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# Polarizing

Polarisierende Deutungen von Gesellschaft  
als Herausforderung für die Musikpädagogik

herausgegeben von  
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# Interpretations of Society as a Challenge for Music Education

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## **Polarizing Interpretations of Society as a Challenge for Music Education.**

Introduction

## Acknowledgements

The following texts are the result of the conference *Antipluralism and Populism: Polarizing Interpretations of Society as a Challenge for Music Education*, which took place on November 6 and 7, 2020, at the University of Siegen under the direction of Bernd Clausen and Johann Honnens. This book includes the preparatory conceptual considerations and decisions, as well as the presentations and discussions at the conference itself. We would like to take the opportunity to express our special thanks to the conference coorganizer and music educator Bernd Clausen: for his contribution to the development of the conference concept, his important suggestions for reflection, the great scientific exchange, and his support in organizing the conference and follow up. We would also like to thank Katrin Daniel, Doron Geiler, and Julius Steuerwald-Ludwig for their technical, logistic, and emotional support and their ongoing, patient willingness to answer questions during the conference. And, of course, special thanks are due to the University of Siegen for making the conference possible both financially and logistically.

We are very pleased about the opportunity to publish this conference volume as a special edition of the digital *Zeitschrift für Kritische Musikpädagogik* (Journal for critical music education). This allows us to make the results accessible to a broader professional readership, and we would like to express our sincere thanks to the editor of the ZfKM, Jürgen Vogt, who also contributed a guest article to the present publication. The English-language editing of this conference proceedings was handled by Michael Thomas Taylor, whose finely nuanced revisions, proofreading, and sociological comments were very helpful. Thank you for the wonderful collaboration and your deep perspective on music educational discourse! Funding for the English-language editing was made possible by the Cologne University of Music and Dance and the Berlin University of the Arts—we are extremely grateful to both institutions for their generous support.

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## Polarizing Interpretations of Society as a Challenge for Music Education

### Introduction

Since the turn of the millennium, processes that are perceived as social polarizations seem to have increased internationally. In the UK, the dispute over Brexit developed into a cultural battle between two opposing social camps. In the U.S., the gap between Republican and Democratic supporters deepened during Donald Trump's administration, which led Joe Biden, in his victory speech as the new president on November 8, 2020, to focus on the goal of listening to each other again and no longer viewing political opponents as enemies, but as Americans<sup>1</sup>. The list of countries that are known for increasing social polarization can be continued: Poland, Turkey, France, Brazil ... In Germany, social polarization is less prominent in the political discourse, but processes of division are increasingly being diagnosed. For example, the Team Todenhöfer—Die Gerechtigkeitspartei (Team Todenhöfer—The Justice Party), led by the politician and publicist Jürgen Todenhöfer, is using the slogan “Racism, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia are dividing our society” in its campaign for the 2021 federal election. During the coronavirus pandemic, a new generalizing and hierarchizing confrontation between vaccination supporters and vaccination skeptics emerged, the social consequences of which are hardly foreseeable yet. And within the progressive bourgeois middle-class, more and more people complain about the phenomenon of “cancel culture”, arguing that “left-wing” and “identity politics” groups exclude people who hold opinions or use language that are no longer acceptable within the public discourse (see, e.g., Thierse, 2021). According to political scientist and sociologist Ulrike Ackermann, a culture of “Gesinnungslagerbildung that [is] antiplural from the outset, lead[ing] to uniformity and build[ing] up opportunistic pressure” is also spreading in academia<sup>2</sup>. Against this backdrop, an “Appeal for Free Debate Spaces” was published on September 1, 2020, by lawyer Milosz Matuschek and philosopher Gunnar Kaiser, claiming “a victory of opinion over rational judgment”, with the assumption that “vocal minorities of activists [...] increasingly determine what may be said and how, or may become a topic at all”<sup>3</sup>. It has now been signed by nearly 20,000 people.

The narratives of social polarization and social division are not only relevant in political discourse, but have also been increasingly used in social science during the last decade as an analytical tool for interpreting societies. In sociology and political science, the thesis of an antagonistic conflict along cultural, political, and economic dimensions pervading Western societies across milieus has become very prominent. In the words of Andreas Reckwitz, there are, on the one hand, adherents of a “hyperculture” who are able to curate and optimize their individual identities drawing from diverse sources of a global culture. And on the other, he argues, there are representatives of “cultural essentialism” oriented towards homogeneous communities and a

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uUzWjSdSUpA> [29.10.2021].

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/politologin-ueber-die-spaltung-der-gesellschaft-die.1270.de.html?dram:article\\_id=472448](https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/politologin-ueber-die-spaltung-der-gesellschaft-die.1270.de.html?dram:article_id=472448) [29.10.2021; translation by the authors].

<sup>3</sup> <https://idw-europe.org/> [29.10.2021; translation by the authors].

“symbolic boundary between the internal world and the external world” (Reckwitz, 2021, p. 22). Accordingly, our times are not marked by a “clash of civilizations” as Samuel Huntington claimed at the end of the twentieth century (Huntington, 1996), but rather by a “fundamental conflict between two opposed regimes of culturalization” (Reckwitz, 2021, p. 15): on one side, cultures are seen as a toolbox for individual identity tinkering; on the other, culture is a place- and origin-bound parameter for collective identity affiliation. Other juxtapositions employed by sociology and political science to develop this thesis of polarization are the concepts of “Anywheres” (in the sense of “globetrotters”) and “Somewheres” (in the sense of “stayers”) (Goodhart, 2017, p. 3), “transnational” and “neonational narratives” (Krämer, 2019), or—particularly prevalent—cosmopolitanism and communitarianism (Merkel, 2017a, 2017b; Koppetsch, 2019). Cosmopolitans, to cite political scientist Wolfgang Merkel, stand for the principles of “individualism, universalism, and openness” and “emphasize the opportunities of globalization” (Merkel, 2017b, p. 53; translation by the authors). Communitarians, on the other hand, “prefer manageable communities and controlled borders; they advocate limiting immigration, opt for cultural identity, and emphasize the value of social cohesion” (ibid., p. 54, translation by the authors). The dominant narrative in these antagonistic models is the thesis that cosmopolitanism has progressively developed into a hegemonic position of power occupied by the winners of globalization or modernization (see, e.g., Jörke & Selk, 2015, p. 492). This position, it is argued, is prevalent among the upper and middle classes and declines from left to right in the party system (Merkel, 2017b, p. 54).

An interesting music sociological confirmation of this thesis can be found in the analysis of online discussions about musical taste by Michael Parzer. His research finding is that in popular music “musical tolerance” has developed into a “central criterion of sociocultural distinction” (Parzer, 2011, p. 223; translation by the authors). Pop cultural capital is now signaled less by authentic affiliation with a particular musical culture, but rather by the narrative of a “fundamental openness to many different musical worlds” and a “symbolic crossing of boundaries” (ibid., p. 211). Parzer’s study suggested as early as 2011 that musical taste in our times serves the function of drawing social boundaries based on a “cosmopolitan disposition” (Woodward et al., cited in ibid., p. 236).

Numerous traces of the polarization thesis so prominent in sociology can also be found within current music education discourses, even if the connection to the sociological and political science discourse mentioned above has so far been peripheral. Among others, in a keynote delivered at this year’s symposium of the Wissenschaftliche Sozietät Musikpädagogik (WSMP) entitled “A Longing for Consensus? Identity Politics and Polarization”, Øivind Varkøy (2021) asked whether music education is currently characterized by a longing for a left-liberal consensus that is primarily aligned to norms of identity politics and morally disqualifies those who think differently<sup>4</sup>. According to Varkøy, a review of conference programs dedicated to the philosophy of music education of past years reveals that a rather homogeneous spectrum of topics has developed. Studies oriented towards identity politics, including critiques of racism, cultural diversity, feminism, or LGBTQI\* rights, dominated. He argues that this normative consensus tends to exclude colleagues who are more aligned with traditional or conservative values, or who otherwise see

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<sup>4</sup> We would like to thank Øivind Varkoy for making his lecture manuscript available to us for the writing of this introduction.

themselves as left-liberal. Varkøy develops a discursive alternative model with reference to political scientist Chantal Mouffe. According to her book *On the Political* (2005), the currently dominant discourse on central social issues such as migration, fair distribution, participation, or climate change can be characterized as a post-political vision of a cosmopolitan, reconciled dialogue. Based on this hegemonic consensus, an antagonistic thinking between an “us” and a “them” emerges. Political controversies are no longer conducted on an equal footing and with equal value, but take the form of a moral delegitimization of the opponent. Political opponents become enemies in this way of thinking. Instead of a conflict based on moral self-valorization and devaluation of those who think differently, public discourse must once again be conducted more agonistically, i.e., in a competition of competing opinions among equals. Alexis Anja Kallio postulates a similar goal for practical music lessons. Especially in times of increasing polarization, she argues, one must strive less for the ideal of discursive consensus and more toward mutual political listening (Kallio, 2021, p. 164). Accordingly, hate music and hate speech should not be seen as pathological phenomena, but as products of social conflicts in which opinions about what is good and right are constructed and controlled by hegemonic social groups (ibid., p. 172): “we also need to cultivate skills in listening and responding to difference, even when—or perhaps especially when—such difference represents views and values we find reprehensible” (ibid.).

Other music pedagogical discourses assume completely different hegemonic relationships in institutionalized music pedagogy than Varkøy claims for the current academic discourse, but they base their analyses on patterns of interpretation that are no less antagonistic. The discourse on community music, for example, claims that music teacher training in most universities and conservatories is primarily focused on norms of European art music, and not toward values of cultural diversity, participation without preconditions, and inclusion (e.g., Higgins, 2017, p. 49; Willingham, 2017, p. 75). The critique that conventional music education continues to feature practices of Western art music is also prevalent within the sociology of music education. Authors argue that the focus on “serious music” reproduces the elaborate language codes of a traditionally minded middle and upper class, leading to barriers in understanding for members of less educated classes (Wright & Davies 2010, pp. 46-48). For these authors, the objective of constructing an institutionalized musically educated elite is to represent a normative concept of culture and a worldview that is averse to a diverse or cosmopolitan habitus. A confirmation of the thesis that the training of music teachers is primarily based on a hegemonic focus on European art music can be found in a study by Thade Buchborn on the qualifying examination requirements at German universities and conservatories (Buchborn, 2019). Buchborn comes to the conclusion that despite a clear opening of the artistic major offerings into the realms of jazz-rock-pop, large parts of music cultural practices that would be extremely relevant for music education open to diversity remain excluded: non-European musical instruments as well as subjects like songwriting, dance, and rap are rare, and electronic and digital instruments don’t even play any role at all. Both the curriculum of arts majors and the exams in minors continue to reveal a focus on classical European art music. Buchborn sums up:

In conversations with colleagues, there is often little evidence of an equal coexistence of all manifestations of music and an appreciation of musical cultures in particular, which traditionally have little room at the conservatory. Rather, a concept of culture that is hierarchical, elitist, and based in norms of high culture is also conveyed to

students, and the preservation and transmission of our “cultural heritage” in schools and conservatories is demanded. (Buchborn, 2019, p. 46; translation by the authors)

The abovementioned discourses of music education are, of course, situated on different levels: while Varkøy primarily refers to contemporary scientific discourse, the latter findings primarily consider institutionalized hegemonies in teacher training at music conservatories and universities. Moreover, the analyses often only refer to specific national contexts, making it difficult to discuss cross-national trends in hegemony discourse. What they do have in common, however, are polarizing figures of thought and clusters of values that are in conflict with each other, corresponding with Reckwitz’s hypothesis of a fundamental cultural conflict.

The book at hand ties in with the conference volume by Ivo Berg, Hannah Lindmaier, and Peter Röbbke entitled *Change of accidentals. Socio-political Dimensions of Music Education Today* (Berg, Lindmaier & Röbbke, 2020; translation by the authors). One of their central arguments is that music education can no longer escape a sociopolitical shift and must position itself more clearly on topics such as diversity, inclusion, and migration within a tense public discourse (ibid., p. 7). We agree with the observation that it is inevitable that current social developments will lead to a shift in the discourse around music pedagogical reflection in the twenty-first century. With the contributions gathered in this book, we would like to systematize, structure, reflect, and critically discuss, from a music pedagogical perspective, the widespread thesis that Western societies are increasingly undergoing polarization processes. Is political scientist Chantal Mouffe right that antagonisms sharpen the view of social conflicts in the first place (Mouffe, 2005, pp. 8-9)? Is it only through dichotomies that ambivalences, paradoxes, and simultaneities can be recognized? Or do polarizing models of thought such as cosmopolitanism versus communitarianism rather obscure the view of music pedagogical realities? Do they even run the risk of unintentionally preparing an ideological breeding ground for populist world views in their top-bottom antagonism?

The contributions collected in this book are largely based on the lectures given at the Siegen conference *Antipluralism and Populism: Polarizing Interpretations of Society as a Challenge for Music Education* and form a kaleidoscope of music educational perspectives on these questions. The book is divided into three sections: *Cultural Hegemony and Value Conflicts in Music Education* (I), *Music (Education) and Populism* (II), and *Normative Reflections on Music Education* (III). These sections are flanked by a prologue from a sociological perspective, a (self-)critical intermezzo, and an epilogue.

## **Prologue**

The introductory text is based on the keynote of the Siegen conference. In that lecture, political scientist and sociologist *Floris Biskamp* explored phenomena of political and social polarization by contrasting two different approaches that frame and explain polarization in different ways. The first approach is based on the ideology of the far right and its (often racist and anti-Semitic) depiction of different social groups, the second on the view of scholarship on cosmopolitanism/communitarianism. Biskamp critically examined both and elaborated their respective normative implications, which led him to the assessment that even this discourse of cosmopolitanism/communitarianism is in danger of producing ideology—all the more stimulating a differentiated view of that debate in this publication.

## I. Cultural Hegemony and Value Conflicts in Music Education

The first and most extensive section links the polarization debate to music education discourse, focusing particularly on matters of cultural hegemonies and providing different perspectives on which values, norms, and elites actually seem to (and should) prevail in music education at its various institutional and structural levels.

- *Dorothee Barth* identifies contending elites that develop significantly divergent norms for music education in schools: on the one hand, an elite that promotes a focus on Western art music (culminating in the unconditional demand for a secure knowledge of musical notation), and on the other hand, a cosmopolitan elite that strives for culturally diverse openness. Arguing that any normative approach in the educational field should be guided by the two basic ethical questions of *justice* and the *good life*, she analyzes the orientations of both elites and concludes that the cosmopolitan one is clearly more just, more inclusive, and allows to a greater extent for the development of one's personality.
- Subsequently, while *Thade Buchborn*, *Hansjörg Schmauder*, *Eva-Maria Tralle*, and *Jonas Völker* note that many educational institutions proclaim a broad, diversity-focused understanding of music, they discover a discrepancy between this demand and the actual guidelines and contents of school curricula and music teacher training programs. They diagnose a hegemony of Western art music, which takes expression both in its "naturalizing" linguistic-argumentative presentation and in implicit prioritization and stronger structural embedding. Since this hegemony is likely to shape the professional practice of future music teachers and thus to be passed on, the authors see a reproductive cycle of hegemony that needs to be challenged in order to reflect the diversity of musical practices today and increase accessibility to the music teacher profession.
- *Tobias Hömberg* refers to the cosmopolitanism/communitarianism discourse by taking up the aspect of conflicting individualistically or collectivistically shaped concepts of value. On the basis of two prominent publications, he examines whether this polarity can also be found in music pedagogical thinking in the form of pedagogical norms. A critical thesis by the educationalist Karl-Heinz Flechsig provides the impetus for this and adds a new facet, especially in light of the preceding texts: Flechsig identifies what he sees as a problematic universalization of individualism as a pedagogical norm in Western societies, which should not be projected unquestioningly and should also be balanced by additional consideration of collective orientations.
- In the following text, *Thade Buchborn* and *Eva-Maria Tralle* focus on individual music teachers, drawing from two studies on music teachers' perspectives on and ways of dealing with intercultural learning. In an effort to reconstruct shared norms as well as implicit knowledge that guides their teaching practices, they discover that the music teachers in question share diversity-oriented norms and express that their teaching should reflect these, but at the same time have very limited experience in actually embedding them in their practice, which is dominated by Western art music and a static, ethnic-holistic concept of culture. Interestingly, the male and female respondents deal with this discrepancy between habitus and norm differently, revealing gender-typical strategies. Moreover, in the light of the polarization issue

these findings could also be considered an indication that individuals cannot always be clearly assigned to one camp; rather, there may also be an intraindividual level of conflict.

- *Anne Bubinger* picks up on the focus on individual worldviews and beliefs. She provides migration-related and postcolonial perspectives on the phenomenon of borders and, in an empirical study, finds that they play a central part in individual teachers' reflections on interculturality in music education at school. Since reflexive-mental borders manifested in teachers' imagination can be traced back to systemic-institutional, personal-biographical and emotional aspects, they fulfill highly ambivalent functions—on the one hand as measures of protection and orientation, on the other hand as instruments of power that reinforce boundaries and stabilize existing hegemonic structures. An examination of borders under critical consideration of power structures could thus hold potential for intercultural music education discourse.

### **(Self-)Critical Intermezzo**

The following contribution constitutes a kind of (self-)critical intermezzo. *Andreas Lehmann-Wermser* provides thoughts on the Siegen conference from the position of an observer and commentator. While the preceding contributions have described polarizations and conflicting norms and values in music education from different perspectives, he starts from the thesis that music education discourse in Germany is characterized by a high degree of unity and uniformity (fueled by a relative social homogeneity of its members) but at the same time sealed off from many fields of ongoing social unrest and conflict—partly due to the lack of actors representing opposing positions.

## **II. Music (Education) and Populism**

Right-wing groups, but in sociological analyses such as Reckwitz's, as well the culturalization regime of cultural essentialism is repeatedly associated with populist appropriations. Where and how is music used populistically or does it become an element of populist staging? But also: to what extent is this classification already an attribution from a normative, biased cosmopolitan perspective? Are there other possible, plausible readings? The two texts in the following section unfold different facets and perspectives.

- *Mario Dunkel* explores populism and authoritarian nationalism in European music cultures as a challenge for music education. He argues that the debate about connections between music cultural developments and populism in Europe should be considered to belong immediately to music education discourse in order to actively determine the understanding of the nexus of music and populism that should become relevant in music education contexts. Departing from a discursive-performative concept of populism, Dunkel analyzes the interplay of populism and nationalism on a cultural and musical level, exemplified by the development of the song "Nélküled" (Without you) by the Hungarian rock band Ismerős Arcok. He then takes a look at political and cultural developments in Germany and discusses the use of music by populist-nationalist organizations as well as a piece from the genre known as New German Rock and its appeal to populist utilization.
- *Reinhard Kopanski* focuses the use of references to National Socialism in pop music. Sparked by the trailer and video clip *Deutschland* by the Neue Deutsche Härte band *Rammstein* whose release



provoked a major media controversy in 2019, Kopanski develops an analytical model building on Linda Hutcheon's (2005) *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony*. As a result, he presents alternative readings on Rammstein's teaser and video clip—striving on the one hand for a critical, but unbiased and differentiated view of Rammstein, and on the other more generally for a transparent and nonjudgmental approach that can foster an open, substantial debate on controversial artists and their work in music education contexts.

### III. Normative Reflections on Music Education

The third section gathers four contributions that investigate ethical issues and dimensions of music education and relate the underlying norms in different ways to the social polarization debate as well as to cosmopolitan values in particular.

- *Oliver Kautny* outlines an ethically based model of dialogue for intercultural music education, building on a new reading of political scientist Rainer Forst's ethics of toleration (2013) that specifically aims for a balance between the construction and deconstruction of cultural ideas. Kautny adds the poststructuralist motivated dimension of *reflexive tolerance* to the *respect and esteem conceptions* introduced by Forster. He concludes his model of dialogue for music education by reinterpreting Ott's model of classroom dialogues (Ott, 2012) in terms of these three aspects. Finally, Kautny draws compelling parallels between his model and forms of recognition and communication claimed by Reckwitz (2021), even though their argumentations differ in detail.
- According to *Daniela Bartels*, music teachers can counter increasing phenomena of antipluralism and populism by deciding to act as *ethical practitioners* (Elliot, 1995) and to strengthen the ability to cope with plurality through deliberate pedagogical actions and the development of certain ethical capacities. With reference to Hansen, Bartels suggests an ethical understanding of cosmopolitanism that “signifies the human capacity to be open reflectively to the larger world, while remaining loyal reflectively to local concerns, commitments, and values” (Hansen, 2011, p. xiii)—and thereby not just tolerate others, but learn from them and deeply value plurality. In this ethical turn of cosmopolitanism, the clusters of values understood as opposites in sociology are reconciled to a certain extent.
- *Sara Hubrich* and *Fiona Stevens* conducted a small-scale pilot study at the Darmstadt University of Applied Sciences in order to investigate whether low-threshold, participatory music interventions in different forms of active involvement with music might encourage prosocial behavior and democratic values in a group situation. If this were the case, it would—and here an affinity to Bartel's considerations arises—add responsibility and a political aspect to the role of music educators.
- In this section's final contribution, *Alicia De Banffy-Hall* and *Marion Haak-Schulenburg* address the critical question of whether community music—originally a bottom-up movement that championed values of equality, participation, and diversity and opposed high arts exclusivity and cultural hegemony—has recently become associated with a neoliberal agenda, as suggested by Krönig (2019). The authors dissent from Krönig's assessment and highlight community musicians' strategies for handling the tension between idealism and realism in order to participate in shaping politics under changing conditions, while also remaining rooted in their principles.

## Epilogue

This ZfKM special issue closes with an article by *Jürgen Vogt*, based on a keynote at the Nordic Network for Research in Music Education (NNRME) conference in Copenhagen in March 2020, which we are pleased to include in this volume as a complementary perspective. Engaging with Adorno's critical theory, Vogt argues that—after it seemed for some time that critical music education had made itself obsolete—its aims “have not either been fully reached in the past or are in danger again in the present” (p. 209). He claims that strategies of the New Right can be interpreted as a direct attack on critical theory and its impact on all possible cultural spheres, and differentiates this thesis with regard to all three generations of critical theory, leading him to the concluding and resonating request to “(re)discover the political within music education” (p. 215) and “resharpen the tools of critique” (p. 215).

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