

Operationalizing Aesthetics Within the Eugenics Movement: Cautionary Implications for
Aesthetic Education

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Abstract

Although multiple scholars have pushed music education to embrace the aesthetic as a curricular and pedagogical touchstone, research surrounding this aesthetic turn has largely framed aesthetics as a sensory experience rather than a social technology (one that can both liberate and oppress). In response, I use this paper to address the following question: how do uncritical aesthetic philosophies and the experiences they engender act as a means of oppression within music education? By way of example, I approach this question through a text analysis of writings on aesthetics from *Eugenics Review*, a long running publication that disseminated eugenics news and research. In doing so, I construct a eugenical theory of aesthetics, one that illuminates how eugenicists used aesthetics to enact what Foucault defines as pastoral power and assert control of bodies and populations through education. I then frame the writings of Carl Seashore (a pioneering music education researcher and avowed eugenicist) within this eugenical theory of aesthetics, revealing the ways that Seashore used aesthetic theory to forward eugenical arguments. I conclude with implications for contemporary educators and researchers, sounding a call for a deep and critical examination of all aesthetic formations within music education.

Introduction

Since its publication, Reimer's *A Philosophy of Music Education*¹ has stood as one of the dominating texts in music education's turn towards the aesthetic. This book, which culminated a two-decade long period of upheaval within the music education world,² posited the intrinsic value of aesthetic experiences as a learning practice while Reimer's subsequent work (including an updated version of the original text) expanded on this central thesis.³ In Reimer's own words, this particular formation of aesthetic education "refers to (1) our understandings, assisted by the field of aesthetics, of what characterizes music as art and (2) our attempts to teach music in ways that are true to its artistic nature."⁴ But rather than forward one universal understanding of art, the author also situates this understanding of aesthetic education within a polycultural framing nominating an "an attempt to enhance people's ability to gain the meanings available from culturally embedded expressive forms" as a central tenet of music education.⁵ Since the publication of these foundational texts, multiple authors have theorized alternate ways of engaging "music education as aesthetic education," including approaches rooted in the materiality of sound itself,⁶ sociocultural work derived from listening across cultures,⁷ and the necessity of learning how to appreciate music altogether.⁸ While some have challenged this approach, most notably Elliot,⁹ the reliance on aesthetic experiences and the importance of developing aesthetic appreciation continues to hold space within music education broadly.

While the aesthetic turn within music education scholarship has generated multiple philosophies and underlying techniques, these approaches to music education largely define aesthetics as a sensory experience by foregrounding notions of beauty or meaning making within music. However, a number of scholars outside of music education research have challenged this theoretical framing by positioning aesthetics as a social technology, one that acts on and asserts power relations within various cultural contexts. These formations include theorizing aesthetics as a tool for reimagining networks of social relationships¹⁰ and, within an education context, liberating students from oppressive social orders.¹¹ Rancière also went so far as to define aesthetics as the foundation on which society governs itself when establishing the "distribution of the sensible," or "the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it."¹² In doing so, Rancière claims that "politics consist in reconfiguring the distribution of the sensible which defines the common of a community, to introduce into it new subjects and objects, to render visible what had not been, and to make heard as speakers those who had been perceived as mere noisy animals."¹³ These alternate definitions of aesthetics not only challenge educators to think about aesthetic experiences within the classroom but serve as a warning for the unintentional consequences that may emerge through aesthetic interactions. While proponents of social aesthetic theories often promote the benefits of these experiences, they also warn of oppressive tendencies within uncritical aesthetic formations. As a tool, institutions and individuals can use aesthetics, however defined, to both positive and oppressive ends.

Between these two framings of aesthetics, one that focuses on an affective response to the sensory and the other that situates aesthetics as its own social technology, sits an important space for researchers and educators to explore. These investigations hold value precisely because aesthetics can engage both framings at once, an assertion Rancière makes clear within his writings on the politics of artistic expression.¹⁴ I therefore use this article to engage the intersection of these two aesthetic philosophies by addressing the following research question: how do uncritical aesthetic philosophies and the experiences they engender act as a means of

oppression within music education? To approach this question by way of example, I examine writings from the eugenics movement in order to define a eugenical theory of aesthetics. This social movement from the first half of the 20th century, one that promoted an all-encompassing form of social engineering based on a faulty understanding of genetics,¹⁵ serves as a highly valuable site of exploration because of its continued legacy within music education¹⁶ and the field of education more broadly.¹⁷ Understanding how eugenicists both defined and operationalized aesthetics, both within education and broader cultural contexts, could therefore illuminate the ways that sensory understandings of aesthetics could enact forms of oppression.

To produce this historical analysis, I begin by providing a brief overview of the eugenics movement that I frame within Foucault's notions of sovereign and pastoral power. I then turn towards a text analysis of articles from *Eugenics Review*, a long running eugenics journal, that discuss aesthetics. In doing so, I argue that eugenicists produced a formation of aesthetics that furthered the movement's racist and sexist attempts to control the global population. To position this analysis within the context of music education, I use this newly defined eugenical theory of aesthetics to analyze the writings of Carl Seashore, a pioneer within music education research and an avowed eugenicist,¹⁸ to exemplify the potentially oppressive impact of uncritical aesthetic formations within educational contexts. I then conclude with implications for contemporary aesthetic education and research.

A Brief History of the Eugenics Movement

The process of mapping the history of the eugenics movement begins with a single point of origin: Francis Galton. One of the fathers of modern statistical analysis, Galton laid the foundation of the eugenics movement in 1865 with the publication of a two-part article that later became *Hereditary Genius* and eventually coining the term in 1883.¹⁹ In his own words, "eugenics is the science which deals with all influences that improve the inborn qualities of race; also with those that develop them to the utmost advantage" with a particular emphasis on genetics and heritage.²⁰ This formulation, if taken at face value, produces a simple approach to "improving" the population that resembled breeding practices amongst livestock or pets: if you want a healthier and smarter population, then make sure the people who exhibit those traits procreate and restrict people who do not share those qualities from doing so. Over the course of nearly 100 years, the eugenics movement grew substantially as academics from a wide range of fields built on this foundation, despite the fact that researchers of the time had already disproven Galton's original use of Mendelian genetics and other eugenical assertions.²¹ By the time the American Eugenics Society changed its name to the Society for the Study of Social Biology in 1972,²² well past the horrific use of eugenical science adopted by the Nazis, both academics and public figures across the globe had advocated for eugenical approaches to economics,²³ birth rates,²⁴ interracial relationships,²⁵ artistic ability,²⁶ women in higher education,²⁷ and an immensely wide range of other topics and concerns from various disciplines.

It is worth explicitly noting that a dedication to white supremacy existed at the core of this scientific philosophy. Fueled by a dedication to racism and xenophobia, most eugenicists held a deep and unshakable belief that, first, the white race was genetically superior to all other races and, second, an increase in population among other racial groups threatened the greatness of whiteness. Stoddard clearly states this in his highly influential book *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy* when discussing the stocks (here meaning genetic quality) of different racial groups: "whether we consider interwhite migrations or colored encroachments on white lands, the net result is an expansion of lower and a contraction of higher stocks, the

process being thus a disgenic one.”²⁸ Ross further exemplifies how these racial fears intertwined with a faulty understanding of genetics when he says, “if our people has become weak, no transfusion of peasants will set it on its feet again; for their blood too, soon thins. The trouble, if you call it that, is not with the American people, but with the wide diffusion among us of a civilized manner of life.”²⁹ This belief in white supremacy, one fueled by a supposed genetic predisposition towards greatness, evolved into a wide spread theory of human history that positioned northern Europeans as the most intelligent, civilized, and qualified racial group within the world.³⁰ It then fell on eugenicists to act on this false assumption, uncovering and designing mechanisms to eliminate racially inferior groups and increase the white population. These mechanisms included forced sterilization, controlled breeding, and, in extreme circumstances, genocide.³¹

Despite the popularity of eugenics ending in the mid-1900s, this wide-ranging approach to intellectual production continues to assert its influence, especially in education. According to Winfield, the influence of the eugenics movement seeped into all aspects of educational practice within the United States and produced an institution dedicated to the promotion of white supremacy.³² This occurred largely through a process of normalization, with eugenicists directly influencing both school policy and curriculum to promote eugenical ideals.³³ Most prominently, the continued use of standardized intelligence tests (including both general assessments such as the IQ test and more specific tools like the SAT and ACT) emerged from this movement.³⁴ Again, this dedication to measurement emerged from the foundation set by Galton at the outset of this movement. The development of statistics as a tool for producing knowledge allowed for the measurement and comparison of broadly intangible phenomena, such as intelligence. Emboldened by these tools, eugenicists also expanded the reach of testing by developing new tests for an array of newly devised forms of intelligence. Seashore, for example, devised a set of tasks that could measure one’s inherited musical intelligence³⁵ And when white students scored better on these tests, eugenicists used this finding to prove their racists assumptions (rather than challenge the tool being used), an assertion that continues to influence education research decades later.³⁶

To act on these racialized assumptions, eugenicists simultaneously promoted two different tactics, positive eugenics (the development of valuable genetic traits) and negative eugenics (the reduction of negative genetic traits), that largely align with Foucault’s notions of pastoral and sovereign power. Concerning sovereign power, this formation rests on the concept of one body acting on another, a formation that foregrounds the sovereign’s “right to take life or let live.”³⁷ Within many enactments of negative eugenics, eugenicists relied on sovereign power to control the lives of racially marginalized individuals and their ability to procreate. Especially in instances of genocide (here referring to the Holocaust) and forced sterilization laws, the eugenics movement enforced violent white supremacy in an attempt to eradicate entire populations of people. Alongside sovereign power, Foucault argues that pastoral power exists as the defining form of power within modernism (as previous social structures relied exclusively on sovereign power).³⁸ Foucault argues that this form of power, one constructed through a collection of social values and beliefs that restrict the actions and status of others, originates in the salvation narrative of Christianity but spread to secular institutions through modernity. This allowed other institutions, such as schools and the academy, to enact power in the same way as the church: utilizing social codes and future oriented fears to shape the worldview and subsequent actions of populations. In this instance, the eugenics movement enhanced the use of sovereign power via physical violence or policing practices by enacting control through the

deployment of erroneous knowledge and, subsequently, fear. Through positive eugenics, a process largely enacted through education and intellectual production, eugenicists engaged pastoral power to produce the idealized subject through white supremacy. As Foucault attests, pastoral power “is linked with a production of truth- the truth of the individual himself.”³⁹ Intelligence tests, for example, does not merely measure the intelligence of an individual. They produce both an understanding of intelligence and intelligent individuals. Simultaneously, these tests produce unintelligent or deviant individuals, thereby acting as a tool for controlling social behavior.⁴⁰ The eugenics movement therefore asserted its power in multiple ways, both through physical violence and through the production of subjects in society.

Aesthetics in the Eugenics Movement

To further explore how the eugenics movement engaged in the use of pastoral power, I turn now towards eugenical formations of aesthetics. In doing so, I focus on how eugenicists conceptualized and operationalized aesthetics within the movement. As a means towards unveiling how the eugenics movement conceptualized aesthetics, I conducted a text analysis of articles from *Eugenics Review*, a scholarly publication focused on disseminating research into and news about the eugenics movement that ran from 1909 to 1968. To conduct this analysis, I first found every single mention of the terms “aesthetic” or “aesthetics” within the journal’s entire run (68 mentions total). I then coded each mention using an open and iterative approach to descriptive and thematic coding techniques.⁴¹ I then used this analysis to construct a substantive theory⁴² of aesthetics within the eugenics movement, proposing an aesthetic theory shared by the authors who published in *Eugenics Review*. Through this coding process, I produced six themes that serve as the core of an eugenical theory of aesthetics: the social value of aesthetic appreciation (social), the scientific roots of aesthetics in evolution (biology), the intellectual roots of aesthetic appreciation (mind), physical beauty of people or individuals (body), beauty in art (culture), and ecological forms of beauty (nature). Aside from these six themes, I also produced three other codes that prove less relevant to this analysis: the aesthetics of the eugenics movement within the cultural sphere (politics), the aesthetics of contraception (birth control), and the aesthetic qualities of written texts about eugenics (writing). Table 1 provides information on each mention of aesthetics and how I coded these texts. In the remainder of this section, I will explore each code and how it contributes to a eugenical theory of aesthetics.

Table 1
Coded Texts from Eugenics Review

Code	Author	Article Title	Date	Page Number
Social	W. R. Inge	Some moral aspects of eugenics	1909	27
	Alice Ravenhill	Eugenic ideals for womanhood	1910	266-267
	J. A. Lindsay	Lester F. Ward's philosophisches system der soziologie	1912	316
	J. A. Lindsay	The philosophy of Nietzsche: an exposition and an appreciation	1913	72
	J. J. Findlay	Disabled soldiers and school life	1917	137
	L. D.	Eugenics, civics and ethics	1921	302
	F. C. S. Schiller	Eugenical reform of the House of Lords	1929	240

	N/A	On Catholicism: As revealed in the latest encyclical of his holiness Pope Pius XI	1931	42
	F. C. S. Schiller	Studies in sociology	1933	40
	Various	Notes of the quarter	1935	183
	Various	Notes of the quarter (2)	1937	262
	Evelyn Lawrence	The New Era in the Junior School.	1938	285
	H. L.	Psychosocial medicine: a study of the sick society	1949	148
	C. P. Blacker	J. B. S. Haldane on eugenics	1952	149
	Mary Stocks	Reflections on a changing class structure	1959	17
	A. James Gregor	On the nature of prejudice	1961	217-218
	Julian Huxley	The Impending Crisis	1961	136
	Various	Notes of the quarter	1962	188-189
	J. A. H. Waterhouse,	Inquiry into fertility of immigrants: Preliminary report	1964	16
	Diana H. Brabban			
Biology	J. W. Slaughter	Selection in marriage	1909	156-157
	R. A. Fisher	Some hopes of a eugenicist	1914	309
	Geoffrey Smith	A contribution to the biology of sex	1914	35
	R. A. Fisher	The evolution of sexual preference	1915	184
	Various	Notes and memoranda	1921	480
	R. A. Fisher	The evolution of the conscience in civilised communities (In special relation to sexual vices)	1922	190
	Leonard Darwin	Mate selection	1923	461
	F. C. Bartlett	Temperament and social class	1928	26
	B. Dunlop	Æsthetics and contraception	1931	286
	R. A. Fisher	Family allowances: In the contemporary economic situation	1932	90
	R. Austin Freeman	Psychology of sex; a manual for students	1933	113
	C. B. S. HODSON.	Crowther, J. G. Biology in Education. (Review)	1934	72
	N. W. Pirie	The chemical origin of life	1965	30-31
Mind	Havelock Ellis	The truth we owe to youth	1911	70
	Tuke	The eugenic ideal as a factor in the formation of character	1913	45
	T. Simon	The measurement of intelligence	1915	293
	N/A	Teaching in schools, training colleges, and colleges from the point of view of the Eugenist.	1917	134
	F. H. H. Tredgold	The education of a nation	1920	119-120
		Discussion on the inheritance of mental qualities, good and bad	1922	204

	Leonard Darwin	Expenditure on education and its effects on fertility	1926	239
	A. F. Tredgold	Mental disease in relation to eugenics: The Galton lecture	1927	11
	J. F. D.	Burt, Cyril, M.A., D.Sc. The Measurement of Mental Capacities. (Review)	1928	43
	George H. Knibbs	The fundamental elements of the problems of population and migration	1928	285
	R. J. A. Berry	The physical basis of mind: And the diagnosis of mental deficiency	1930	175-176
	Cyril Bibby	Sex education aims, possibilities and plans	1946	162
	C. P. Blacker	Galton on eugenics as science and practice	1947	179
	H. J. Eysenck	The measurement of socially valuable qualities	1947	105
	Paul Bloomfield	The eugenics of the Utopians: The Utopia of the eugenists	1949	198
Body	G. P. Balzarotti, C. S. Stock	Niceforo on the highly superior German	1918	36-37
	F. C. S. Schiller	The group mind, a sketch of the principles of collective psychology with some attempt to apply them to the interpretation of national life and character	1920	225
	H. Onslow	Fair and dark; is there a predominant type?	1920	217
	J. Arthur Thomson	Love-life in nature: the story of the evolution of love	1932	40
	Cyrus H. Eshleman	Eugenics and mongrelization	1940	29
Culture	Alice Ravenhill	Eugenic ideals for womanhood	1910	266
	G. Elliot Smith	The upper palaeolithic age in Britain	1927	180
	R. Austin Freeman	Thus we are men	1939	296
	W. Russell Brain	Some reflections on genius	1948	17
Nature	Various	Notes of the quarter	1935	183
	G. C. L. Bertram	Eugenics and human ecology	1951	13
Politics	Douglas White	Contraception	1924	613
	N. W. Pirie	The biochemistry of semen	1955	53-54
Birth control	Lord Horder	Eugenics	1936	282
	Various	Notes of the quarter	1937	95
	John R. Baker, R. M. Ranson, J. Tynen	The chemical composition of the volpar contraceptive products, part 2	1939	27

	N. W. Pirie	The biochemistry of conception control	1952	139
	Margaret Hadley Jackson	Artificial insemination (donor)	1957	209
Writing	S. Zuckerman	A herd of red deer. A study of animal behaviour	1938	64
	F. R. Simpson	Handling of Chromosomes	1942	74
	J. H. REY	Comfort, Alex. Darwin and the Naked Lady. London, 1961. (Review)	1962	43

Across all nine themes, three specific notions dominated the discussion of aesthetics within *The Eugenics Review*: discussions of the assumed social good found within aesthetics, the biological argument for aesthetic understandings, and the link between intelligence and aesthetic appreciation. With regards to aesthetics as a social good, the authors in this journal debated the role that aesthetic appreciation should play in man's higher pursuits but they agreed that it played some part. Lindsay summarized this argument, saying, "we may fairly speak of 'The greatest good of the greatest number' as the supreme end of legitimate individual, political and social activity, but, of course, everything will depend upon the definition of 'the good.' If it includes not merely material conditions, but the highest ethical, moral and aesthetic satisfactions, the dictum is valid, and is almost a truism."⁴³ This quote situates aesthetics squarely within the aims of social progress and formation since aesthetic value becomes part of the truism that sits at the heart of producing "the greatest good of the greatest number." Linked directly to the notions of population control at the core of the eugenics movement, Huxely warned that

we are beginning to ruin our own spiritual and mental habitat also. Not content with destroying or squandering our resources of material things, we are beginning to destroy the resources of true enjoyment- spiritual, aesthetic, intellectual, emotional. We are spreading great masses of human habitation over the face of the land, neither cities nor suburbs nor towns nor villages, just a vast mass of urban sprawl or subtopia.⁴⁴

Not only does Huxely forward an understanding of aesthetics as a valued goal within social formation, but the increasing population threatens that social good. Using the logic of the eugenics movement, the solution would then entail population control.

The next dominant theme from this study, the biological foundations of aesthetic appreciation, played a huge role in Fisher's analysis of human sexuality. In this writing, the author relies on Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection to argue that individuals with a better aesthetic judgement had a better chance of survival and evolution would favor those with a keener eye. According to Fisher, "It would be an advantage to primitive man, even if from the earliest times he had no aesthetic prepossessions, to find a bright complexion pleasant and attractive to him, and, for the same reason, tainted breath offensive."⁴⁵ In doing so, Fisher asserts the biological roots of aesthetic appreciation: because certain people appreciated certain aesthetic aspects in their sexual partners, they then had a higher likelihood of passing those aesthetic values on to their offspring. Darwin further exemplifies this assertion when describing the mating practices of other animals:

Females would have been attracted whether the fine colour of the males was due to inherited brightness of colouring or to good constitutions. They were thus in many cases unknown to themselves selecting healthy mates, that is those whose appearance had not been made shabby by ill health; with the results that their descendants inherited the good health of their male ancestors and multiplied accordingly. But their descendants also

inherited from their female ancestors a desire for a brightly coloured mate; and this process going on generation after generation, this desire became universal in the species.

This is the way, so it is suggested, that the rudiments of aesthetic taste first arose.⁴⁶

More than just linking aesthetic appreciation to evolutionary biology, Darwin draws a connection between aesthetic value and the health of the animal itself. An aesthetically pleasing animal (one with a colorful coat that “has not been made shabby”) is also mentally and physically fit. The genes associate with all of these traits are then inherited by the offspring of these animals.

Building on this biological assumption, the authors in *Eugenics Review* also framed aesthetic appreciation as a form of intelligence. While these texts did mention that education could hone this aesthetic intellect, the unchangeable core of inherited knowledge limited the effectiveness of teaching. Eysenck speaks to this framing of aesthetic intellect when he says:

There appears general agreement that there are broad abilities making for proficiency in dealing with spatial relations, perceptual speed, verbal relations, attentive processes, word fluency, numerical relations, mechanical or practical problems, aesthetic judgments, and so forth. The isolation of these qualities, which are undoubtedly “socially valuable,” is one of the proudest achievements of modern psychology.⁴⁷

In doing so, Eysenck not only frames aesthetic judgment as a psychological (as opposed to sociocultural) skill but reasserts the social value of aesthetics as well. In developing this intellect, Hughes argues for aesthetic education: “The human being, we are told, must be treated as an individual, as a worker, and as a citizen. Under the first heading comes physical education, mental education (both humanistic and scientific) and moral education, the latter involving both moral practice and aesthetic appreciation.”⁴⁸ However, this development could only occur if the student had inherited a certain capacity for aesthetic judgment. Berry makes the argument against all individuals holding the capacity for aesthetic judgment when he says, “all feeble-minded children are lacking in the logical, and most of them in the aesthetic, sense.”⁴⁹ Rather than holding the capacity to develop aesthetic judgement, people of “weaker stock” (such as the feeble-minded) did not hold the genetic ability to learn aesthetic judgement.

Themes related to physical, artistic, and natural beauty occurred far less than the previous three themes but still existed within these texts. Although appreciating beauty within these contexts should not seem out of the ordinary, the authors often framed these considerations within eugenical aspirations. Directly advocating for a formation of white supremacy rooted in genetics, Onslow contends that “the aesthetic judgment that ‘fair’ is ‘good’ was originally caused by the fact that the fair were also the noble, the rich, the conquerors, whom the slaves of mankind would always strive to emulate. It is clear, therefore, that the moral judgment ‘good’ is ultimately based upon a very concrete foundation involving the pigments of the hair, skin and eyes.”⁵⁰ In this assertion, Onslow concludes that fair skinned (white) people are physically more appealing because of their high social status which then translates into both a genetic claim about pigments and a moral judgment as well. In turn, each claim feeds the next and a white supremacist worldview emerges. Similarly, Langdon-Brown frames the aesthetics of visual art within a white supremacist context in his book *Thus We Are Men*. In reviewing the book, Freeman writes “He regrets that the modern artist should look to the aboriginal peoples for his inspiration, but hopes for the best. ‘Yet however much my aesthetic susceptibilities may be outraged by the art of to-day, I am willing to hope that out of the present chaos a new art may still be born.’”⁵¹ A racialized understanding of aesthetic appreciation clearly presents itself in this quote, with aboriginal influences being framed as a chaotic element within western modern art, an element that diminishes the aesthetic beauty of western artists’ work.

Turning towards the eugenical trope of overpopulation, Fisher discusses natural beauty by claiming that,

however misguided the drift to the towns may be from an aesthetic standpoint, we must recognize that it is the economic effects of underpopulation- of insufficient mouths to consume the food produced by land already brought under cultivation- that impoverish the idealists who still remain cultivators. These are the people who should be consulted, in my judgment, if the aesthetic argument is to be used, as to whether a countryside largely derelict and neglected is aesthetically more satisfying than one supporting a prosperous agricultural industry.⁵²

In this quote, we see the relationship formed by the author between the social value of an aesthetically beautiful landscape and the fear of over population. While the aesthetic beauty of an open landscape holds value, this beauty must be considered within the context of eugenics. Although the discussion of birth control proves less applicable to this particular analysis, the authors that did discuss this aspect of aesthetics unsurprisingly framed this theme within the context of population control as well. Pirie states this object succinctly when he writes, “once a community had an emotionally and aesthetically satisfactory contraceptive technique the birth-rate would reflect the demand for children and nothing else.”⁵³ Physical, artistic, and natural beauty (along with the aesthetics of contraception) therefore exist as tools for eugenicists to manipulate and control in producing eugenical arguments. These tools then aided eugenicists in acting on the ideals of the movement.

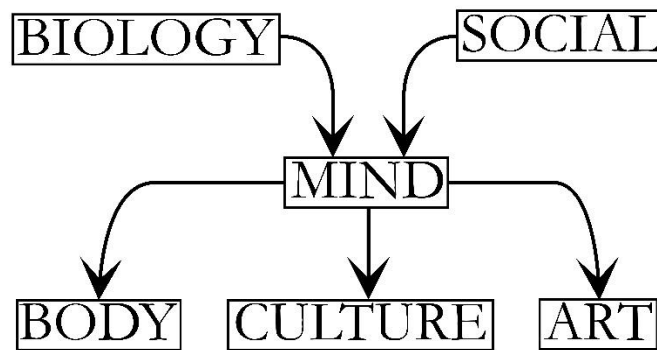


Figure 1. Model of Eugenical Aesthetics

Considering these six main themes in conjunction, the use of aesthetics as a form of pastoral power begins to reveal itself (see Figure 1). It starts with the assumption of aesthetic value and appreciation existing as social goods. Then, by situating aesthetic appreciation within a pseudo-scientific (but widely accepted) understanding of evolution,⁵⁴ eugenicists injected their claims about aesthetic appreciation with a sense of validity. However, this relied on a narrative of evolutionary biology devoid of meaningful evidence. Instead of respecting a multitude of cultures or historical realities, the eugenical approach to aesthetics asserted one understanding of aesthetic beauty rooted in European history.⁵⁵ This assertion acts as a double gesture, promoting one type of body, landscape, and cultural history while denigrating all others. A self-reproducing cycle subsequently forms since only one type of person and culture is deemed valuable within this pseudo-scientific model. The operationalization of aesthetics within eugenics then promotes one category of person. And when a person from that category attained power, they could then reinforce these aesthetic judgements and continue the cycle. This understanding of aesthetics

exacerbates the issue by positing aesthetic satisfaction as a societal good that only the most intelligent could truly understand. Of course, since the eugenicists assumed the heritability of intelligence,⁵⁶ this naturally placed certain people near the top of a hierarchy and others at the bottom. So even in aesthetic appreciation, varying levels of fitness exists while the unfit should be eliminated through practices such as sterilization and purposeful breeding.⁵⁷

Of course, this aesthetic formation can only emerge from false assumptions. The “scientific” argument for aesthetics’ roots in biology relied on an already disproven understanding of evolution and genetics. Eugenicists exacerbated this issue by assuming the heritability of intelligence, which produced a hierarchy of individuals. Falsehoods also fueled claims for the social value of aesthetic beauty: instead of respecting a multitude of cultures or historical realities, the eugenical approach to aesthetics asserted the dominance of one understanding of aesthetics rooted in European history. But since those in power (specifically white, upper class men) held these beliefs, they could assert their own aesthetic judgements as facts while a system constructed to promote these values and fueled by white supremacy bolstered their claims. Through this process, a self-fulfilling notion of aesthetic judgement emerges as a social technology that enacted forms of pastoral control and validated the policing of landscapes, bodies, and cultural artifacts.

Pastoral Power Within Music Education

With the use of pastoral power through education and aesthetics established, I turn towards the intersection of these two aspects of eugenics research. Connecting both of these formations back to music education, I draw parallels between my analysis of aesthetics within the eugenics movement and the writing of Carl Seashore. I focus on this specific author for two reasons. First, Seashore’s foundational work in music education research, and the pioneering use of experimental psychology to measure musical intelligence in particular,⁵⁸ continues to hold considerable influence in the field.⁵⁹ Second, Seashore was an avid eugenicist, being both a member of the American Eugenics Society and a frequent contributor to the International Eugenics Conference.⁶⁰ Methodologically, this alignment with eugenics makes sense: Seashore based most of his music education research on a series of musical intelligence tests and the eugenics movement as a whole centered their theoretical orientation towards intelligence and education entirely within similar tests in other areas.⁶¹ How a eugenical theory of aesthetics plays into this approach to education research, however, remains unexplored. With this in mind, I now engage Seashore’s writings to unveil how this aesthetic formation contributed to the eugenical enactment of pastoral power in music education.

In exploring the writings of Carl Seashore, a clear alignment with the model of eugenical aesthetics provided in the previous section emerges (see Figure 2). To begin, Seashore overtly relied on a genetic understanding of musical intelligence and aesthetic appreciation, one that education could enhance but only for certain individuals. In discussing musical composition, Seashore contends that “of all musical pursuits, composition demands the highest order of intelligence, both native capacity and cultivated power. This intelligence is fundamentally of the same order as scientific, philosophical or aesthetic intelligence in general, but its content is dominantly musical.”⁶² In naming native capacity as an aspect of composition, Seashore positions musical (and, by extension, aesthetic) intelligence as a genetic trait. The author further developed this claim by compartmentalizing musical intelligence into a series of “musical talents” (such as sense of pitch, rhythmic action, sight reading, etc.) that together comprise a full musical intelligence.⁶³ Seashore then argued that other researchers would find proof of this

inheritance by “select[ing] a musical individual who is distinguished for his achievement and measur[ing] his mate, ancestors, and progeny, as far as possible.”⁶⁴ Through this type of analysis, the genetic basis of musical and aesthetic intelligence would prove self-evident.

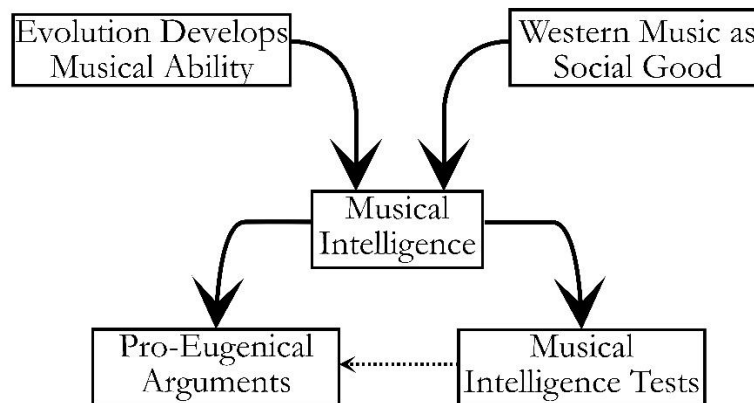


Figure 2. Seashore’s Aesthetics as Technology of Pastoral Power.

Seashore then validated this assertion by further rooting aesthetic abilities within evolutionary biology and social value, two themes the author prominently threads through his work *In Search of Beauty in Music: A Scientific Approach to Musical Aesthetics*. In discussing the evolution of musical values, Seashore makes the unequivocal claim that “the natural history of music reveals the principal rungs in the tottering ladder of its evolution.”⁶⁵ Specifically related to the notion of biology, Seashore draws a connection to the musical abilities and intelligences of humans within animal life:

Every musical capacity had its taproots in the lower forms of animal life, where song and vocal calls of warning, attraction, endearment, and sociability tended to preserve the individual, perpetuate the species and integrate the group. The rising need of vocal communication in the animal world resulted in the development of a physical organism essential to musical behavior.⁶⁶

Through this claim, Seashore not only situates musical intelligence within evolutionary biology, but a specific kind of musical and aesthetic intelligence rooted within traditional forms of western music: “the capstone of musical achievement even today lies largely in its purely artistic aspect- in music as a form of play with no ulterior purpose, as art for art’s sake.”⁶⁷ Within this quote, Seashore invokes a Kantian notion of disinterestedness, a contention largely reliant on the enlightenment project of racialization that constructed whiteness through the separation of intellect and body.⁶⁸ Seashore then further builds on this process of validation by aligning aesthetic and musical values with the social good: “the growth of music was contingent upon and parallel to the evolution of the power of human beings to live together in larger and larger units pointing toward a brotherhood of man in a civilized and cultured world.”⁶⁹ Within this claim, Seashore intertwines the notions of evolutionary biology and social value, positioning both as parallel processes that contribute to the civilization of man. Additionally, the use of coded language once again points towards the white supremacist worldview behind the eugenics movement. Based on the framing Seashore uses to discuss an idealized musical form, a “civilized and cultured world” becomes synonymous with white, Eurocentric society.

Finally, Seashore extended this aesthetic judgement to define beauty within music strictly through a Eurocentric lens. The scientific approach (which, in this instance, means measurable or

quantitative) taken by Seashore to construct this understanding of beauty reveals this assumption. To further analyze aesthetic beauty within music, Seashore and his associates invited professional musicians to record performances of their work within studio settings.⁷⁰ Researchers then analyzed these recordings, ones representative of “presumably good music,” based on the assumption that “physical music as the art object has four and only four basic variables- pitch, loudness, time, and timbre... which operate not only in the actual hearing of music but at all the higher intellectual, emotional, and motor levels of musical behavior.”⁷¹ These assumptions, however, prove highly flawed. Even under the assumption that a positivistic definition of aesthetic beauty may exist outside of any situated understandings of aesthetic experience (an assumption that has been challenged multiple times over), music from outside of the western musical canon challenges Seashore’s definitions of these categories that provide the foundation of his aesthetic theory. Douglas, for instance, undermines Eurocentric approaches to rhythm and melody (and the subsequent pedagogical practices that convey these understandings) by embracing multidominant rhythmic and melodic elements outside of the Western canon that read as nonsensical, distracting, or aesthetically unappealing within most Eurocentric definitions of music.⁷² By ignoring (or, at least, overlooking) these challenges, however, Seashore produced a means for scientifically analyzing and defining aesthetic beauty in music. The selection bias associated with the population of musicians being studied then reinforces the Eurocentrism behind Seashore’s aesthetic formation.

By assuming the existence of an aesthetic intelligence, validating that assumption through faulty evolutionary biology and other assumptions of social good, and applying all of these contentions towards a Eurocentric understanding of music, Seashore constructs an aesthetic formation within music that trades in the pastoral power of the eugenics movement. Especially in applying this formation within education, Seashore’s aesthetic theory emerges as a tool for controlling and manipulating the actions and status of individuals within a broader social context. As part of the practice of education, Seashore strongly advocated for the use of testing procedures to determine the aesthetic intelligence levels of individual students which, in turn, would allow educators to track students into curricular pathways that best suited each child.⁷³ Rather than assuming children had the capability to improve, Seashore advocated for notions of “genius” and “giftedness,” both in music and other subjects, that students either did or did not inherit.⁷⁴ This leads to choices within educational settings as to which students deserve resources (because of their ability to act on them) and which ones do not. In his words, “Great composers must be born with musical talent. Nature is prolific in this respect, but individuals, society, art and environment are wasteful with such resources.”⁷⁵ Again, this approach to education proves self-serving. The people deemed musical geniuses were largely white men and white men would then receive more educational resources (especially within western music education), leading to more white men becoming successful composers and thusly proving their genius. In this process, the pastoral power behind this aesthetic theory comes into full effect: aesthetic intelligence and its operationalization through education produced individuals, constructing a (gendered and racialized) musical genius. Seashore also expanded the pastoral power behind this aesthetic theory beyond education in the form of racialized intelligence studies⁷⁶ and calls for selective breeding to increase aesthetic intelligence,⁷⁷ showcasing not only the danger of this aesthetic form but the nefarious reach of eugenics as a whole.

Implications for Contemporary Education Practices

Although eugenics has largely fallen out of favor in public discourse (but not entirely),⁷⁸ the lasting influence of this intellectual movement continues to shape the modern educational and cultural landscape.⁷⁹ This influence includes a continued legacy with music education, one directly related to Seashore's work in producing musical intelligence and the associated technologies used to measure that construct. Beyond trying to systematically measure musical aptitude in students, researchers in this field continue to contribute musical ability to genetics or inheritance without questioning the social construction of musical ability beforehand.⁸⁰ If anything, the reach of the faulty assumptions behind genetic understandings of musical ability have grown to include other sociocultural factors (such as the genetic propensity for practicing) within this assertion.⁸¹ To this end, the formation of pastoral power developed by Seashore through his forays into eugenical music education research continues to control and act on individuals through institutional practices. By rooting musical ability within a discourse of genetics-based inheritance, contemporary authors continue to produce individuals who are "naturally" good at music.

Even outside of this particular understanding of musical intelligence and music education, this analysis holds significant implications for other forms of aesthetic education. Returning to Reimer's initial framing of "music education as aesthetic education," the fact that eugenicists managed to construct aesthetics as a technology for pastoral power should give scholars and educators pause before adopting Reimer's curricular and pedagogical approach. Specifically, those working in music education need to deeply and critically investigate what "aesthetics" truly entails before building a curriculum around that construct. To use Rancière's terminology, researchers and teachers need to ask, first, who or what exists within the regime of the sensible produced in this educational context and, second, who or what has been excluded. This holds true not only for the ways that music education deploys aesthetics within these contexts but how music itself engages different forms of aesthetics, considering that musical aesthetics themselves can unintentionally reproduce dangerous forms of pastoral power as well.⁸² However, an assumption of naturalism behind the aesthetic education theories of Reimer continues to influence music education research.⁸³ This infers a potentially dangerous pedagogy: in learning about and through aesthetics without questioning the social and historical forces that determined how aesthetics operate, students could unintentionally reproduce dominant narratives within their own worldview. However, the analysis presented in this paper also instills that call for educators and researchers to deeply and critically engage aesthetic education with a sense of urgency, a call that aesthetic education research has already taken up.⁸⁴ Overlooking aesthetics as a needed area of study also results in the continued use of aesthetics as a form of pastoral power. Instead, music education should deploy culturally and historically informed aesthetic education curricula to challenge the dominant narratives that aesthetics, in part, reproduce.

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