth the word changes according to different historical epochs where truth has different interpretations. Thomson adds that for "him (Heidegger), 'the essence of truth' is the 'history of being.'" (2001: 247). This suggests that we cannot know the essence of something, unless we already know what it is, so that we only act on the basis of an unconscious or prior understanding of essence. If this is so, then essences are neither something we can prove conclusively or establish to be true but something that we strive for within multiple understandings. This concept of truth therefore refers to knowing words and knowing how they belong to both our lived experience (being-in-the-world) within our lived context, and having a knowledge or specific knowing that to us works before we arrive at conceptual formulations. As an example consider the word, or phenomenon, such as desk for example. This might be a desk situated in an office where certain tasks are appointed to a desk or alternatively a desk might be as in a school, a different kind of desk. Here relations are described and identities located, in such a way that we can see things in the overall context of desks, offices, schools and related activities. Heidegger sees our

relationship to an object connecting to this rich experience of the world that articulates that object. Hence it is possible for a person to speak of a desk and use the word even though they may have no idea of what it is. The implication for music education is that teaching knowledge of something that students do not have the 'world' experience or connect with fails in the attempt.

To elaborate the point consider a teacher introducing a style of music utterly removed from the daily experience of students being taught. Perhaps classical music being introduced to a lower decile population is a good example. What occurs is a form of musical colonisation in this exercise, where high art is provided for those that normally can't afford such access. This is not to say learning and teaching music may not be provided but that musical skills and development that is rigorous yet remain within the musical traditions of that place of that culture are important factors (D. Lines, personal communication February 10th 2008). What is the point of making an investment in a music program for a population that may result in one or two being 'saved' from the music of their own culture? Sadly the reverse message to those learning to play classical music from wealthier districts is that their culture is of a higher order than others. When those same students enter the academy the sense that one culture is 'higher' is made very apparent as the options system often reduces 'other' music to a sideshow. Listening to Chinese music students at a New Zealand University dismissing their grandparents playing by ear on the traditional instruments sums up the dilemma, or a student from one low decile school in South Auckland asking about their composition option remarked to their teacher: "I can't write my composition for guitar can I sir? 'Cause that's a party instrument eh sir?" (Student, personal conversation, 2003).

12.3 Truth as Propositional Knowledge

If we take the concept of truth, we discover more in Heidegger's reading in relation to the difference between truth or propositions, and truth related to what is termed the negation of truth – untruth. While this may seem confusing at first, the construction is a useful one.

Mark Wrathall (2004) in discussing Plato, claims that he draws attention to seeing truth only "in so far as it is a property of propositions." (2004: 444). This becomes a view of things in terms of the unchanging properties. Heidegger adds to this that truth "...needs to be approached by understanding its negation" (2004: 444). What is to be unconcealed is "thus determined in relationship to a positive state of concealment" (2004: 445). That is to say that what first needs to be understood is concealment, "seen as something positive..." before the unconcealment can be addressed. (Wrathall 2005: 342). Here we come to the question of hiddenness or concealment in Heidegger's reading of truth, where to determine the unsaid, the unsaid being the "background assumptions, dispositions, conceptual systems etc., which ground the actual views they (those open to the unconcealment at the time) accept" (2004: 445). This unsaid hidden aspect of being or the potential of knowing is, according to Heidegger present within the unconcealment of knowing.

In looking more carefully at our present day usage of the word truth, can we say that truth is seen as correspondence – that is the correspondence of a proposition within a set of propositions?(Wrathall 2004: 445). Heidegger maintains that Plato limits truth to this propositional knowing in the cave allegory. For Heidegger truth is grounded in the unhiddenness and hiddenness of entities:

What is primordially true, i.e., unhidden, is not the proposition about a being, but the being itself – a thing, a fact,... The proposition is true in so far as it conforms to something already true i.e., to a being that is hidden in its being. Truth in this sense of correctness presupposes unhiddenness. (Heidegger 2002: 86).

The distinction between a proposition relating to an object, and unhiddenness revealing potentially a phenomenon needs to be borne in mind in making this reading, as truth is seen not only in the concrete manifestation of objects but seen without the context of their being. This is encapsulated in knowledge without experience.

Heidegger sees *aletheia* (unconcealment), as different in meaning when removed from unhiddenness. Truth can be truth as unhiddenness and truth as correctness as they arise quite differently, relating and functioning according to our comportment or response to an object or thought at the time. The experience of unhiddenness, according to Heidegger, is then the foundation of truth as correctness, that we need to reawaken or at least make the attempt to do so. Heidegger put this to his students in the 1931/32 lectures, to make an interpretation of the text in the proximity of our “...ownmost being” (2002: 94). The idea behind this questioning was a challenge for students to confront their own being or essence if truth is considered as a series of propositions or pre-ordained knowing.

12.4 Heidegger’s Interpretation of Plato’s Allegory of the Cave

To return to the allegory and to music education, let us examine the four stages of the cave allegory alongside the question: What is teaching and how can we present to the student an authentic experience that provides an essential musical encounter? The implications of this question for the music educator will be discussed with reference to Heidegger’s reading of the allegory.

12.4.1 Stage One

In stage one the cave dwellers, or prisoners, are shackled and blinkered looking up at a wall. Images are projected by the puppeteers, who hold up objects that are reflected from a fire and the sun behind them. This depicts “our everyday abode – which is revealed to sight as we look around.” (1998a: 517a8–518d7). The real for

the cave dwellers, is thus what they see – that which is. This setting is home for the cave dwellers where they are in the world. This becomes an illusion of being, where beings are simply shadows, representations that are controlled by the puppeteers. However there is more to the visible form, whereby a thing presents itself. Here we might say that what is true in terms of correspondence is recognised, but the challenge to that truth, whereby the opportunity to engage in new revealing looking to new concealments or opportunities is not met.

The cave dwellers see only the proposition not the unhiddenness of the object. The controlled situation they are in means that they only see concrete objects. It is pointed out that while we need to see the objects as a concrete illustration (otherwise we would never be able to perceive this or that as a house or a tree) this does not mean that the onlooker realises what is seen is everything that passes as real. Thus that which is nearest, though it has the consistency of shadows, holds us as humans captive day after day as we fail to see the hiddenness and see only what is primordially true.

Can we say that in music education when what it is to be musical might be very specific, where a performative culture pervades, this may limit the scope of our being? If the role of the teacher is seen as imparting a body of knowledge, such as teaching the song or the instrumental teacher teaching the repertoire, there may be little prospect for invention and making to reveal new possibilities. Sadly the outcome can become very predictable especially in higher education, where performance of the 'repertoire' equates to recognition amongst your peers. This emphasis on performance, can create a two tier community where the sense is that those who perform – usually being those more experienced in performing before entering higher education – are seen as legitimate musicians, whereas those who choose not to perform the 'repertoire' are seen as 'other.' This differentiation can become a mindset and create a disconnect, for those unable to see beyond this received value system (Naughton 2009a).

12.4.2 Stage Two

In the second stage of the allegory the prisoners are turned around to look at the objects and the fire. Their shackles are removed but all they do is look at the shadows and approach a "little nearer to what is." (2007a–515 d2). As Heidegger maintains, the freed prisoner "... will consider that (the shadows) he saw before (without any help) are more unhidden than what is now being shown." (Heidegger 1998a: 209) Here for the first time in the essay we come across the term unhidden. The glow of the fire blinds those who have been turned around so that they see other things but see them in confusion. Heidegger suggests that the prisoners lack the prior condition for assessing concrete beings in their being and see only shadows still as their unconcealed reality.

Similar to the ‘not seeing’ on the part of students, an institution can become so formalised that students may not ‘see’ beyond the value system of that institution or university department. If we consider the social pressures to conform to what music is, especially for newly arrived students from a Junior Academy or secondary school, music may already have been fixed for those students in terms of power and roles that music played in the system. A Head of Music at a leading New Zealand University recently pointed out that students arriving at her department were quite clear that they wanted to be taught, and not ‘muck about!’ As Christopher Small remarked:

Since a social order is a matter of relationships between human beings, the performance of this or any other ritual act together is a powerful means of ensuring the social cohesion and stability. That being so, we need not be surprised to find that it is commonly used, often deliberately and sometimes even cynically, by those who rule to maintain the acquiescence of those over whom they rule. (Small 1998: 97).

Hence power often dictates how music is conceptualised in the secondary school, and music plays a key role in the maintenance of that power. One has only to reflect on the school song, the national anthem, prize giving, where the orchestra and choir serve to reinforce a sense of order and power vested in the authority of the institution.

12.4.3 *Stage Three*

The prisoners are removed from the cave in this stage with a new orientation to ideas and so learn to discern the presencing of beings and of themselves. Here they see beings appearing as they are, not as representations provided by others in the cave. This slow turning around has to be nurtured and must unfold from a relation that sustains. Heidegger links this thought to the German *Bildung* to *paideia* as the prisoners themselves create their own boundaries, unlike the puppeteers making their decisions for them, as they allow being, their light, to presence within their new experience of being. This creation of their own new boundaries might suggest that the prisoners have both an ontic knowing of artefacts as in concrete objects (*Seinde*) or the unhidden as well as an ontological knowing (*Sein*) of the process that they are engaged with in relation to their being.

As Thomson observes: “Recall Heidegger’s succinct and powerful formulation: ‘Real education lays hold of the soul itself and transforms it in its entirety by first of all leading us to the place of our essential being and accustoming us to it.’” (Thomson 2001: 254). The opportunity arises at this point for the “attunement to – this ‘open’ ... what Heidegger famously calls ‘dwelling.’” (2001: 258).

As things show themselves as they are at this stage, the role for the teacher can be seen as removing the students from an enframing within the confines of their daily experience. What then can be made of this third stage in assisting students to think and experience and be open to experiencing music beyond their conscious

understanding, reaching that state of antecedent learning and knowing "...what appears antecedently in everything that appears and ... makes whatever appears be accessible." (Heidegger 1998a: 170).

As Heidegger indicates much care has to be taken at this stage by the teacher. The type of experience that might be offered to develop the students from their daily experience and allow them access to the encounter through other experiences of becoming or being. It may be that such an opportunity is afforded for instance in a less structured more improvisatory community celebration, where the experience of music allows the students to experience what may have been a predominantly prescribed experience up to that time (Naughton 2006). The introduction of community samba for example into a conservatoire, serves this purpose as students encounter a musical awakening of something that may have lain dormant for too long in their experience of their being. If students come from a classical background, the opportunity to re-connect with the child in themselves, to break from reading music to be making music and experiencing music as part of a community of musicians may be something quite new. Here decisions are made as to what students may want to do in the act of making, where music is not prescribed, where students have to commit to something that moves and changes as it is fluid and uncertain. For students growing up in a rapidly changing world where the opportunity for personal engagement is becoming more and more limited such an opening brings many challenges. For students a sense of making, free from judgements of right or wrong where reliance is placed on others in the spontaneous arising can be a healthy alternative to the prescription that most are obliged to follow in their predetermined degree (Naughton 2009a). Students in this experience may develop a concept of being as Being where they move from preconceived ideas of themselves within the confines of an individual, to a space in which they might realize an attunement with others in music, removing the barriers that may previously have delimited them as musicians.

Heidegger sees the pivotal role of the teacher, by analogy, leading the prisoners out of the cave, in engaging with the students allowing them to encounter the 'beingness of being.' In musical terms considering the world for themselves, allowing students to discover an awareness of working with others to reveal music beyond the confines of their musical enframing (Young 2002). This is seen as all part of the disclosing – as in Small's reference to the Maori god Tane and the envelopment of being:

Even the deities who are evoked to preside over the pattern, or aspects of it, are the result of metaphoric thinking. The Polynesian god Tane, for example, is – not represents or symbolizes but is – the proper relationship between humanity and the life of plants and the forest, and the Yoruba–American goddess Yemayá is that which connects us to the sea and its creatures (Small 1998: 103, Small's italics)

And as Wrathall writes:

The liberation requires force, work, and exertion, strain and suffering to break out of our everyday orientation to the world. It gives the prisoner a 'new standpoint,' from which the everyday comportments of men are shown to be empty. (Wrathall 2004: 253)

12.4.4 Stage Four

The prisoners, now liberated, return to the cave. With the return, the liberators, as they have become, are able to distinguish different levels of intelligibility on the basis of which beings can appear in their being. Here the liberators engage in a struggle between two different concepts of truth. One is unhiddenness and recognition of hiddenness and the other is the belief that what is seen within the cave is the extent of all relevant conscious knowing. Plato states that when something is more uncovered, unhidden or unconcealed it also becomes the lowest form of truth. For Heidegger unconcealment is the moment or revelation of Being where concealment is reliant on unconcealment, where in the revelation of knowing beings are disclosed in the act of being revealed: “Truth is this dynamic opposition, and truth as the unconcealment of beings is constituted out of this dynamic opposition. Truth as unconcealment is in this sense self-grounding for Heidegger.” (Duits 2004: 22)

In the final stage, the prisoners, now liberators, access a more fundamental understanding of truth or knowledge, as they endeavour to draw out new knowing from that which is hidden, veiled or obscured. This stage is more complicated to interpret where Heidegger might be said to see the final stage as a recognition of the teacher, and a re-orientation to the environment. At this point in making comment on a return to the cave the emphasis is on the teacher to be an exceptional learner with the capability to enable students to learn and actively respond to the demands of the context or as Heidegger put it, the teacher has to “learn to let them learn.” (Heidegger 2004: 15) The recognition here is that teaching is the highest form of learning as opposed to teaching fulfilling standards, or worse teaching that reduces the learning to training so that, “The true teacher is ahead of his students in that he has more to learn than they.” (Heidegger 1998b: 129)

12.5 Implications of the Allegory for Music Education

In his later works such as the *Origin of the work of Art* (1993) and the *Question Concerning Technology* (1977), Heidegger develops in depth such questions as the disclosing of an artwork. In the cave allegory, Heidegger points at some of the underlying aspects of those later works in grounding his theoretical thinking with respect to Plato. While Heidegger’s work on Plato is more concerned with education, it is informative in addressing how art education might be re-looked at, in the light of a future vision for education (Naughton 2012).

Heidegger’s reference to ontological knowing can be expanded within the context of music education by looking at the implications of the cave in a more literal sense. Initially we might say a lot of the time teaching in music, certainly in the studio tradition, is an unflinching experience of the cave. The combined effects of teaching the music of the ‘masters,’ plus the teacher’s own lengthy apprenticeship often leaves little alternative, as students painstakingly develop their skills and

competence over the years in reproducing the 'repertoire'. The spectre of the puppeteer looms large with the insistence on compliance with the score, learning the theory and adopting the manner of playing and stylistic conventions for each composer of each period. Obedience to the rules are implicit in the process, and this characterisation of music, depending on the student culture and the response of the parents, can have an injurious psychological impact on a young children learning an instrument (Boucher and Ryan 2011). This is where the music teacher, like so many teachers in the performing arts who were brought up themselves from a very early age, find it difficult to acknowledge change to the established order. Who or what though can take the teachers from the cave or reveal to them that they are in the cave?

The mantra of standards, excellence and performance is one that is constantly repeated by universities seeking a higher standing in terms of their global academic rating. Yet this striving for ever higher position to secure the top students may make little impression on local students and their selection of university. It is more an appeal to students and countries where there is a much narrower definition of education who see these ratings as important in deciding on their choice according to the global ranking that has been achieved by any university (Lawrence 2009: 21.). As discussed by Bill Readings (1996) the word excellence here denotes a university as an efficient corporate where educational process is reduced to little more than a perfunctory role (Readings (1996) cited in Thomson 2001: 252).

What is plainly missing from the discussion of music in education is that the talented few are given all the attention. While this accords with the prestige of a department to have 'winners' in their midst, what of those young people who may not have sufficient performance experience to compete at this level and who may in any case, owing to their cultural preference and wider vision of being, see music and their being in a much broader light? What kind of education or 'excellent' education is provided for these students who do not wish to, or cannot go down this track of excellence? Can music education be envisaged in a way that as Heidegger suggests, meeting the ontological understanding of being in our age, be inclusive and recognise diversity?

The idea of letting things become in themselves relates to music becoming part of our being in a conscious/unconscious practice. It is this understanding of affect that removing music from a scientific, analytical perspective allows the work, as it is, to arrive in the world, bringing its own attunement or mode of being. Thus music is not seen as is, in the present tense only. Music becomes a matter of possibilities as a might be, or a very different view of music as an object (Naughton 2009b). This is similar to the recognition that Heidegger describes in his way of seeing unhiddenness. Heidegger effectively takes us into a sphere of affect, in which objects are seen as what arrives. It is thus within the openness to mood contained in the temporal nature of affect that music can be felt, a future event encompassing the present experience and the history of place and of being. This understanding of seeing possibilities, in hiddenness, and what arises in the process typifies what occurs in community music where what arises can become the fundamental of a new making process (Naughton 2009a). Often I have seen this as after a samba practice where students

may invent a rhythm and from one inspiration others join in and in moments a new samba emerges – only because students allow themselves to be immersed in the process and form a comportment to this new musical possibility.

Reflecting on the provision of music in tertiary education let us ask: Why do we have chosen styles of music on offer and within those styles why must all be pre-determined? We have many composition tools today that we can use without the use of a score such as the sequencer software. This software provides all that is needed for creating music and is used throughout the music profession, yet the need to script, to legitimize the music so often remains a requirement. Why is this the case? The answer might be, despite ambivalent graduating standards, reading notation or musical ‘literacy’ being seen as part of the attraction for the international market? Sadly this can thus become a series of impossible demands for potential students who may want to further their musical ambitions making and developing music without writing the music next to those who have had the privilege of private tuition.

Are we not at a time when learning the rudiments scales, and the rigidity of playing the right notes fails to match the operation of the arts in our current era? Music education is dominated by a fixation with precision but this may not be justified in the context of how, in previous eras music was intended or understood in the current professional world. Making use of Heidegger’s notion of an epoch (epoche), let us see music put back into an historical context, to see music against the present day world. The alternative it seems is to maintain an endless repetition of the same, with impassable boundaries created for students when they could embark on creating their own boundaries as in the third stage of the allegory.

Taking music students out of the conservatoire or university, presenting them with a philosophical grounding and new experiences, might stimulate a way to re-look at music and music in education. By teaching students to improvise on their instrument, not according to practiced conventions but to what they want to do, by allowing students to learn how to play in different musical environments may reveal music as life enhancing. We might bring students own works with others into the scope of music making, where teachers work with students where music in education can be part of the work of the university. With significant changes occurring in society that include the dissolution of many practices owing to shifts in technology, including access to online learning, the music institution is in danger of stasis and hence losing their relevance if new thinking and awareness is not adopted.

Such experiences as the samba school or any musical event that allows students the space in which they might wholly engage in an experience of music that allows them to open new horizons and create space for re-making might be considered viable in this new order. The acceptance of students developing their own ideas, no matter initially how derivative at first, has to be applauded. If students themselves are engaging in a musical activity that allows them that sense of being for themselves or as Heidegger describes as, dwelling, new potentialities will be revealed.

The final stage of the cave allegory is a reflection by Heidegger on the term teaching, which he links to the German word ‘zeigen’ to point or show. In focusing on what a teacher’s words reveal, Thomson remarks: “To learn means to make everything we do answer to whatever essentials address us at a given time” (Thomson

2001: 259). Learning is then prefaced by what essentials we may encounter in our environment.

12.6 Conclusion

Heidegger saw that through teaching, the essentials of learning are engaged. This speaks a lot for the role of music education and not taken too literally shows how to build into new practice the opportunity to teach, in no matter what capacity, is to develop a broader understanding of music. Perhaps this is why music students have remarked on the best times in their tertiary experience career being when they had the opportunity to invent what they did (Salisbury 2009) without their teachers being present. If teaching others were seen as an integral part of learning this might be of value to all connected with music education reducing the individualistic and promoting a 'disindividuation' as a vital musical acquisition (Naughton 2009a, b).

It is the human interaction and connection that Heidegger prizes in much of his writing seeing the realization of ideas and knowing through a making and gathering together. From an analysis of the cave with music education in mind the opening of where we all are, becomes apparent. The students, by seeing music not as a means to repeat the same modernist typology, but by engaging in a making process linked to a revealing of their own enframing in their metaphysical being, might take thought and practice in new unexpected directions. This in turn may bring new insight and music back to the profession and more presciently to music education at all levels.

Heidegger adds that the things that we encounter themselves, demand a comportment. Our fundamental way for making sense of the world is therefore nothing natural or necessary, but in this we are attuned by the natural world around us. We are then always projecting ourselves into the world, into action and possibilities, comporting ourselves in different ways and making sense of objects and situations that we encounter, looking to build our own communities. To achieve this we need to admit to the fractures in society and work to build relations between those unquestioning, who wish to remain in the cave.

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