

# *An Immanent Pedagogy of Music*

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My background for this paper is that I am analyzing music textbooks from a “multicultural perspective”. Through this work, I have found that the teaching design that the books suggest, does not differ according to the kind of musics taught, but stay more or less the same through for example western classical music, pop and rock, music from Africa and Sámi music. At the same time the content of “foreign musics” as well as western music have been criticized thoroughly from a multicultural perspective, the way this different content is taught, has passed by more silently. This amazed me, and it still does, and in this presentation I want to share some initial thoughts about where this has taken me philosophically. This paper mostly deals with theory and philosophy, and the practical implications are yet to be thought through. Nevertheless, I believe my points here can be relevant for a discussion about how we think about music and how we teach it, especially in our more and more culturally diverse societies, with growing efforts on doing justice to other cultures and musics in our classrooms.

## *How we (still) think about music as object, and how this is reflected in language.*

Phillip Bohlman suggests that there exists typical culturally contingent ontological presuppositions that form ontologies on music. The most common here in the West, he maintains, is that of music as an object. (In Cook og Everist, 1999) Agreeing on that, one should not be amazed if these presuppositions are reflected in language as well as in thinking and finally in practice. Cook links this historically to how music as aesthetic art needed objects for contemplation (Cook, 2000), and even if it is possible through postmodern understandings of aesthetic theory (as music as aesthetic experience) to keep a notion of aesthetics without having to obey to music-as-object, we do through language and concepts, constantly reconstruct “music” as ontologically existing as autonomous objects. Small (long before “Musicking”) sees a similarity between a common notion of “music” to “knowledge”, and says illustratively:

...music exists as something quite apart from themselves, to be listened to, in concert hall, opera house or on record, but that is all. They have no part to play in the creative act, but content themselves with the contemplation of the finished musical work as it is presented to them, the work itself having an abstract existence apart from themselves as listeners, indeed even apart from the performer to whose performance they are listening. The parallel between this abstract view of the musical work and the abstract view of knowledge held in our culture is clear; both are thought to exist `Out There`, independently of the listener and the knower, and both are thought to be essentially unchanged whether or not any individual, as it where, plugs himself in to them (where `Out There` is remains a mystery)  
(Small, 1996:163)

Numerous recent discussions on music (often motivated from experience with alternative ontologies of music) criticize this notion of music-as-object. Perhaps most explicitly, this is formulated through notions of praxialism (David James Elliott, 2005, David J. Elliott, 1995) and “musicking” (Small, 1998). Herbert, calls this turn toward viewing music as a process rather than product the most significant paradigm shift in recent musicology. (Hebert, 2010:96)

Yet, there is still evidence everywhere that the way westerners often think about “music” and what music is, reconstructs music-as-object<sup>1</sup>, autonomously existing “out there”.

Consider a couple of quite common expressions:

Music is made, performed and listened to  
What is central in music?  
The essence of music  
Music itself  
The value of music in it self  
“Music affects us in different ways”  
Layers of meaning in music corresponds to layers in the human mind

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<sup>1</sup> Here I mean both the focus on musical objects (works), and the subject music as existing in it self. (See Rønningen, A. (2011) Musikkbegrepet som sort boks. Årbok NNMPF.)

“Music” becomes an antropomorphicated metaphor: It is thought as something substantive-ish, which has objective qualities and values and a core, as existing independantly outside human beings. If you look up a definition of “antropomorphication”, you may get “embodiment of one or more human traits”, and this is exactly what I mean: “Music” takes a concrete form (a body) and is given an identity constantly mixed with *the sound of music*, (which I of course agree that exists independently outside human beings). For an excellent treatment of this in a Hedeggerian perspective see (Lines, 2005).

Still, music can indeed be seen as primarily an activity, as a verb, (as Elliot does with “ music!” , and what is implied in the expression to music.(David J. Elliott, 1995) ) But focusing on activities *with* music does not rock the basic ontological presupposition of music-as-object. Music as a verb is often music as a transitive verb.

**(WARNING: SHORT GRAMMAR LESSON FOLLOWING! : Let us repeat some basic grammar: a transitive verb is describing action with something - a verb that takes an object, either indirectly (like in for example “ I listen to you ” ,) or directly: (I conduct a Bach cantata.) Transitive verb expresses action towards “ something ” an object outside the doer. Intransitive verbs does not take any object. Ex: I sleep (it is nonsense to ask: “ What do you sleep?) or die, fall, sound, resign, stand, sit, og etc ... )**

Music-as-a-verb does not nessecarily bring an onto-conceptual change if it means music-as-a-transitive-verb taking “ music” as its object. The “ basic musical activities” in the curriculum (and textbooks) in music in Norwegian school (and many other places) are: *performance, listening, composing* and *dancing*. (Dancing somewhat liminal here, and partly arranged under sports, thus I leave it for now) And let us hear the expression from the national curriculum:

With the forms of activity - Performing, Dancing, Composing and Listening - as a frame, the pupils can experience and gain insight in how music has developed, how it works and how it is being used in diverse social, cultural and historical contexts. (National corriculum: L-06)

We here see how “ music” remains objectively existant, (it even becomes an actor: developing, working) and the verbs being used (with the possible exception of dancing) are all transitive, taking Music as their objects.

### ***The essence of “ music ”***

The conception that “music” has a (autonomous) substance outside human beeing, is also a belief that there exist more and less central aspects of music. Essencial to “ music” in our culture (and in the textbooks I studied) it is a thought that musical concepts like rhythm, melody, harmony and sound quality are central<sup>2</sup>, while other feature are not central. This is what Bowman underlines when he says that “*at the heart of the matter lies a set of assumptions about the nature and value of music that wrongly segregates the “truly musical” from things with which music may somehow be associated*” (Bowman, 2007) In this light, please consider these quotes from one of the textbooks I analyzed:

”Some artists have used powerful and unusual tricks that not always have something to do with the music.”

”Lots of people try to get rich on music, and we can witness that rock and pop has become a huge item for sale in a (super)market that does not have anything to do with music”

”Some of the most extreme bands can also use powerful extramusical effects on stage”(Refvik, 1998:42).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Elliot corrects this in a good manner when he states: “The basics of music are not melody, harmony, and so on: The basics of MUSIC are the practice-specific thinking processes that musicers and listerners use to construct musical patterns in their auditory, artistic and contextual fullness.” (MM, s.97)

<sup>3</sup> This is an ad hoc translation. Here´s the norwegian: ”Noen artister har benyttet seg av sterke og uvanlige triks som ikke alltid har så mye med musikken å gjøre”...”Det er mange som forsøker å bli rike på musikk, og vi opplever at pop og rock er blitt en salgsvare i en stor butikk som ikke har noe med selve musikken å gjøre” ... ”Noen av de mest ekstreme bandene kan også benytte seg av sterke utenommusikalske effekter på scenen.

Just to sum this up in my first part of the argument, this is how I will make a caricature<sup>4</sup> of the music-as-object / musicking-as-transitive verb:

Caricature no 1.



I do – with Bruno Nettl (1992)- believe that the way in which a society teaches its music is a matter of enormous importance for understanding that music. Nevertheless, and quite contrary to that, in my ongoing PhD project I find that the aspects of teaching and learning are “forgotten” , and all kinds of musical contents are to be taught and learned in the same way. Let us just have a glance at how a textbook facilitates the learning of an African song “Bele Mama” :

<sup>4</sup>A short comment on making models: I do not like models and figures; I find them very often to be – as pictures: ”destrortions into clarity”. But models can be good if we see them more like caricatures, hence, I call mine caricatures here.

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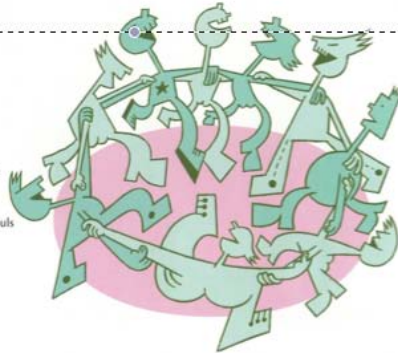
## En afrikansk sang

### Béle Mama

♩ = ca. 140



**DANS**  
Denne afrikanske sangen synger dere best ved å stå i sirkel og samtidig lage «slavesteget». Da lager dere samtidig en god puls til sangen:



- Høyre fot stamper ett tungt skritt inn i sirkelen på «Bé-», venstre stamper på «ma-» (på stedet), og høyre ut av sirkelen på neste «bé-» osv. Pass på å bruke overkroppen med i bevegelsene på afrikansk vis, med mye bruk av løse skuldre og armer!
- Klapp samtidig på etterslagene (toer og firer)
- Syng også sangen som kanon.
- Et samspill med trommer egner seg godt til sangen, især om dere har noen store trommer.



Med trommer og sang 83

### 82 Med trommer og sang

Rytmer dere kan bruke er:



Sett gjerne på andre rytmeinstrumenter dere synes passer. Sangen har bare to akkorder:

Disse kan dere legge i **tangentinstrumenter**, for eksempel slik:

Alternativ for gitar:

På **stavspill**, for eksempel xylofoner, kan dere akkompagnere trestemt. Fordel gjerne dette akkompagnementet på flere stavspill. Dere kan bruke denne rytmen, eller lage en rytme dere synes fungerer bedre.

På **bass** kan dere spille på grunntonene, enten enkle firedelsnoter eller:



### 84 Med trommer og sang

The view that “music” is seen as something external to processes of teaching and learning can be found (unarticulated, but nevertheless very visible) in a variety of texts and writings. It is perfectly possible to speak about music within our field (Music education) as the object of teaching without anyone lifting an eyelid. There are numerous other examples on this in different kinds of books and writings separating processes of learning from “music”, and understanding both “music” and

“pedagogy” as something mutually exclusive and the one thinkable without each other. Consider for example this passage from Green who enthusiastically speaks of the processes of teaching and learning music:

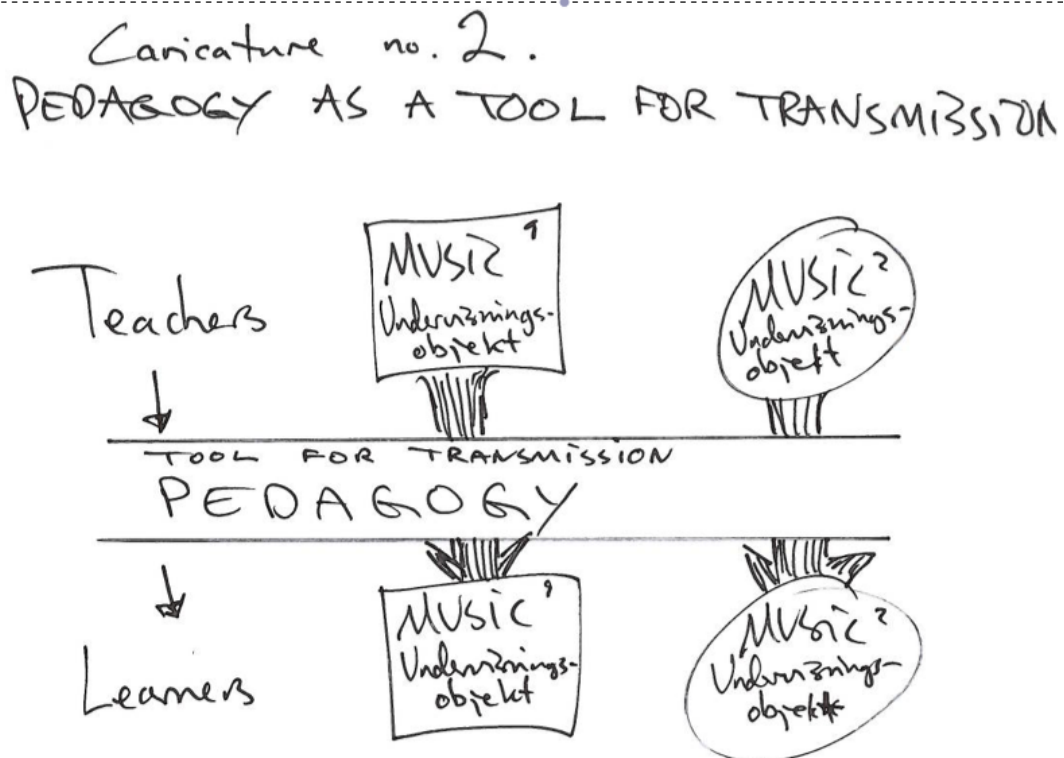
The processes involved in the transmission and acquisition of musical skills and knowledge are living social practices that are ultimately as unfathomable and fascinating as music it self. (Green, 2008)

Even if there is much sharing and enthusiasm on the musical processes of learning, I have to regret the way this utterance separates “music it self” and social processes of transmission and acquisition. But let’s return to the textbooks, because here it also eventually will become clear what the danger of this separation can be.

***Acquisition of music is seen as extramusical...***

My research objects are three textbooks with a fairly great amount of non-western music represented, but the teaching design is very much the same as with the western-classical music. (For example by using notes, teaching very analytically, focusing on the different “basic elements” of music etc.). This indicates to me that music is seen very much like objective knowledge, to be transferred with a tool (external to music), and this tool is (the Western) pedagogy. Teaching and learning is seen as extra-musical, and universal, and its cultural dependence is hidden. This brings us to my next caricature (as you will see this model is dependant of the notion of music-as-object, or at least music-as-objective):

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If I had the time I would like to show why I dare claim that the textbooks see pedagogy as a culturally independent, exnominated and standardized tool, but it would need some more examples from the textbooks, and a way to compare different “pedagogics” (For this I’d like to recommend Schippers twelve continuum transmission model (TCTM) (Schippers, 2010)) Let me instead quote a passage from a much-used book within profession-studies in Norway, as this is much more concentrated and clear:

”A teacher in one culture – also within a minority or sub culture – shall be equally good as a teacher from within another culture in imparting actual knowledge, but also according to the basis of the teacher profession: The pedagogy”<sup>5</sup>  
(Gule, 2008)

In addition to a belief in ”actual knowledge”<sup>6</sup> we see that pedagogy here is seen as a potentially neutral tool for imparting knowledge. Discussion on how to learn any ”objects of teaching” is very often driven into discussions on effectiveness (also within music studies), and we tend to forget that the teaching and learning is all about culture. The way in which we learn and what we learn is closely interconnected.

Back to my short example: Bele Mama: With note sheets, and so on. Of course, this way is thought to be the most effective way if trying to copy the melody (again: See the caricature 2), but if the target is to understand music both as humanly organized sound, and soundly organized humanity (to use Blacking, (1973)) a more effective way of learning this music is to simultaneously gain understanding of the learning process that very often sticks to that music (according to Nettl).

Several recent music philosophers and writers have commented on the fallibility of the traditional (Western Classical) pedagogy when it comes to other musics<sup>7</sup>. While Lucy Green focuses on informal music education and has done thorough research on the use of informal teaching strategies and concludes that they are of most importance when teaching and learning pop-music, Peter Dunbar-Hall draws on his long time experience performing and teaching Balinese Gamelan, and suggests the term ethnopedagogics to better reflect that different kinds of music are differently thought and learned (Dunbar-Hall, 2009). Both two perspectives (and mine here also, analytically) recognize the close relationship between the music and its pedagogy<sup>8</sup>. If the target is to teach and build a subject around ”the sound of music”, then we do not need the immanent pedagogy of music (although it would also contribute here, then it would be called ethnopedagogy of music), but if it is to gain understanding of music as existing in human action and cognition, then we must not overlook that the teaching and learning in a very deep matter is closely linked to that ”musical humanity”.

In conclusion, my suggestion then, is not just to make different pedagogies for different musics, but also to expand the notion of music to include the teaching and learning processes *qua* music. Then I do not agree when the Norwegian philosopher of music education Øivind Varkøy states that ”music education is about two things: Music and education” (Varkøy, 2003:26), I would with this essay claim that the functions of teaching and learning always and already are *immanent* in music, and hence, NOT that music education is about two things: Music and education, but rather that:

Music education is about one thing: Music.

But hold on... ! It is not a thing, so let me express it like this:

Music education is about one ~~thing~~: Music

Well, after all I have done to redefine the term of music in this essay, I believe also that ”music” should be erased, just to mark that it is not the western conception of music that is referred to here. So we’re left with this:

Music education is about one ~~thing~~: ~~Music~~

### ***Returning to the understanding of music***

There is perhaps no way to talk about music without a conception of music as object, and an area of knowledge, but practically we might gain a lot if we do not start where ”music” isn’t (out there somewhere), but where it is.

That means starting in the human beings, the individuals themselves. If it is meaningful at all to search for the essence of music, there is where you’ll find it: In the human mind, it is consistent with the

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<sup>5</sup> Norwegian: En lærer i en kultur - eventuelt innenfor en minoritets- eller subkultur- skal være like god som en lærer innenfor en annen kultur i formidling av faktiske kunnskaper, men også i forhold til læreryrkets grunnlag: pedagogikken.

<sup>6</sup> What is the work of the word ”actual” here?

<sup>7</sup> I really see the fallability of language here...

<sup>8</sup> Comment on this! Here I am splitting music from pedagogy again, although claiming it’s impossible...



meaning of being a human, of being at all! My focus on immanence can therefore be extended further from the concept of pedagogy-immanent-in-music, to a concept of to music-immanent-in-human-being. Trying to separate music from human beings and still search for its inherent value is just a deception, seeing it as a human immanent feature it is already clear that it has a value (if we believe in human rights and values), and we need not argue about aesthetic values in music and works any more: The value is (in) the human. So, as soon we will see from my last caricature, I believe we need to change our view on “*music in itself*” and teaching and learning as the human actions towards it, into a view of “*music in human beings*” and “*music as human doings*”. Then teaching and learning really becomes inseparable from it. Music education then, is concerning people.

Caricature no. 3



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