

Does this Work [of Art] Invite Me into [Intersubjective] Dialogue?

Discussing Relational Aesthetics in Music
Education

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Abstract

Some artistic and educational practices in music have yet to be defined within the dichotomy of referential and autonomy aesthetics. However, there has been an ongoing shift towards more interactive, social and relationally founded aesthetic practices, which often originate in other art media but influence music as well. In this article, we investigate relational aesthetics' place and further potential in music education, taking Nicolas Bourriaud's term 'relational aesthetics' as a point of departure. Originally a theory concerning a specific postmodern genre within the visual arts, we identify and discuss certain elements of Bourriaud's relational aesthetic theory that are relevant for music education, particularly the role of intersubjective relations. We further explore the traces and relatives' of relational aesthetic theories that may already exist in and around music education, such as musicking and communicative musicality. As a result, certain aspects of relational aesthetics become more explicit than in Bourriaud's theory, particularly *care in intersubjective relations*. Furthermore, we discuss the potential importance of relational aesthetics in music education practices, exemplified by teacher education, school concert visits and piano teaching. Finally, we conclude with some remarks on relational aesthetics as a resource in music education and arts education in general.

Keywords: aesthetic theory, relational aesthetics, music education, musicking, communicative musicality

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Discussing Relational Aesthetics in Music Education

Torill Vist and Kari Mette Holdhus¹

Introduction

During the last few centuries, paradigms have shifted in both pedagogy and the arts. In Western discourses, art and beauty were integrally related until the late nineteenth century, when artists who embraced modernity proposed ‘aesthetic ugliness as a true artistic response to the realities of the modern world’ (Winston 2015, 9). Recently, there has been an ongoing shift towards more postmodern aesthetic practices, which tend to be more interactive, social, democratic, and relationally based. In parallel, educational discourses have progressed through the stages of behaviourism, cognitive, socio-cultural and relational learning theories. To us, a major reason for supplementing modernity’s view of art is not only aesthetic but also grounded in what we want for our fellow human beings. (Following this article’s argumentation, we might even define such motives as within the aesthetic).

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We acknowledge that music experience and knowledge development happen within a cultural, intersubjective and relational reality. Nevertheless, contemporary arts consist of a huge number of different practices. Practices within the modernity discourse are still often viewed as separate from everyday life; artworks may be considered to contain coherent messages or meanings that emerging independent of their context, and recipient strategies may be restricted to those that are discrete and contemplative (Goehr 2007). Relational practices,² on the other hand, are primarily heteronomic and cannot exist without relying heavily on shared social practices and human relations (see also Kester 2004; Kwon 2004). As such, they can be seen as contrasting more work-oriented aesthetic forms.³

Today, it is possible to trace relational artistic behaviour across genres and art forms all over the world. In music, it could be a symphony orchestra surprising visitors at a marketplace, pop crowds contributing to their favourite artist's appearance by making noise, or parents singing a lullaby. These aesthetic practices address problems related to *intersubjectivity* or *interhuman relations* that, in our opinion, have not been thoroughly and explicitly addressed in a modernity discourse of music aesthetics. A rationale for many relational artistic practices was formulated

2 For instance, collaborative arts, community art, social art practices, or site-specific art.

3 What we term in this article 'a work-oriented' discourse or aesthetic form is described as 'the regulative work concept' by Goehr (2007). Bourdieu terms this 'the charismatic ideology' (Bourdieu 1993, 47), which he claims purports the artist as a unique and magical creator of original works and the work as a talking subject. The real production, though, he claims, occurs based on the artist's and audience's education and habitualisation towards this specific view. This is a way of relating to art to which Western societies have been socialized for and that can be recognised in many musical genres, including popular music (Burnard 2012). Recently, however, it seems to us that some music educators who follow the philosophies (and practices) associated with work-oriented modernity also place a stronger emphasis on relational topics, sometimes even on *intersubjective* relations (e.g. Varkøy 2017; Pio and Varkøy 2012).

by Nicolas Bourriaud (1998/2002) in his book *Relational Aesthetics*. By no means did Bourriaud ‘invent’ relational practices, but in his curatorial work and writing, he identified some of their common characteristics and developed the now-well-known term ‘relational aesthetics’. The term has primarily been used in the field of visual arts and is not as often used in discussions of music, although this might be changing (see Cook 2012; Valberg 2011). After researching relational perspectives in music education for a decade (Holdhus and Espeland 2013; Holdhus 2018; Vist 2009, 2016), we have found ‘relational aesthetics’ to be a fruitful term to use in connection with music educational practices as well as visual practices, and we believe the term is too good to reserve for specific visual art traditions. Not every part of Bourriaud’s theory is relevant to our discussion, but we often find ourselves using formulations and elements from his texts to drive our thinking within the field of music education. Additionally, as music teachers, we may be in a position to use Bourriaud’s ideas more freely compared to visual artists and teachers; we are not ‘burdened’ with the rather heavy critique of the theory by those involved in the museum or art exhibition context, in which the theory was developed.

This article addresses the need for music (and other arts) education philosophies to deal with the theoretical issues underpinning relational practices. In this article, we also argue that such a philosophy can afford meaningful music (and other arts) experiences to a wider public or group of students. In our view, relational perspectives and intersubjective relations are embedded in any art form. Already, there are music education practices that are clearly interactive and socially and relationally based. Furthermore, relational aesthetic practices have existed for a long time, although they have not necessarily been recognised as such or as art. Therefore, in our investigation of relational aesthetics’ potential in music education, we present some of the salient features of Bourriaud’s theory of relational aesthetics (in particular, the role of intersubjective relations), its critiques, and its possible relevance

for music education. We then discuss what could be considered traces and ‘relatives’ of relational aesthetics that already exist in or around music education (Small 1998; Malloch and Trevarthen 2009; Dissanayake 2000; Stern 1985/2000; Higgins 2012). Finally, we discuss relational aesthetics’ potential importance for music education practices, exemplified by teacher education, school concert visits, and piano teaching, and conclude with some remarks on relational aesthetics as a pedagogical and intersubjective resource in music education and other types of art education. In this article, we also reveal that the major change—and our major contribution—when relational aesthetics is applied to music education may be a focus on care in intersubjective relations. Care is not as explicit in Bourriaud’s theory. We suggest that this is an important issue in any type of art education.

Relational Aesthetics

According to Bennett Simpson (2001), the first appearance of the term ‘relational aesthetics’ was in the catalogue for the exhibition *Traffic*, which was curated by Bourriaud at *CAPC musée d’art contemporain de Bordeaux* in 1995. The book *Relational Aesthetics*, originally *Esthétique relationnelle* (1998), was published three years later. It consists of several essays, some of which were first published in magazines and exhibition catalogues and considerably reworked for the book. Many of the essays primarily discuss elements of 1990s visual art practices, like those of Felix Gonzales-Torres and Rirkrit Tiravanija. They discuss visual (or conceptual) artworks that create a social space in which people come together to participate in shared activities. We mainly focus on the more general ideas presented in the essay titled ‘Relational Form’, which extend far beyond the decade of the 1990s.

A Theory of Relational Form

The essay places relational aesthetics far away from (a work-oriented) autonomy aesthetics, instead describing ‘a game, whose forms, patterns and functions develop and evolve according to periods and social contexts, it is not an immutable essence’ (Bourriaud 1998/2002, 11). Bourriaud claims that ‘[r]elational aesthetics does not represent a theory of art, (...) but a theory of form’ (1998/2002, 19). However, perhaps revealing a wide definition of ‘form’, he later defines relational aesthetics and relational art, respectively, as an ‘[a]esthetic theory consisting in judging artwork on the basis of the inter-human relations which they represent, produce or prompt’ and ‘[a] set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than independent and private space’ (Bourriaud 1998/2002, 112–113).

If one explores and discusses artwork as social interstice, intersubjectivity is at the core of aesthetic practice and hence *within the artwork*. In our opinion, this changes or expands what is usually understood as music experience, musical encounters or musical elements, and is relevant to teacher–student relationships. Intersubjectivity (at the core of aesthetic practice) further changes the role and actions of the viewer/audience/spectator (or student). As Bourriaud claims, ‘the artist encouraged the “beholder” to take up a position within an arrangement, giving it life, complementing the work, and taking part in the formulation of its meaning’ (1998/2002, 59). Hence, the audience—or student—becomes necessary for completion of the artwork. To fulfil this idea, a common understanding of equity between participants and moving beyond the view of the artist as genius and ruler of the artwork are important. Furthermore, it goes beyond the idea of the teacher as the only expert of music expression in the classroom, supporting the United Nations

Convention on the Rights of the Child as well as today's relational educational philosophies (United Nations 1989; Gergen 2011; Biesta 2004).

Judging on the Basis of Inter-human Relations

Gert Biesta (2013) reminds us that, to fulfil the function of education, teachers are responsible for facilitating learning processes in a professional manner. The pedagogical situation necessarily provides the teacher with a certain element of power. Hence, within any explicit educational relation comprising teachers and learners, consensus and equal power relations can only be partly achieved. This, however, must by no means overshadow the principle of equality of intelligences described by Jacques Rancière (1991). Within this philosophy, the student's intelligence is viewed as equal to—and yet different from—anybody else's intelligence. Grant Kester's (2004) dialogic aesthetics strives toward such a respectful equity-based, relational practice. In this theory, the participatory or *sharing* role of the spectator is even more crucial than in Bourriaud's theory, and the emerging artwork might even be considered a situation of *care*.⁴ Kester points out that differences in language and social situation between participants within dialogic art might be a challenge. To us, as authors of this article and as music teachers, an educational situation actualises such a challenge. We acknowledge that students are an important part of educational and aesthetical relations, and as such, they should have a say and be enabled to contribute.

In addition to these ideas, judging artworks and educational practices based on their inter-human relations, in our view, becomes important for teachers' assessments as well as for art critiques. Bourriaud's questions "Does this work permit me to enter

4 Hence, our use of the term *care* is more inspired by Kester and interhuman care in early childhood education and care discourse than by 'sorge', the wider care structure proposed by Heidegger.

into dialogue? Could I exist, and how, in the space it defines?”(1998/2002, 109) might be useful also for judging educational practices’ quality and meaningfulness. In a visual art exhibition context, this perspective may differ more dramatically from the traditional (modernity or work-oriented) context than from music education contexts. Music, dance and theatre have always been relational; it is the *conscious* emphasis on encounters, interstice, care, inter-subjectivity and inter-action that has changed. As we see it, scores, co-musicians and lullaby have always invited dialogue, ‘completing’ the (sound-based) artwork. The audience’s/students’ ‘position’ may change when a relational perspective is adopted in the context of music education.

When artwork represents a social interstice, and the substrate of this kind of art is formed by intersubjectivity, it is our view that this area of exchange should be judged ‘by analyzing the coherence of its form, and then the symbolic value of the ‘world’ it suggests, and of the image of human relations reflected by it’ (Bourriaud 1998/2002, 18). In music education, when the relationship between the teacher and the student can be seen as part of the artwork, ‘relational’ has implications beyond the structural or formal elements of ‘the art object itself’ (to use a modernity discourse) and beyond a traditional understanding of ‘context’. Such a shift in the dynamics of art-making processes suggests a reconceptualisation of music towards art as an in-the-making process in which inter-relational elements are critical for engagement with the ‘doing’.⁵

5 Our focus on social interstice and intersubjectivity, however, does not do justice to Bourriaud’s complete theory; he also discusses relations between the individual and the material in a more traditional sense. Another element that is less emphasised in this article is that the new is less important when judging aesthetic quality than ideas like relevance, usefulness, and pertinence. Furthermore, inspired by phenomenological attempts to repeal the traditional separation between senses and thoughts, physical and tactile aspects are of great importance to Bourriaud. The body is considered the starting point for perception, and each participating body means something in the artwork as a whole. An in-depth discussion of these aspects of Bourriaud’s theory is beyond the scope of the present work.

Elements of Critique

Bourriaud's theory of relational aesthetics has been criticised for being romantic, elitist and directed toward Western middle-class, educated art lovers (Bishop 2004, 2012). Critics have also argued for the immediate need to construct quality criteria addressing relational art. Claire Bishop (2004) claims that relational aesthetics should be embraced in eulogistic terms and that criteria determining the quality of this sort of aesthetics should be critically examined and discussed. She also claims that relational aesthetics is inhabited by idealistic artists who want to save the world, but it is too closely related to neo-liberalism to be useful as a vehicle for radical political change: '...so many other aspects of this art practice dovetail even more perfectly with neoliberalism's recent forms (networks, mobility, project work, affective labour)' (Bishop 2012, 277). In an early chapter of her 2012 book, Bishop thus disaffiliates from Bourriaud and the term 'relational aesthetics'.

In contrast, we find the term useful, although we agree with her claim that Bourriaud's use of 'relational aesthetics' has severe limitations. For instance, Bourriaud's relational aesthetics primarily addresses adult audiences. To us, the younger children are, the less they can be defined as only 'spectators' or 'receivers' of a musical encounter, regardless of whether it is educational. In line with current educational practices, discussing art as being 'transmitted' to children becomes irrelevant. Therefore, relational theories and art forms can be interesting to explore also—or in particular—when working with young children as audiences or pupils. Furthermore, in *Relational Aesthetics*, Bourriaud writes that relational aesthetics' 'basic claim—the sphere of human relations as artwork venue—has no prior example in art history, even if it appears, after the fact, as the obvious backdrop of all aesthetic praxis (...)' (1998/2002, 44). We cannot support this claim, especially not without limiting 'art history' to an elitist, narrow definition of fine art. Bishop (2004) also

comments on this claim, but writes that relational art started with Duchamp's ready-mades. To us, and as Bourriaud says elsewhere, '[a]rt has always been relational in varying degrees' (1998/2002, 15). Interactivity is anything but a new idea.

At least in music education, a relational perspective might involve acknowledging aspects and practices that have not been considered art. It might also involve identifying parts of our practice that previously lived in the shadow of more prestigious and elitist elements of the artwork, such as the care and intersubjective communication associated with lullabies.

Traces of Relational Aesthetics in Music

Although we claim that relational *practices* in music have existed for a very long time, the term 'relational aesthetics' has been rare in musical scholarship until recently.⁶ Nevertheless, topics combining relations and aesthetics (but not relational aesthetics) are frequent. Deanne Bogdan (2001), relying on postmodern theory, explored musical listening and performance as embodied dialogism. In her work, artwork represents 'the other'. She claims that her experiential encounter is remarkably similar to that of a personal (real) other. Still, the musical encounter she explores only involves herself and a 'music minus one' compact disc. Similarly, Frederik Pio and Øivind Varkøy, from a modernistic point of view, focus on the individual's thinking (through music) about the world, describing 'artwork as a prism for the being to which man has a relation' (2012, 110). They claim that we are invited by paradigmatic musical artworks to become part of a shared world. In the following section, we discuss what could be considered closer 'relatives' of relational aesthetics that already

6 For example, a search on Bourriaud in *Philosophy of Music Education Review* (September 2017) produced no results.

exist in or around music education and present some scholars who have already used the term.

Relational Aesthetics in Musicology

Georgina Born uses the term *relational musicology*, proposing a musicology that ‘addresses different orders of the social in music and their complex interrelations’ (2010, 235). She strongly problematises the dominant conceptual boundaries that have underpinned large parts of her field, which posit the social as extraneous to and only part of the context of music. According to musicologist Nicholas Cook, ‘[t]he core insight of Nicolas Bourriaud’s “relational aesthetics” is that art is not addressed solely to the individual but creates relationships between its spectators’ (2016, 10). Cook claims the same is true of music, but musicologists—both ‘old’ and ‘new’—have often neglected or not seen intersubjective relationships as aesthetically significant: ‘Yet one of music’s most important roles lies in the construction and negotiation of relationships at both individual and group level’ (2016, 10). Pointing to Bourriaud and a perspective in which relations are seen as part of the artwork, not only its context, Cook writes, ‘[s]een in this way, music becomes not just a metaphor but a metonym of social interaction’ (Cook 2012, 196).

Cook also refers to ethnomusicologist Mark Slobin, who by 1992 had suggested that musical encounters of any kind are central to musicological explanations. Slobin links a focus on the local to a relational approach in his attempt ‘to lay out the musical interplay—the cultural counterpoint between individual, community, small group, state and industry’ (1992, 4). Hence, analysis of individual and cultural identities is important in a relational musicology, as are the different orders of the social (in music) and their complex interrelations.

Musicking as Relational Aesthetics

Christopher Small claims in his book *Musicking* that '[m]usic is not a thing at all, but an activity' (1998, 2). The book attacks the Western classical music tradition. Some of Small's formulations may seem a bit outdated today, but his impact on music education discourse is indisputable. We find it strange that his message about the importance of the *relations* in musicking has not had the same impact as his concept of activity, at least not until recently and not in our Scandinavian discourse.

Without using the term 'relational aesthetics', Small suggests that people come together in a musical performance 'to take part in a ceremony in which their values, which is to say, their feelings about what are right and proper relationships, are affirmed, explored and celebrated' (1998, 185). The parallel to the interaction between infant and mother (discussed below) is striking. As the quote suggests, the theory has a strong relational perspective; we could almost claim that Small is defining the musical material as 'context' and relationships as 'content'.

In Small's opinion, the primary meanings of music are not individual, but social. Any concert or musical encounter presents us with a certain set of relationships, which are fundamental for understanding the activity that we call music. Hence, permission to enter a dialogue becomes a prerequisite for what he calls *musicking*. While proposing a framework for understanding all musicking as a human encounter and activity, he describes his theory as 'an important component of our understanding of ourselves and of our relationships with other people and other creatures with which we share our planet' (Small 1998, 13). Thus, his emphasis on social and emotion(al) knowledge as an outcome of the music encounter is more explicit than in Bourriaud's theory, as is his emphasis on care for others.

Furthermore, Small emphasises that every human being is born with the gift of music, but that in the Western world 'our powers of making music for ourselves have

been hijacked and the majority of people robbed of the musicality that is theirs by right of birth' (1998, 8). In Small's words, traditional Western work-oriented, one-way communication is 'in a social vacuum; the presence of other listeners is at best an irrelevance and at worst an interference in the individual's contemplation of the musical work' (1998, 6). As mentioned above, Bourriaud's theory also rebels against such ideas, seeking equity between participants and encouraging the listener or 'beholder' to take up a position that complements the work and participate in the formulation of its meaning. Similarly, Small advocates viewing music and music education as doing something together and 'a musical performance as an encounter between human beings that takes place through the medium of sounds organized in specific ways' (1998, 10), without defining some participants as experts and others as obedient listeners.

To conclude, not far from Bourriaud, Small suggests that musicking establishes a set of relationships and that the meaning of the act lies in those relationships. Music as action, in this sense, is *relational action*. However, Small emphasises the potential for *knowledge* within these encounters more than Bourriaud, thus extending what can be relevant knowledge in music education beyond 'autonomous' knowledge of music. The act of musicking 'provides us with a language by means of which we can come to understand and articulate those relationships and through them to understand the relationships of our lives' (Small 1998, 14). In comparison, Bourriaud claims that 'any artwork is a relation to the world made visible' (Strecher 2002), or audible, we may add. Small claims that who we are is how we relate. Thus, to affirm or celebrate our relationships, like we do in musicking, is also to explore and celebrate our sense of who we are. Even more than in Bourriaud's theory, then, musicking

is an activity by means of which we bring into existence a set of relationships that model the relationships of our world, (...) then musicking is in fact a way of knowing our world (...) the experiential world of relationships in all its complexity—and in knowing it, we learn how to live well in it. (Small 1998, 50)

Relational Aesthetics in Communicative Musicality

Earlier, we questioned Bourriaud's claim that relations are new in aesthetics, mentioning the lullaby as an ancient example from the field of music. According to Ellen Dissanayake (2000), lullabies and improvisational melodic and rhythmic expressions have been used to help children regulate feelings and interact with others throughout history. In these situations, musicality 'can be considered as a form of psychological "holding" that encompasses the handling of the baby' (Gratier and Apter-Danon 2009, 314). Despite Bourriaud's lack of focus on children, it seems to us that the most explicit argumentation for music's potential (already) unique contribution to a relational aesthetic theory comes from the relationship between child and caregiver and ideas like Dissanayake's theory on the origin of the arts, Stephen Malloch and Colwyn Trevarthen's (2009) theory on communicative musicality, and Daniel Sterns' (1985/2000) concept of affective attunement in his theory of self.

Half a century ago, when definitions of the listener as passive or contemplative were still dominant, infant research experienced a shift away from the 'passive infant'. Infants were seen as born with a motivation for sharing mental states from the very beginning through their body, gestures and voice. Parents' and infants' mutual enjoyable and knowledgeable communications were described 'in terms of rhythmic patterns of engagement that could be represented as "musical" or "dance-like"' (Malloch and Trevarthen 2009, 1). As Katerina Mazokopaki and Giannis

Kugiumutzakis put it, music became ‘a model to guide the analysis and understanding of the communicative and emotional components of interaction between the two companions’ (2009, 188) long before verbal speech. When research on children investigates such aesthetic interactions, it also judges these ‘works of art’ based on inter-human relations, to use Bourriaud’s terms. Here, elements of musicality and intersubjectivity seem heavily interlaced and could be described as the ‘cradle’ of music, dance and drama (Dissanayake 2000). Both young infants and adults seem to have an intuitive capacity for sharing implicit emotional meaning in these musical rituals of human relations (Stern 1985/2000).

Malloch and Trevarthen (2009) also posit that musicality serves people’s need for companionship and plays a vital role in creating and sustaining human social relationships. Their term ‘communicative musicality’ is defined by the three parameters: pulse, quality and narrative. Pulse is the regular succession of discrete behavioural events through time, while quality refers to the modulated contours of expression moving through time. Together, ‘[p]ulse and quality combine to form “narratives” of expression and intention’ (Malloch and Trevarthen 2009, 4), which allow infants, children and adults to share a sense of relational sympathy and meaning. Hence, in communicative musicality, intersubjective musical expressions are seen as rhythmic patterns of engagement or intersubjective patterns revealing qualities of relationships. This kind of ‘musicking’ encourages both the child and parent to ‘take up a position within an arrangement, giving it life, complementing the work, and taking part in the formulation of its meaning’ (Bourriaud 1998/2002, 59). Pointing towards Small’s perspective on knowledge, Lori Custodero sees communicative musicality as ‘a fundamental source of relationship, comprised of musical dialogues that generate knowing of the world through knowing each other’ (2009, 514). She also thinks the same forms of interaction re-emerge throughout one’s lifespan in freely creative settings. Although typically seen as a stepping stone to early

childhood music education, we also consider communicative musicality to have the potential to make visible important meanings in music education far beyond early childhood.

Affect Attunement as Aesthetic Relations

In Stern's (1985/2000) theory of self, some of the terms have particular relevance for communicative musicality. *Affect attunement* is what we see when parents, communicating more or less nonverbally with their children, are imitating and mirroring their children's emotional expressions while keeping the same affect contour. It is the intersubjective experience of shapes, intensities and temporal patterns that is meaningful for the child, or 'the performance of behaviors that express the quality of feeling of a shared affect state' (Stern 1985/2000, 142). Affect attunement, then, is based on the matching and sharing of vitality affects (emotional forms or energies) across different modalities, as when (audible) music expresses human emotions. Consequently, and parallel to Small's idea that musicking can strengthen identities, selves and relationships, the child is afforded an opportunity to be acknowledged and to experience her/his own feelings as real, important and accepted by others before verbal speech. According to Stern, it is this 'music' that will permit the emergent self to appear, which is crucial for normal infant development. We cannot find a similar developmental focus in Bourriaud's work, although his theory of relational aesthetics clearly affords space for it. It is in such dialogues, and in the spaces they define, that the child exists and develops.

Stern's theory of affect attunement also includes sensitivity to affect contours or *forms*. Taking Bourriaud literally, he claims that his theory is one of form. Sensitivity to expressive forms (but not intersubjective or relational forms) is a common element in many aesthetic theories. Bourriaud refers to Serge Daney's position that '*all form is a face looking at us*' (1998/2002, 21, italics in original). The (mother's) face may be

the first *visual* form to give meaning to us, but since our *aural* sense is better developed at birth, we find it reasonable to suggest that (the origin of) all form, and hence all meaning, may be a (*mother's*) voice '*singing*' at us. Following the core ideas of relational aesthetics, a lullaby sung without a (physical or imagined) child could hardly be defined as a lullaby. If the artwork does not permit Bourriaud or the child to enter into a dialogue, the work of art—and the form—is not complete.

Despite the differences between the discourses in which these theories were developed and their differences in terms of focus on care, communicative musicality, like relational aesthetics, takes human relations as a point of departure. Furthermore, both theories talk about art forms 'where the substrate is formed by intersubjectivity and which takes being-together as a central theme' (Bourriaud 1998/2002, 15). Intersubjectivity not only represents a social setting for the reception of art but also is considered the quintessence of these artistic practices and an element of artworks.

Music–Community

Closing this section, we need to briefly discuss two of the most clearly relational areas in music, although neither of them seems to rely on Bourriaud's relational aesthetics. Defined as facilitation of local music activities, community music (CM) is similar to relational aesthetics in its heteronomous understanding of music as well as in its 'active intervention between music leader or facilitator and participants' (Higgins 2012, 3). Ranging from democratically driven communal bands and choirs to music activities for/with disabled people or underprivileged groups and community music therapy, CM practices address issues like social justice and identity formation. They recognise social and personal growth to be as important as musical growth. Furthermore, social and political agendas seem to be much more explicit within CM practices than within Bourriaud's theory. In some aspects, certain CM discourses might even adhere to Bishop's (2012) theory of radical political communal art forms.

CM is often understood as an approach to active music-making and musical knowing ‘celebrating informal learning and the musical amateur’ (Kertz-Welzel 2016, 113), and according to Lee Higgins, ‘community music’s key characteristics can be expressed through the themes of hospitality, the creative workshop, friendship and cultural democracy’ (2012, 8). In particular, the act of hospitality runs deeply through CM practices and is parallel to care, which we emphasise. Hence, the question *does this work [of art] invite me into [intersubjective] dialogue* is clearly relevant for judging CM practices as well. Nevertheless, when scrutinising recent issues of the *International Journal of Community Music*, we find that an explicit philosophic aesthetic approach to CM seems to be limited or lacking, as also expressed by Alexandra Kertz-Welzel (2016). Still, CM’s reliance upon a postmodern vision of art, and thus its similarity to relational aesthetics in its emphasis on process and in the particular relationships of communities, inclusion and democratic engagement of all participants, are clear. However, it seems to us that when judging artwork on the basis of inter-human relations, CM discourses sometimes become more instrumental than Bourriaud’s relational aesthetics.

Not far from Small’s theories, music teacher and therapist Even Ruud (e.g. 2010, 2004/2015) has advocated for music as a form of communication and interaction for more than 30 years. His ideas are widespread among music therapists⁷ as well as educators and have influenced our perspective on relational aesthetics. In line with Ruud, in *Relational Music Therapy* Trondalen describes musical meaning as constituted ‘through an active co-creation and interplay with other fellow beings by way of intersubjective sharing and interaction’ (2016, 8). She writes that, as an art form, music therapy involves subjectivity, individuality, creativity and beauty, but that ‘as an interpersonal process, it involves empathy, intimacy, communication,

7 Stige’s (2003) work in community music therapy is relevant for educators as well, as is Valberg’s (2011) discussion on relational aesthetics.

mutuality and relationship' (2016, 4). We suggest that an intersubjective and relational perspective on music *education* (as well as therapy), acknowledges the teacher–student relationship as a frame and relational possibility in and of itself for development *and* learning.

Potential Importance for Music Education Practices

If the definition of music changes, the meanings of music also change. This influences the content, objectives, necessary teaching skills and even what we assess and what is seen as 'quality' in music education. Small writes that if we think about music primarily as action and action as concerned with relationships, 'then we see that whatever meaning a musical work has lies in the relationships that are brought into existence when the piece is performed' (1998, 138). Parallel to this, a successful artwork should, according to Bourriaud, reach out of its own existence and afford relations and dialogue. Today, a fair share of (at least Western) children's listening and composing goes on outside of school and educational contexts, as they literally have access to the whole world's music in their pockets. Thus, their musical agency is significant, and a contemporary approach to music education, in our opinion, must take these circumstances into account.

From a general (relational) educational perspective, Kenneth Gergen claims that 'education is more fruitfully conceived as a process for enhancing participation in relational process' (2011, 241). Bourriaud's question, then, could inspire us to ask, *does this educational practice invite my student into dialogue?* In our class preparations and assessments, we are also 'judging artworks [and the way we approach them] on the basis of the inter-human relations' (Bourriaud 1998/2002, 112, our brackets). What we are suggesting is that, in preparing for our next piano lesson, day care circle time, or visiting school concert, Bourriaud's theory may afford an

expanded focus and space for intersubjective relations, dialogues and interactions as objectives in music education.

Although we emphasise that it is the teacher's/performer's responsibility to initiate such dialogues, without the involvement of all parties, a relational artwork will not exist. According to Small, any performance should be judged based on its success in bringing into existence a set of relationships that the participants feel to be ideal, and on its capacity to afford them the ability to explore, affirm, and celebrate those relationships. Quality, then, means performances 'that [empower] all the participants to do this most comprehensively, subtly and clearly, at whatever level of technical accomplishment the performers have attended' (Small 1998, 215).

Here, we can only briefly discuss and exemplify a few specific practices with which we are familiar as music teachers. Our practices in music education also carry a heavy burden of tradition and knowledge developed within modernity's focus on the composer and the art work per se (Espeland 2011, Goehr 2007). Equipped with a toolbox that includes relational aesthetics, how can educators further inspire and improve music education practices?

Does this Teacher Education Invite Me into Dialogue?

We are currently teachers in early childhood and music teacher education. At least in the Scandinavian early childhood teacher education curriculum, the relational theories of Small, Dissanayake, Stern, Malloch and Trevarthen are common. Still, we claim that there is a way to go until the main ideas of relational aesthetics have found their way into every aspect of our teaching (Vist 2014, 2017). Many teachers, like us, grew up in modernity discourses and hold degrees as classical musicians.

This interstice between a background in modernity and current philosophical engagement in relational theories can sometimes reveal the potential for further

development towards relational perspectives. We propose an approach in which everyone is included and seen as equally musically valuable, despite differences in skill. At the same time, we find traces of discourses that effectively ‘kill’ our students’ musical self-esteem, whether they manifest in graded guitar exams or vocal solo disgrace (Vist 2014, 2017). Nora Kulset (2017), interviewing an early childhood teacher, was told that the music courses during the interviewee’s education took away much of her joy regarding music. Many of our students also enter their educations with attitudes toward musicality and the value of music that they have inherited from a work-oriented discourse, which may exclude them from seeing themselves as musical or able to relate to others musically. Thus, both teachers and students more or less tacitly operate based on views that might threaten their musical enterprises. We doubt that this is the best foundation for future music activity in day cares or classrooms.

It seems like discourses in which musicality is reserved for the elite or defined as the ability to play from a score, sing in tune or perform on an instrument are hard to get rid of, even in early childhood education (Vist 2014, 2017). However, we find that the content of didactical categories change when one considers relational aesthetics and explicitly asks questions such as the following: *Does this [music teaching] invite my students into dialogue? Could these young students exist, and how, in the space it defines?* Gaining consciousness and skills that allow one to think more relationally about music could change the discursively inherited ways of music education. Even our exam assessments should change to value the relational and communicative qualities of student performances more heavily at the cost of instrumental skills.

Does this Visiting School Concert Invite Me into Dialogue?

In our Norwegian context, where 96,5% of children attend public schools (Statistisk Sentralbyrå 2015), there is a comprehensive state-run system of visiting art practices in

schools, including professional concerts. In her doctoral research, Holdhus (2014) found that these visiting professional concerts in Norwegian schools mostly take place in a highly regulated manner directed by the musicians. Many of these musicians want to communicate with and relate to their young audiences, but they reveal a lack of ability to experience their audiences as ‘performance owners’ or as ‘interesting contributors’, and are thereby far from affording a relational aesthetic practice.

Their practice thus seems to be ruled by discursive sayings and taken-for-granted power structures. For instance, musicians and artists in this practice rely heavily on repeated stories of children as inherently suited to experience artistic utterances, while teachers and schools are seen as obstacles to children’s creative and sensory lives (Digranes 2009; Christophersen 2013). Contradicting these views, Holdhus (2014) points out that teachers are a significant resource for artistic enterprise in schools; they know the individuals and relations in their classes, what competencies and tensions are present and what the children’s interests are.

To really invite into dialogue, artistic contributions involving pupils should be grounded in a stance of equity acknowledging the *school* context. Consequently, we claim that pupils, teachers and visiting musicians need to treat each other’s knowledge, cultures and apprehensions as equally significant, in many ways practicing aspects of dialogic aesthetics as suggested by Kester (2004). In accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN 1989), Norwegian schools underscore and encourage children’s democratic right to have a say and to fulfil their potential. We argue that pupils’ or children’s current cultural situations and rights, together with relational aesthetics, can be utilised as educational and artistic possibilities and, thus, that concerts and artist visits for today’s schoolchildren can be shaped more like dialogues.

The artist in a dialogic practice has a facilitative function, working to transform participants' voices into an artistic shape upon which they can agree (Kester 2004). We agree with Valberg (2012), who claims that the Norwegian term 'henvendelse'—to address or approach someone in a communicative and inviting/requesting way—is a basic state of any participant in relational artistic processes. However, this must be facilitated and encouraged by the artist, like the care and hospitality mentioned above. We will add that in a verbal dialogue, it is considered rude not to listen to others' responses when asking a question. Why should this be any different in music performance or education?

Does this Piano Teaching Invite Me into Dialogue?

Piano students are afforded an enormous amount of music for any technical level compared to most other instruments. Although many new beginner methods have been introduced, older methods still stand, even some from the 1950s and 1960s (e.g. Thompson 1955; Schaum 1962; Agnestig 1958). These methods have proven their quality for decades. However, do they afford the optimal skills and music experiences for today's children? It seems to us that the modernity discourse still dominates in many piano lessons and books in a way that complicates the development of new educational thinking. Is the explicit aim of most piano lessons primarily to make the music invite the student into dialogue, as Bourriaud suggests, or primarily to make the student play the music the way the discourse expects it to be played? Have modernity's ideas proven to be so successful for piano teaching that piano discourses are less willing to critically analyse their ideas and perspectives on humanity, teaching and music in the twenty-first century?

Today, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN 1989) explicitly demands that teachers and caregivers facilitate and acknowledge children's rights to participation and expression in different media—to see children, not as 'becomings',

but as ‘beings’ (James, Jenks & Prout 1985). What do ‘different media’ and ‘beings’ mean in the context of a classical or jazz piano lesson? Many beginner pianists get to play Beethoven’s ‘Ode to Joy’ from Symphony No. 9 in arrangements that meet their technical level but are far away from Beethoven’s original. In this way, traditional piano teaching invites the student into dialogue, at least technically. However, as we recall from our own development, are not students often told that certain music is still too advanced or not suited for piano? Developmental psychology and musicology could be accused of a reductional attitude toward children’s use of music, as Barrett claims (2009). We suggest that this is often rooted in a modernity philosophy and discourse and that relational ideas can afford a less reductional attitude, both towards the artwork, as above, and towards other aspects of teaching.

Within arts-based research methodologies, a/r/tography explicitly relies on relational aesthetics (Springgay et al. 2008). Jee Yeon Ryu, a piano teacher and researcher, claims that living and working in the typical a/r/tographical interstice between musician, teacher and researcher enables her to reflect better on her own performance. An a/r/tographic approach to piano pedagogy can, in her opinion, help create meaningful music-making and piano-learning that encourages investigation and reflection on relational issues between a teacher and student. It also allows room for improvisation; she claims, ‘I am learning to create a space and time for my students and myself to attune to our own musical selves’ (LeBlanc et al. 2015, 364).

Concluding Remarks

In this article, taking Nicolas Bourriaud’s *Relational Aesthetics* as a point of departure, we have argued that relational aesthetic theories are relevant for music education. We also claim that ‘relatives’ of Bourriaud’s relational aesthetics already

exist in or around our field, like musicking, communicative musicality, CM and relational theories in musicology and music therapy. In today's music education philosophy, music is a diverse and changing human practice, and it is the bearer of multiple meanings and values (Bowman and Frega 2012). However, we claim that there is a need for development and refinement of intersubjective or interpersonal relational elements within music education in order to clarify, transform and improve the contemporary field of music education practices and to see relational aesthetics as a *pedagogical and intersubjective* resource in music education. We also claim that our music education perspective has something to 'give back' to visual (and other types of) arts (education), expanding the theory, particularly in terms of care.

Ruud writes, 'Something was lost when music became an art form within an aesthetics, which became disentangled from everyday life and separated into its own sphere. Music became less important (...)' (2008/2015, 225). We want to see music and other types of arts education reclaim their importance as central forces in humanising culture (Kaur and Dave-Mukherji 2015), and 'armed with Small's concept of musicking, we can deal with music in its full social-cultural significance' (Odendaal et al. 2014, 162). We believe that arts educators, as well as artists operating within an educational context, will probably have to take an additional step away from autonomy aesthetics in the years to come. This is why we argue that relational aesthetics have something to add to the 'relatives' in music introduced above and that music in this sense has something to add to its art relatives. Bourriaud's focus on *intersubjective* relations, his suggestion to *judge* (in our case, teach) *on the basis of such relations* and his postmodern stance, in which democratic and intersubjective relations *are seen as part of the artwork*, represents a fruitful supplement to existing conceptions of dialogical approaches within the arts.

It seems to us that relational theorists within music are focusing on intersubjective relations in a way that puts terms like care, hospitality, identity and inclusion more at the forefront than does Bourriaud's theory. Schools and day cares of different kinds can be seen as societies 'concerned with health promotion and mutual caring', as Ruud (2004/2015, 502) describes community music therapy. Regarding this matter, Bourriaud appears rather neutral. Does he—and the visual art discourse around him—reveal some trace of modernity or work-oriented aesthetics in the lack of focus beyond the art world and (the new and wider definition of) the artwork? Bishop's (2004) critique of Bourriaud also points to the lack of a political agenda for change and justice. However, as Alexandra Kertz-Welzel (2016) comments in her critique of community music, such agendas may also become a limitation. We find value in both perspectives, or preferably, in the interstices or gaps they create.

As a parallel to Bourriaud's *interstice*, Biesta's educational term *gap* illustrates the places where transformation—or learning—takes place. He writes, 'education is located not in the activities of the teacher, nor in the activities of the learner, but in the interaction between the two' (Biesta 2004, 12). Arts education also takes place in the transformative *gap/interstice* between the teacher and the learner. Returning once again to aesthetics, focusing on the interstice also helps make explicit the importance of seeing relations not only as context but also as existing within the expanded artwork. For those of us born in the middle of the twentieth century who grew up in a modernity discourse, terms like 'interstice' and 'gap' help us achieve the radical shift in attention needed to see relations as existing within the artwork and knowledge and, hence, to strive for what we want for our fellow human beings, including our students.

When relations become part of the artwork, relational skills become part of musicianship—and today's arts teachers' skills. A significant teaching skill in relational arts education will therefore be to 'nurture student's awareness of the many

ways in which arts arouses, comforts, bonds, and creates who we are as embodied, social beings' (Elliott and Silverman 2012, 59). As it has helped us here, a Bourriaudian question could support the development of such skills: *Does this work [of art] invite [my student] into dialogue?*

As we end this text, we want to point out that by no means do we want relational aesthetics to be the only aesthetics in arts education. In a postmodern discourse such as that of Bourriaud, grand theories are out of the question. If any artwork is a relation to the world made visible, the individual's relation to the artwork also has importance and value. We see no reason to forget the wonderful richness of the relation between the person and the materials and art works, as documented throughout our aesthetic and philosophical history, so long as the discourse provides room to acknowledge intersubjective relations as well. What we suggest is that arts—in our case, music—educators consider intersubjectivity and relations as core aspects of their field. As stated by UNESCO, '[e]ducation is not only about the acquisition of skills, it is also about values of respect for life and human dignity required for social harmony in a diverse world' (2015, 37).

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