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Try for a moment to recall one of your most absorbing, intense, fervent or sublime musical experiences—listening to the thrilling timbre of a great voice or the overwhelming sound of a symphony orchestra; being seduced by the intimacy of a jazz melody or by the grandeur of an opera; or being touched by the "truth" of musical meaning. Dependent on your experience with music, you may recall the highly differentiated dimensions of meaning you have experienced by listening, creating or performing music alone or together with others! In what way(s) was consciousness of your body part of this experience? How and to what degree were you consciously aware of your body?

You may have several answers to this question, since the role of the body in music experience is extremely complex and multifaceted, and this is exactly what makes it interesting to discuss the implications such notions as "body consciousness" and "somaesthetics" (Shusterman 2008)[1] may have for music experience. Shusterman generally argues that human beings can achieve enhanced life quality through increased body consciousness. In Shusterman's account, "Somaesthetics can be provisionally defined as the critical, meliorative study of the experience and use of one's body as a locus of sensory-aesthetic appreciation (aisthesis) and creative self-fashioning" (19). *Body Consciousness* is the most recent in a series of books and articles intended by Shusterman as a continuous meliorative study of aesthetic practices. *Body Consciousness* is a serious and detailed exploration of theories usually considered remote from each other and seldom discussed within the same context: treatments of the body and embodiment by Foucault, Merleau-Ponty, Beauvoir, Wittgenstein, James and Dewey. In this essay, I will offer a number of comments and questions on the topic that arise from a phenomenological perspective.

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On the meaning of "body consciousness" and "somaesthetics"

From the point of view of musical experience and music education, the above definition of somaesthetics certainly resonates. As my opening paragraph is intended to suggest, whether one is listening to, creating, or performing music, one's body is always a "locus of sensory-aesthetic appreciation." Professional musicians in particular can attest that years of "critical, meliorative study of the experience and use of one's body" are required to master an instrument or to become a singer—although, of course, the level and scope of "body consciousness" vary according to the situation in which a musician is performing, a student is practicing, or a teacher is teaching. Many musicians are intimately familiar with the sense of music "autonomously" playing through their bodies. They may or may not be explicitly or consciously aware of their bodies while playing, reliant as they often are upon automatized movements not controlled by explicit thought processes. Similarly, music listeners may variously "lose" body consciousness or become acutely aware of their bodies through intense experiences of pleasure, dislike, or aversion. Eleanor V. Stubley describes musical engagement as involving something not unlike touch: "Understood from this perspective, musical listening involves a certain reciprocity that makes it seem as if the music has become part of our bodily being, touch ultimately being a matter of 'both touching and being touched by'" (Stubley 1999, 5). Touch in this sense is reminiscent of the phenomenological term "intentionality," which means that consciousness is directed towards and by something. Furthermore touch refers to both inner and outer sensation, to mental and physic touch.

In many ways, engagements with music are nicely illustrative of Shusterman's claim, "The body-mind connection is so pervasively intimate that it seems misleading to speak of body and mind as two different, independent entities. The term *body-mind* would more aptly express their essential union, which still leaves room for pragmatically distinguishing between mental and physical aspects of behavior and also for the project of increasing their experiential unity" (Shusterman 2006, 2). I agree that it is possible to distinguish between and thus to investigate the physical (bodily) and the mindful (mental) aspects of music experience. At the same time, trying to understand them as disconnected makes very little sense.

The idea of the "soma" in Shusterman's term "somaesthetics," however, conventionally invokes the idea of the body as distinct from the soul, mind, or psyche (New Oxford Dictionary of English). It is clear that Shusterman hopes to transcend this body-based definition, asserting that "*any acutely attentive somatic self-consciousness will always be*

conscious of more than the body itself" (8). Does this "more than the body itself" include both environment and consciousness? Taking the intertwinement of body, consciousness and environment seriously, we arrive at a phenomenological idea of the body-as-subject similar to that of French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty.[2] The etymological roots of the term "somaesthetics," however, seem to suggest aesthetic approaches to the body as an object—a much narrower understanding than Shusterman apparently has in mind for the term.

How, then, does "somaesthetics" account for the notion of body-mind or of body-as-subject? Is the notion of body consciousness[3] intended to bridge the gap between soma and consciousness? Are these merely minor definitional concerns, or do "somaesthetics" and "body-mind" invoke two different, even divergent approaches to the body?

Being in touch with music

The second chapter of *Body Consciousness* is entitled "The Silent, Limping Body of Philosophy: Somatic Attention Deficit in Merleau-Ponty." The first part of this title refers directly to Merleau-Ponty's explanation of his philosophy of the body. It is silent because, on Merleau-Ponty's account, the world becomes meaningful "silently": through the body, prior to verbal thought. The "limping" metaphor refers to the ambiguity of philosophy, since "it is no more possible to set up a one-to-one correspondence between the historical event and the conscious philosophical interpretations of this event, than between the event and its objective conditions" (Merleau-Ponty 1970, 57). Thus, a phenomenological investigation must be critical and open ended, and despite his limping philosophy the most important consideration for a phenomenologist must be to reach a balanced view. The obligation to strive for balance always leaves the possibility of a limping body. I try to read Merleau-Ponty in this spirit.

The chapter's subtitle—attributing to Merleau-Ponty a "somatic attention deficit"—expresses Shusterman's main concern about the explanatory limits of Merleau-Ponty's body phenomenology. As Shusterman puts it, "I will do my best to explain Merleau-Ponty's resistance to thematized somatic consciousness or somaesthetic reflection. But I will not be able to justify it. For this attitude is precisely one of the features of his somatic theory that I find most problematic…" (50). In response to this claim, I will present in the next section of this essay an interpretation of Merleau-Ponty in which a phenomenological philosophical perspective need not preclude reflection on the body or even bodily reflection.

It is important to bear in mind that musical activities such as listening, performing, composing, and activities related to music such as dancing, Dalcroze Eurhythmics, musical games, and stomp always include perception as well as reflection. Furthermore, musical experience always involves the kind of implicit reciprocity Stubley describes as "both touching and being touched by" music. This kind of reciprocity occurs in other modes of artistic engagement, too: Dance might be described as touching the music with movements while at the same time music touches one's lived body;[4] and engaging with visual art—a painting, say—involves the reciprocity of visually touching the surface through the same process as one is emotionally touched by the painting.

Shusterman acknowledges the reciprocity of consciousness being directed both *toward* and *by*, and he also discusses Merleau-Ponty's distinction between two modes of intentionality: operative intentionality and act intentionality. Operative intentionality produces our immediate and spontaneous perception of the world. It happens, for instance, when we grasp the meaning of a situation without explicit awareness. Act intentionality, on the other hand, is "that of our judgments and of those occasions when we voluntarily take up a position" (Merleau-Ponty 1962/2003, xx; and further 118, 130f, 139ff).[5] In act intentionality we can point out the meaning of a situation and take action. Expanding on the notions of operative and act intentionality, Shusterman (53–56) describes four different levels of consciousness. Here are Shusterman's short definitions of each, followed by examples I have tried to draw from musical experience.

(1) *Corporeal intentionality* is a primitive mode of grasping without conscious awareness. Even when we are asleep we are able to experience music, or perhaps to hear music that is only sounding in a dream. This kind of experience exemplifies Merleau-Ponty's basic claim that consciousness is installed in perception which does not presuppose conscious awareness.

(2) *Primary consciousness* denotes conscious perception without explicit awareness. This could be the experience of background music which may invoke certain emotions. We may even be conscious of the emotions without attending to the music itself, or we may sing along with the music without being explicitly aware of our action.

(3) *Somaesthetic perception* implies explicit bodily awareness. Relevant music examples might include trained musicians reading music, playing an instrument or identifying

a piece of music by ear, activities that require explicit awareness but not necessarily analytic reflection. Focus is on the activity rather than on our consciousness of the situation.

(4) *Somaesthetic reflection* or self-consciousness means that we are "focused on our own self-awareness" (56). Musical activities such as composing, improvising, correcting wrong notes, etc. require awareness of one's own awareness. In other words, this kind of activity requires act intentionality and to a certain degree analytical reflection.

Using Merleau-Ponty's terminology, (1) and (2) might be understood as differentiations of *operative intentionality*, whereas (3) and (4) form different levels of *act intentionality*.

I would like to extend these four levels of consciousness to the phenomenological notion of intentionality by referring to some of my own empirical research. The study (Holgersen 2002, 2006) involved music teaching to groups of children aged one to three, with their parents or caregivers. Different modes of intentionality were pivotal for the analysis and categorization of participation strategies. The aim of the study was to understand fundamental aspects of what makes children experience participation in musical activities as meaningful. Four participation strategies were found—*reception, imitation, identification* and *elaboration*—each requiring a different mode of intentionality. These concepts are defined differently according to different theories and the following short definitions only form main categories open for further differentiation. Words in italics refer to the four levels of consciousness as described by Shusterman.

(1) Reception requires at a minimum a *primitive mode of grasping without conscious awareness*. Participants may be present in an open and receptive way, watching and listening to the musical activity with varying degrees of felt experience and empathy, yet with a minimum of gestural or vocal expression. Reception may "cover up" for virtual participation or averted involvement. Reception involves the latent possibility of partial as well as total comprehension of whatever the situation affords. Even sleeping babies who are present in musical activities may recognize aspects of the musical experience when awake.

(2) Imitation requires at a minimum *conscious perception without explicit awareness*. Participants may be attentive to outward structural features, including other participants' gestural or facial expressions, that is, on the basis of partial as distinct from total comprehension. Imitation of aspects of musical activities does not require explicit awareness of the musical sound or structure, not even if the participant moves in coordinated ways.

Imitation, though, often amounts to acting the way that other participants apparently act. For example children clapping hands along with the music need not pay particular attention to the musical structure—just clapping hands like the peers may be a fulfilling experience. This example illustrates a certain kind of operative intentionality through which participants may grasp certain meaningful aspects or certain affordances of the musical activity.

(3) Identification requires *explicit awareness through act intentionality*, though not necessarily verbalized. Participants' engagements show embodied understanding of the music: they can demonstrate bodily identification with the music or with other participants' musical expressions. For example Lasse, a 16-month-old boy, was encouraged to participate in a dance which he had observed a few times. He started by imitating the prescribed dance movements but quickly he focused on his own movements, turned his back to the group and engaged in a whole body movement that was precisely attuned to the form, timing and intensity of the music. In other words, he was inspired by other participants and through his own dance movements, he identified with the music.

(4) Elaboration requires a *focus on one's own awareness*, showing one's understanding of meaning and contributing forms of expression or understanding that are new in the context in question by elaborating a personal and composite expression. Elaboration finds expression in the forms of variation, improvisation, transformation and free experimentation. Children participating in this way may try to change the lyrics of a song, invent new dance steps or otherwise expand the meaning of a musical activity, and most often they do so without totally neglecting the rules or transgressing the limits of what makes this particular activity meaningful.

These four participation strategies can be recognized as modes of engagement that are successively and increasingly more overt, more visible, and more complex. Likewise, the level of consciousness is increasing (though it is important to note that reception may also cover up for more reflexive consciousness).

There are several reasons for relating Shusterman's distinctions between four different levels of consciousness to considerations about music education: First, different levels of consciousness of the lived body provide explanatory power also for different ways of being in touch with music. Second, Shusterman's distinctions are helpful for understanding participation at different levels of consciousness. Third, paying attention to the described levels of consciousness in participation may render visible aspects of meaning that might

otherwise remain tacitly implicit, lost to reflection or possibly completely overlooked. A final important point is that my study has suggested participation strategies are non-hierarchical and that they do not occur in any predictable order.

In reflective practice, however, the highest level of consciousness should be the goal of any teacher or learner. That is the rationale for the following discussion.

Musical learning, representation, and reflection

Shusterman supports—although to a limited extent—Merleau-Ponty's claim that "it is our basic unreflective intentionality that silently and spontaneously organizes our world of perception without the need of distinct perceptual representations and without any explicitly conscious deliberation" (59). Shusterman quotes one of Merleau-Ponty's central claims: "It is the body which 'catches (*kapiert*) and 'comprehends' movement. The acquisition of a habit is indeed the grasping of a significance, but it is the motor grasping of a motor significance" (Merleau-Ponty *PP*, 165). One of Merleau-Ponty's examples is the incorporated knowledge of mastering a keyboard without recourse to explicit or conscious thought. Merleau-Ponty describes the embodied knowledge required by an organist simultaneously playing several manuals and a pedal. The organist after only one rehearsal at a new instrument can play without paying conscious attention to his or her own movements. Focusing consciousness on the movements as such would impede or disrupt motor function and hence the musical expression. Everyday actions like ball games or riding a bike similarly rely on automatized bodily function. Furthermore, drawing on implicit knowledge about acoustics and other aspects of embodied knowledge, musicians "measure" and "appreciate" the room in which they are performing.

Shusterman, though, points to "troubling limits to the efficacy of unreflective habits, even on the level of basic bodily actions" (62). One of the troubles here is how to correct bad habits, because once they are acquired, we cannot rely on sedimented habit to correct them, and neither can we rely on simple trial and error. The logic seems to be that we would not be able to predict which habit would be the stronger, since all habits become sedimented over time.

Performing musicians can easily identify with this problem. Musicians not only memorize and learn music by heart, they literally incorporate the music. If they need to correct body habits in order to improve their musical performance, they often focus attention

on the musical rather than on the somatic problem. So far, I agree with Shusterman that the correction of bad habits requires reflection: It cannot be approached solely as a motor problem, unconnected to deliberate reflection.

In the present context, though, I do not find the distinction between body schema and body image "vague and contested" as Shusterman does (63–64). What matters, using musical learning and performance as examples, is that we do not have conscious access to the body schema. A body image, on the other hand, is the product of imagination and as such is not only accessible to but also manipulable by consciousness (*PP*, 95). Merleau-Ponty (160) sees movement as a body schema process, which is the necessarily silent (there we go again) plan behind a movement ("Bewegungsentwurf" in German).

Shusterman explains his reservation about this in the following way:

> In advocating the unreflective lived body and its motor schema in opposition to the conceptual representations of scientific explanation, Merleau-Ponty creates a polarization of "lived experience" versus abstract "representations" that neglects the deployment of a fruitful third option – what could be called "lived somaesthetic reflection," that is, concrete but representational and reflective body consciousness (63).

In Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, however, I do not find any such polarization. His general philosophical view on reflection, which should also account for reflection on the body, is clearly stated:

> The core of philosophy is no longer an autonomous transcendental subjectivity, to be found everywhere and nowhere: it lies in the perceptual beginning of reflection, at the point where an individual life begins to reflect on itself. Reflection is truly reflection only if it is not carried outside itself, only if it knows itself as reflection-on-an-unreflective-experience, and consequently as a change in structure of our existence (*PP*, 72).

How does this apply to musical learning and performance? Taking musicians as examples, they often attend lessons of Alexander technique, Mensendieck or other body practices in order to improve their musical performance through enhanced "body consciousness." Shusterman refers to Alexander, who "aimed at transforming ineffective, 'unrecognized', and thus uncontrollable habits into habits that are effective and adaptable because they are essentially governed by 'conscious control', even though not constantly held in the focus of reflective self-consciousness" (204). What musicians really experience through their bodily practice under the guidance of an Alexander teacher may not be that they control their *physical body*; rather they have conscious access to certain aspects of their *lived body*.

Alexander technique focuses on movement intentionality rather than physical control, and in musicians' practice movements are closely connected with musical intentions.

Many musicians—and perhaps especially, singers—have experienced that *practice through thinking or imagination* can enhance bodily performance. The manipulatory power of imagination and mental training is connected to reflection through metaphors rather than one-to-one reflection connected to specific movements. As to the notion of a "plan behind the movement," musicians rely on both a "silent" (read: unconscious) and a conscious plan, which—in Merleau-Ponty's words—"knows itself as reflection-on-an-unreflective-experience."

According to Merleau-Ponty the starting point for any investigation of consciousness must be how the lived body becomes meaningful through operative intentionality, i.e. prior to reflection. This does not exclude subsequent reflection, but reflection cannot change the fact that "body consciousness" (read: perceived bodily meaning) is constituted prior to reflection. In other words, *we meet the world in perception, but we change it through reflection*.

Despite the fact that musicians cannot consciously control every movement in real time performance, it is possible to plan movements in a more general sense and to correct errors. The notion of "thinking in movement" (Sheets-Johnstone 1999, 483ff) illustrates the problem of consciously controlling one's own body. Sheets-Johnstone argues that conscious thought is not directing the movement as such, rather "To be thinking in movement means that a mindful body is creating a particular dynamic as that very dynamic is kinetically unfolding" (ibid. 489). As already suggested, bodily movements as such cannot be accessed consciously; rather, "thinking in movement is a way of being in the world, of wondering or exploring the world directly, taking it up moment by moment and living it in movement, kinetically" (ibid. 490). As Sheets-Johnstone points out, thinking in movement, like Cézanne's thinking in painting, describes a process in which "vision becomes gesture" (ibid. 494). I would like to add that music becomes gesture, too, or that music and gesture in a more general sense are related forms of expression and as such they may elucidate and reflect each other.

In musical body practices like dancing, conducting, and stomp, it may be impossible to point out when the particular form of expression should be interpreted in terms of music-as-movement or movement-as-music, because they tend to merge in our experience. This could be described as lived bodily reflection, since the performed movements reflect the

reciprocity between a lived experience and its expression. This view adds an additional meaning to the previous statement: *we meet the world in perception, but we change it through reflection*. In this sense all kinds of musical experience tend to change the perceiving subject, and particularly in music performance the aim of the activity is to add a musical expression that can never be an exact copy of a previous experience. It is tempting to ask, "If music performance does not change the world, then why bother to make music at all?"

An example from elementary music teaching with two- to three-year-old children participating together with a parent may illustrate this last point as well as the general problem of reflection in action. Maria, participating from the age of two years, was in some situations the natural leader of a song or a dance, while in other situations she resisted participation. She could be intensely oriented toward the activity (receptive), but she resisted showing her engagement in the activity because she felt embarrassed, lonely or awkward in the situation. In a case study ("Why Does Maria Dance?"), Holgersen (2002) describes how Maria devised a personal choreography of a dance which far exceeded her motor capability. This was a very shining example of the "elaboration" participation strategy described above.

When Maria extends the form conveyed by the teacher of the dance "Sascha", trying to transcend the limits of her bodily ability, we may understand her expressions in terms of "I can…" rather than "I think that…." This does not mean that Maria is not able to think, but it would be too simplifying to interpret her movements as direct representations of deliberate thoughts. Maria's musical expressions through movements should be seen as both situated and habituated, since she devises her own choreography incorporating and transforming other participants' expressions. Analyzing Maria's movements as related to the music, it appears that she is demonstrating her idea of a general plan while at the same time trying to accommodate to the discrepancies of timing between the musical structure and her bodily positions. Maria's dance movements are very often a bit late in relation to the musical timing, but that does not disturb the general choreography.

<< Click here to view this clip >>

mms://stream.dpu.dk/public/svho/svho090512-01sq.wmv

Maria's expressions and efforts in this example display embodied musical reflection which may be described in terms of form, time and intensity. In the video example she

attempts an elaborated choreography with distinctive repetitive features such as dance steps and postures. A movement analysis reveals Maria's deliberate use of several distinct dance steps formed in sequences following the musical structure. As a vivid example of reflection in action, this may be explained referring to Merleau-Ponty's notion of "reflection-on-an-unreflective-experience" (*PP*, 72), which consequently changed the structure of Maria's existence.

Through my discussions about reflective consciousness and through this dance example I have tried to show that a phenomenological analysis may very well focus on bodily reflection, but it will always be conditioned by the lived body. This may need a short explanation: When Maria is dancing, she tries hard to accommodate to the musical structure, but she cannot do so by thinking, only. The phenomenological point is that bodily reflection, or thinking-in-movement, is only possible as a holistic enterprise since we have to accept that body/bodily experience, consciousness, and environment (music, other participants, etc.) are intertwined. I see no contradiction between Shusterman's "lived somaesthetic reflection" and Merleau-Ponty's "reflection-on-an-unreflective-experience."

Conclusion

Musical experience is extremely apt for the study of consciousness and bodily awareness, since involvement with music is interdependently connected with a wide range of conscious as well as pre-conscious aspects of human experience and, in particular, aspects of embodied knowledge. The role of consciousness in various body practices, as discussed in *Body Consciousness*, resonates in music (as in other arts) education and I appreciate the "meliorative study" that has been the explicit and persistent aim of Shusterman's pragmatist investigations over many years. I have reservations, though, about Shusterman's claim that "Pragmatism offers a complementary philosophical perspective that is friendlier [than that of Merleau-Ponty] to full-bodied engagement in practical efforts of somatic awareness. It aims at generating better experience for the future rather than trying to recapture the lost perceptual unity of a primordial past, a 'return to that world which precedes knowledge'" (75, my insertion).

Shusterman suggests that "Merleau-Ponty's resistance to somatic mindfulness and reflection can be justified only in terms of his deeper philosophical aims and presumptions" (73). On the contrary, I would say the philosophical perspective of Merleau-Ponty is wider

and more inclusive than the pragmatist view, since a "return to that world which precedes knowledge" (i.e. meeting the world in perception) does not at all preclude reflection on the body or on embodied knowledge. The notion of "body consciousness"—as Merleau-Ponty has pointed out (*PP*, 55)—may lead to an unnecessary reduction as compared with the phenomenological approach to "consciousness as installed in perception."

In conclusion, I find Shusterman's categorization of somaesthetic reflection relevant and helpful for understanding the intertwinement of body and various levels of consciousness, but I do not share his concern about phenomenology narrowing the perspective on bodily reflection.

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Notes

[1] Richard Shusterman (2008). *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics*. Cambridge Univ. Press. Except where otherwise indicated, parenthetical page references in this essay are to this volume.

[2] The second chapter of *Body Consciousness* is devoted to the phenomenological approach of Merleau-Ponty, whose position will be further explored throughout the present essay.

[3] The fact that Merleau-Ponty very seldom used terms like “body consciousness” and “body-mind” does not necessarily preclude them from a phenomenological perspective, only, he was very much aware of the mentalistic pitfall: The perceiving subject does not need mental representations to understand her own body or the body-in-the-world as they are already meaningful prior to conscious thought. In the present text “body-mind” will be used interchangeable with body-as-subject or body-subject.

[4] The term ”lived body” is a holistic notion of ”the body in the world” including the physical body as well as embodied knowledge and experiences related to being in the world.

[5] *Phenomenology of Perception* will be referred to hereafter as *PP*.

About the Author

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