

Musical Immersion – What does it amount to?



Simon Høffding



The problem and the project

There are many examples of literature to do with a phenomenology of music. There is no literature to do with a phenomenology of musicianship. I am interested in charting the embodied nature of the expert musician performing and get as rich and thorough an account of his phenomenology as possible.



Overview

- 1) Sources from which to construct a phenomenology of musicianship
 - 1) Csikszentmihalyi
 - 2) Hurlburt
 - 3) Geeves and Sutton
 - 4) Dreyfus
 - 5) Legrand and Colombetti
- 2) Taking it forward
- 3) Work example



Csikszentmihalyi: Flow

"The metaphor of "flow" is one that many people have used to describe the sense of effortless action they feel in moments that stand out as the best in their lives. Athletes refer to it as "being in the zone," religious mystics as being in "ecstasy," and artists and musicians as aesthetic rapture." (1997: 29)

"When people first learn about the flow experience they sometime assume that lack of self-consciousness has something to do with a passive obliteration of the self..But in fact that optimal experience involves a very active role for the self. A violinist must be extremely aware of every movement of her fingers, as well as the sound entering her ears, and of the total form of the piece she is playing, both analytically, not by note, and holistically, in terms of its overall design." (1990: 64)



Csikszentmihalyi 2: Phenomenological structure of "Flow"

"So loss of self-consciousness does not involve a loss of self and certainly not a loss of consciousness, but rather, only a loss of consciousness *of* the self. What slips below the threshold of awareness is the *concept* of self, the information we use to represent to ourselves who we are" (1990: 64)



Andrew Geeves / John Sutton

"Applying intelligence to the reflexes"

"there need be no conflict between brain and history, or between reflex and intelligence. Genuinely thinking on one's feet is still a form of thinking." (2011, 79)

"The crux of the 'to think or not to think' apparent paradox lies in music performance involving the execution of skills that have been consolidated over hours of practice and that are open to specificity, to interpretation and to a working dynamicism that is ostensibly incompatible with rote learning." (2013, 3)



Andrew Geeves

Phenomenological results

“Vibe, Connection, and environment”



Russel Hurlburt

- Descriptive Experience Sampling (DES)
- Richardo Cobo



Russel Hurlburt 2: sensory awareness

“Sample 9.3. Cobo is rinsing the omelet fry pan and particularly interested in/drawn to the sensory details of the flow of the water and the chunks of food being washed away. That is, he is not merely washing the pan; he is noticing the particular way the water flows over the pan and the way the chunks turn and move as they break free of the pan.” (2011, 262)

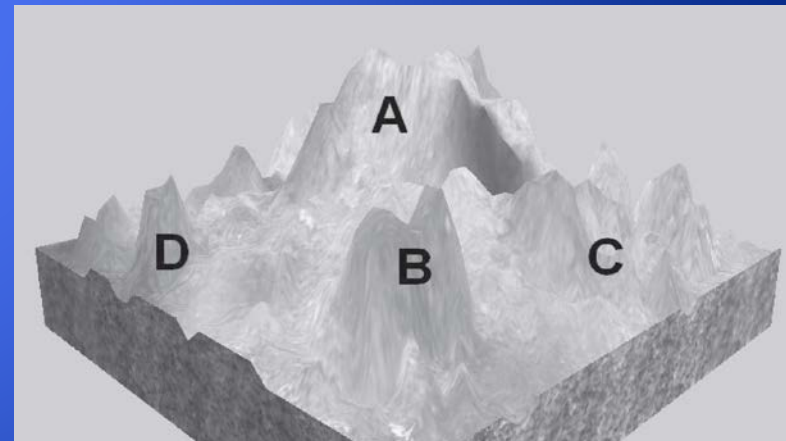
Definition: “It is the specific attending to the sensory aspects of something, not merely to the something itself.”



Russel Hurlburt 3: autonomous multiplicity

"Most people, when they are thinking, experience themselves to be the "driver" of their thought process – that they are in some way controlling or initiating the thinking. By contrast, Cobo understands himself to be the observer of his own thought process. The thought process is happening as if of its own"

"Cobo seems to have multiple perspectives, each from its own mountain peak. That is, there is *not* one particular privileged perspective from which to view all the experiences; *each individual way of experiencing seems to have its own perspective...*Cobo seems to have multiple simultaneous points of view on multiple simultaneous things." (265-6)



Hubert Dreyfus

1) Detached observation is reflective, distanced and intentionally structured with a subject, objects and conceptual content.

"I agree with McDowell that we have a freedom to step back and reflect...Such stepping back is intermittent in our lives and, in so far as we take up such a "free, distanced orientation", we are no longer able to act in the world." (2007, 354)

2) Absorbed coping is distanceless, direct responsiveness to solicitations with no subject and no objects.

"It may be that there is a mode of mindless absorption so total that the coper doesn't realize anything. This phenomenon of unconscious coping is recognized as the way to maximum performance in sports...An Olympic swimmer on autopilot is in a way like a sleepwalker, but he is a master swimmer swimming at his best." (2013, 38)



Hubert Dreyfus 2

3) Detached observation and absorbed coping are mutually exclusive.

“There is no place in the phenomenology of fully absorbed coping for mindfulness.” (2007b, 374)

4) Reflection degrades expert coping to mere competence.

“in general paying attention to a solicitation as one responds to it leads to a regression from expertise to mere competence” (2007b, 374)



Dorothee Legrand

Pre-reflective Bodily Self-awareness

Ian Waterman

Opaque Body
Invisible body

Transparent Body: "The body is transparent in the sense that one looks through it to the world. " (2007, 504)

Performative Body "Specifically, dancers mostly experience their body pre-reflectively, whereas normal people in normal circumstances mostly experience the world in a bodily way" (ibid 506)



Giovanna Colombetti

A taxonomy of Bodily Feelings

“absorption is better characterized as involving alternations of conspicuous and inconspicuous bodily feelings” (in press: 253)

➡ The body in the foreground of awareness, without becoming intentional object.



Central structures pointed to

Csikszentmihalyi: Self-awareness

Sutton + Geeves: Interplay of reflex and intelligence

Hurlburt: Structure of attention and perspective. Agency.

Dreyfus: Status of Reflection and conceptual knowledge.

Legrand + Colombetti: Bodily intentionality



Taking it forward

What we need

- 1) An account that describes the connections and genetic interactions between the central elements.
- 2) A thorough phenomenological description
 - 1) Unless we ourselves are expert musicians, we need to interview some.
 - 2) Reasons it has not been done.



Work example

Deep absorption

"You are both less conscious and a lot more conscious I think. Because I still think that if you're in the zone, then I know how I'm sitting on the chair, I know if my knees are locked, I know if I am flexing my thigh muscle, I know if my shoulders are lifted, I know if my eyes are strained, I know who is sitting on the first row, I know more or less what they are doing, but it is somewhat more, like disinterested, neutrally registering, I am not like inside, I am not kind of a part of the set-up, I am just looking at it, while I'm in the zone. But if I'm not in the zone, I become a co-player, I become a part of the whole thing. And cannot look at it like a bird over the waters. I become conscious of things because I am not part of them to the same extent"... "It is not a primitive control. It is a kind of very deep control. Ur-control. You really feel like a warlord deploying the troops and control it in a way and it gives a kick that you are just a kind of pure superiority and pure control" (Asbjørn Nørgaard, Danish String Quartet)



Work example

Phenomenological implications

"You are both less conscious and a lot more conscious I think"

————→ Unusual experience

" I know if my shoulders are lifted, I know if my eyes are strained, I know who is sitting on the first row" —————→ enhanced proprioceptive, kinesthaetic and visual experience.

" like disinterested, neutrally registering... bird over the waters"

————→ Reflection-like.

" But if I'm not in the zone, I become a co-player, I become a part of the whole thing" —————→ Self-awareness.

" Ur-control... pure superiority and pure control" —————→ enhanced sense of agency or ownership.



Thank you for your attention



Sources

- Berger, H.M. (1999) *Metal, Rock, and Jazz: Perception and the Phenomenology of Musical Experience*, Hannover, New England: Wesleyan University Press.
- Colombetti, G. (2011) "Varieties of Pre-Reflective Self-Awareness: Foreground and Background Bodily Feelings in Emotion Experience." *Inquiry*, 54: 3, 293-313.
- Colombetti, G. (in press) *The Feeling Body: Affective Science Meets the Enactive Mind*, MIT Press .
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990) *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Dreyfus, H.L. (2005) "Overcoming the myth of the mental: How philosophers can profit from the phenomenology of everyday expertise." *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*. 79. pp. 47–63.
- Dreyfus, H.L. (2007a). "The Return of the Myth of the Mental." *Inquiry* 50/4, 352-365.
- Dreyfus, H.L. (2007b). "Response to McDowell." *Inquiry* 50/4, 371-377.
- Geeves, A et al. (2013) To Think or Not To Think: "The apparent paradox of expert skill in music performance." *Educational Philosophy and Theory*.
- Geeves, A. & McIlwain, D. (2009) "That blissful feeling: Phenomenological conceptions of music performance from one performer's perspective." *International Symposium of Performance Science*.
- Herbert, R (2011) "Consciousness and everyday music: trancing, dissociation, and absorption." in D. Clarke and E. Clarke (eds) (2011) *Music and Consciousness. Philosophical, psychological, and cultural perspectives* . Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp. 295-308.
- Hurlburt, R. T. (2011) "Multiple Autonomous Experience in a Virtuoso Musician" in *Investigating Pristine Inner Experience: Moments of Truth*. Cambridge University Press: 258-290
- Legrand, D (2007) "Pre-Reflective Self-Consciousness: On Being Bodily in the World" *Janus Head*, 9(2): 493-519.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (2004) *Phenomenology of Perception*. trans. C. Smith. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Montero, B. (2010) "Does Bodily Awareness Interfere with Highly Skilled Movement?" *Inquiry*, 53, 2: 105-122.
- Montero, B. & Evans, C.D.A. (2011) "Intuitions without concepts lose the game: mindedness in the art of chess." *Phenomenology and Cognitive Science*. 10:175–194.
- Sutton, J. et al. (2011) "Applying intelligence to the reflexes: embodied skills and habits between Dreyfus and Descartes." *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* Vol. 42, No. 1.

