

Musical participation in studies of creativity

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This article explores new ideas towards qualitatively exploring and writing about musical creative processes within different domains. The inspiration for the theoretical points made are from the world of music and the practices of musicians, but the analysis and conclusions of the article discusses musicality as a general phenomenon. It is part of an ongoing research project within cultural psychology, seeking to understand how creative processes develop in dialog with the physical, social and cultural surroundings. Using the example of the music performance and music festivals, the article specifically discusses how ephemeral, social, emergent phenomena depend on musicality in creative processes. The article describes, how both a technical, mathematical and an ambiguous, poetic language is relevant when describing and writing about musical creative processes. Further, it argues how written studies of musically emergent, creative processes demands a close, dialogical relationship to the specific domain, beyond e.g. the phenomenological interview approach - a relationship, enabling the researcher to speak and write freely about musicality within the studied field, actively participate and engage with the processes around the explored phenomena with intuition, engagement and, essentially, musicality.

Keywords: Musicality, emergence, creativity, socio-materiality, qualitative methodology, academic writing

Introduction: Writing about musical creativity

This article discusses the difficulties of and ideas towards methodologically exploring and writing about the musical creative processes. The inspiration comes predominantly from my work with music, musicians and music festivals, but when I, throughout the article, write “musical”, I refer to a broader and more general definition of the term, reaching far beyond the practices of musicians. When exploring the musicality of creative processes, I refer to the processes related to socio-material interaction more generally, as we find it in creative situations related to the production of major festival events, to the restaurant managers who seek to bring people together, all the way down to the

communication between people in conversations. All social situations can be more or less “musical” (Hansen, 1990). The Danish author (and musician) Peter Bastian outright defined musicality as “tonal emergence” (Bastian, 1987, 2012) – an ability to make things, in his example notes, rhythm, harmonies, acoustics, material elements of the concert hall – come together in living, vibrant phenomena. Along these lines, this article broadly explores the musicality of socially emergent phenomena and specifically, ideas towards methodologically exploring and writing about them. Hence, in short, the purpose of the following paper is to begin the development of a language for musicality relevant for the methodological exploration of and writings about musical creative processes of emergence.

Vignette: A language for living, musical phenomena?

But before I rush into theoretical discussions, as a backdrop to the research presented in this article, I find it relevant to begin with real world experience of musicality, as it describes the starting point of the theoretical and methodological ideas presented – the experience exemplifies the challenges of exploring, writing and even talking about musicality and “emergent phenomena”, that I wish to describe and discuss in the paper.

For several years, I have been working at Roskilde Festival, the largest music and arts festival in Northern Europe¹. Each July, 130,000 people gather in Roskilde Denmark for the festival – in 2023 to celebrate the 51st edition of the major event. At the office curating the arts and music program, where I worked for four years as an industrial PhD-student, the festival “spirit” was present all year long. As a newly employed PhD-student at the department of psychology, writing my dissertation on the creative processes forming the major event, I soon realized that both the character of and processes leading to the “result” – the product of the hard labor of the many participants – were hard to describe for people working in the festival organization. Many of my colleagues had been employed for several years and possessed central positions in the festival hierarchy – still, it seemed difficult for (even) the festival management to describe what defined the major event, vital elements of its constitution and how it specifically differentiated from other festivals. When asked, in the interviews I conducted for my research project, the obvious facts were often presented: Roskilde Festival was, for example, different to other

¹ For more information on the history of Roskilde Festival, see www.roskilde-festival.dk/en/about/the-festival

festivals in Denmark in terms of the number of participants. Roskilde Festival is created by 130,000 participants, while the other festivals in Denmark are much smaller. Also, the music program was described as different and highly diverse, compared to other festivals. But these arguments – as often consented by the informants – did not capture the true “nature” or “spirit” of the event, although Roskilde Festival was typically described as having its own “character” – a mysterious, living, social, cultural and ritual “phenomenon” (Hvidtfeldt & Tanggaard, 2019). Also, part of my task as a researcher was to interview musicians performing at the festivals – they also found it difficult to describe the character of the event, and thereby the challenges they met, when performing in the large festival space (Hvidtfeldt & Tanggaard, 2018) – they talked “around” the phenomenon, but found it hard to address it directly.

I began to wonder about the nature of “musical phenomena” in general. I engrossed myself in a research project, which this article is based on, seeking to understand how these types of musical phenomena develop in creative processes and in this regard, for this article, the methodologies relevant for the exploration of how we can describe and write about the creative processes leading to results that are not tangible, but fundamentally social and ephemeral (see also Hvidtfeldt, 2019).

Research focus: How do we explore and describe the indescribable?

It was difficult for both the musicians and the festival participants I interviewed to put their musicality into words and thereby describe their creative processes directly, but it is arguably important to develop qualitative methodologies that enable us to explore and understand how our world develops creatively in social communities – just like it is important to explore creative processes leading to tangible products, typically studied in the psychological literature (Glăveanu, 2016b; Jacucci & Wagner, 2007; Tanggaard, 2014). In researching creativity as musical practice – understood broadly, beyond the ones just musicians engage in – it thus becomes relevant to explore how we are able to qualitatively converse and write about musicality – the research focus of this article is therefore asking two questions: (1) *what characterizes a “musical” creative language?* (2) *what does an analytical focus on creative processes of musically, emergent phenomena demand of the researcher empirically exploring and writing about it?* Experienced musicians have no trouble rationally describing what their music is about, as the world of music is a well-established language they use when communicating on

notes, harmonies, metrics etc., just like the festival organizers I was working with knew exactly how to describe and work with the individual elements of the major event. But in order to explore and understand the musical and creative processes and the true character of the emerging phenomena, within various domains and from both a methodological and epistemological perspective, it became relevant to explore “languages for musicality” and their relevance for qualitative, written studies of creative, emergent processes.

In an effort to theoretically position the article and link back to my previous work on the subject, the following section begins by presenting how creativity can be seen as a socio-material practice dependent on musicality.

Theoretical background: Creativity seen as a musical practice

Psychological studies of creativity are interdisciplinary and diverse (Kaufman & Sternberg, 2021). Typically from various theoretical perspectives, they focus on developing new understandings of creative products, persons, processes or situations in which the work takes place. The research tradition, to which this article contributes, has developed in line with a more general “material turn” in the social and human sciences (Hastrup, 2011), perceiving creativity as a transactional process involving both intra- and extra-psychological processes in a constant, irreversible dialog between inner “mind” and outer “world” (Glăveanu, 2010; Glăveanu et al., 2014; Glăveanu & Tanggaard, 2014; Tanggaard, 2011, 2013, 2014). Whereas some – especially in the earlier studies – emphasize personal traits, cognition and psychometric measurement as core elements of creativity, a cultural psychological socio-material perspective is underlining – inspired by for example James Gibson and Bruno Latour – that mental processes are not limited by the skin: when we work creatively, we tap into and depend on the “knowledge” of the environment. Both in the sense that we stand on the shoulders of others, and do not constantly start all over and invent from scratch, but also in the sense that the materials we engage in in creative work guide us and deliver cultural and social knowledge that afford specific actions (Gibson, 1979; Glăveanu, 2016a). The physical environment is therefore not passively framing, but actively shaping our way of life with all its history, materiality, potentials, barriers and qualities.

We *get* inspired by someone or something, and sometimes we (hopefully) *provide* a little bit of inspiration to our surroundings. It might be a highly unconscious process,

but “the new” does not appear out of the blue in isolated mental processes – it often develops, when we engage with the surroundings and take them in, no matter if it is nature, people, bodily aspects, musical instruments, social settings with specific practices or rituals. In practice, the painter engages with the painting as it unfolds on the canvas and the musician communicates in an intimate dialog with the violin when performing. The painting or the music is not developed in a finite form inside the head of the artist, but as a work of art, in a socio-material, improvised process. In the words of anthropologists Tim Ingold and Elizabeth Hallam (2007, p. 3), “*the creativity of our imaginative reflections is inseparable from our performative engagements with the material that surrounds us*”. The physical, material contexts of creative processes should arguably not be understood as passive frameworks for individual mental processes, but rather as substantial components of creativity in itself (Tanggaard, 2013).

Musicality and emergence in creative processes

In recent studies, I have applied and further developed the above presented socio-material take on creativity in explorations of work processes underlying musical practices (Hvidtfeldt, 2018, 2019). These studies build on my work at Roskilde Festival, described in the “vignette” above, in exploring how creative processes sometimes do not lead to tangible, physical objects that can be held in the hand – sometimes, in the rehearsal space or on stage, creative processes lead to music as a performed, social activity (Small, 1998), possessing other “material qualities” than that of – let us say – a chair. Obviously, music creation is dependent on musical instrument and other physical, tangible materials, but the final result – the music we experience – is temporary and ephemeral. The chair is in a sense also temporary, in that it will disintegrate over the years and eventually collapse (hopefully, empty seated and not underneath an unfortunate dinner guest), but performed music, and other forms of “emergent phenomena”, are fundamentally social and ephemeral – they only exist in the moment and depend on the involvement of and relationship between the specific social elements involved in the process (Sawyer, 2005). Yet, they hold material qualities, for the creative processes that initially and continuously create them (Hvidtfeldt, 2018).

In our studies on creative processes, socio-materiality and musicality, Lene Tanggaard and I have specifically drawn on the philosophical concept of “emergence” in

describing the results and material qualities of musical creative processes. In developing a theoretical description of and methodological approaches towards understanding emergent phenomenon as “materials” for creative processes, we are especially inspired by Keith Sawyer’s (1999, 2000, 2005) work and the late Danish author and musician Peter Bastian’s descriptions of emergence in creative processes. Sawyer describes the emergent phenomenon as:

[...]not a final end product, like a creative product or a connectionist network end state; it is a constantly changing ephemeral property of the interaction, which in turn influences the emergent processes that are generating it. This results in both top-down and bottom-up processes; the emergent is ‘initially’ created with bottom-up dialogical processes, but immediately it takes on constraining, or top-down, characteristics.

(Sawyer, 1999, p. 465)

Sawyer’s conception of emergence is arguably relevant to the understanding of creative processes leading to musical phenomena, as it provides a theoretical framework describing the simultaneous and bi-directional process of emergence. Creativity depends on the musical ability to make “things come together”, and that this “emergent whole” immediately has consequences for the creative processes that continuously create it (Hvidtfeldt, 2018). Emergence is described as an ongoing process, where the whole appears as something “other” than the sum of its parts (Ferrell, 2014, p. 436). Along similar lines, though from the specific perspective of the musician, Peter Bastian wrote:

When things are not working out, you have chaos. Chaos is not death; it is a potential death or a potential life. It can go either way. Chaos means that there is a diversity, but disorder. The aspiration when creating music is a tremendously complex articulated unity, and that is cosmos. Chaos is a great place to be. It is the border between the old and the uncreated. It can go either way - towards death or towards life. As a creative person, you do everything you can to go in the

direction of life. Towards greater intimacy, towards a situation where things start to play together or emerge, to use a foreign word.

Lyhne (2011) [translated by the author]

Both Sawyer and Bastian provide articulate notions of musical creative work and what creative people, who develop socially emergent phenomena, strive to achieve. Still, they leave many questions out in the open and leave no clues as to how to reach the goal: sometimes it works, sometimes it does not and sometimes music arises into something “in itself”. “Something” that cannot be reduced to the sum of the parts, but that arises when “everything” falls into place and makes sense as a meaningful, musical phenomenon.

Therefore, to begin to experiment with the theoretical framework introducing emergence theory to a socio-material perspective on creativity, with the ultimate ambition to develop new understandings of how, when and why musically emergent phenomena appear, Lene Tanggaard and I began to empirically explore the creative processes of musicians – though from our perspective, musicians cannot take out a patent on “musicality”. This is both because musicality is named after the practice of performing music, probably because it is a natural outlet of the quality we write about, and also because I have been working as a musician for many years, and therefore understand the rational, technical language of the domain very well. Specifically, we were interested in understanding how musicians developed their musical products in dialog with “materials” involved in the processes (Hvidtfeldt & Tanggaard, 2018). Generally, we concluded, among other arguments, that the musicality of creative processes within the field demands fragility (see some of the narrative presented below). Secondly, we began to broaden the empirical exploration, and applied the developed theoretical framework in an exploration of Roskilde Festival as a musical, emergent phenomenon (Hvidtfeldt & Tanggaard, 2019) – in both cases acknowledging that the creative product (the emergent phenomenon) is, in reality, immaterial and temporal by nature. Still, we argued, despite the ephemeral, living nature of results of the creative processes – the music performed or the music festival itself – that the socio-material transaction between creative “person” and “product” was evident, in both cases, in the empirical material. Musicians use the ephemeral, emergent phenomenon as a material reference, guiding the creative process

forwards and the Roskilde Festival participant involves the festival, seen as an emergent phenomenon, as a material to the process (Hvidtfeldt, 2019).

In summary, the above presented explorations of both musicians, specifically, and festival participants work processes, generally, where I define creativity as dependent on *musicality*. Inspired especially by Glăveanu (2010), Mason (2003) and Sternberg (2006), I define creativity as ‘*acting in and on the world, in new and musical ways*’ (Hvidtfeldt, 2020, p. 30). Typically, creativity is simply defined as novelty + appropriateness (Amabile, 2018; Sternberg & Kaufmann, 2018), where “appropriate” serves as an umbrella-term broadly relevant within different domains. Here, in relation to the exploration of creative processes leading to emergent phenomena, the *musical* is exactly understood to be appropriate and why the term seems more accurate in the definition: Creativity is therefore understood as a musical process making social situations meaningful; an process, bringing together a multitude of chaotic elements (being notes, rhythms, harmonies or other elements of musicians performances or stages, acoustics or participants involved in the creation of the music festival as a social event etc.) into a cohesive, living unity – the emergent phenomenon. Creativity is here, in other words, defined as a concerted, musical effort.

In the following section, I leave this introduction to the theoretical background of the study, and begin my exploration of the two research questions presented above. Firstly, what characterizes the musical language used when communicating about the creation of emergent phenomena?

Languages of musical creativity

Sentences, formulated by Bastian, Sawyer and myself, repeating notions of “sometimes, something, phenomena, wholes, other and everything” when describing processes of emergence are vague – just like the interviews from Roskilde Festival on musicality and emergence presented in the introduction tended to be. These *are* slippery concepts (probably why they are also alluring), however, it would be conducive to studies of musical creative processes leading to emergent phenomena to take a step just a little closer in an exploration of how, when and why emergent phenomenon appear, and further, how they can be studied and written about. Musical, emergent phenomena are something special and it is in a sense tempting to leave them as these mystical objects out of reach,

but from a scientific point of view, we need more solid ground and established methods for the exploration of the trajectory towards these ephemeral creative results – where we cannot describe the emergent phenomenon directly, we can work on the development of methods enabling us to understand and write about prerequisites for their development. For that, we need a well-established language on musicality, useful in dialog with practitioners and other informants, as well as methods that enable us to get close to the creative, musical processes. In an effort to understand the creative processes related to the development of emergent phenomena, the following sections attempts to take the first methodological steps towards understanding the musical language inherent to the creative processes, seen as a socio-material practice, leading to musical, emergent phenomena.

Musicality has, over the past 100 years or so of studies on the subject (Gembris, 1997), been defined in a number of ways – here, in an early attempt to begin the development of language for writing about and methodologically exploring musicality of emergent processes, two broad and opposing categories of understandings are presented. These two “languages for musicality” should be understood as overall, idealized categories of arguments pointing in the same direction, and again, I return to the world of music as a good example and my “mother tongue”, though musicality can be found in many other situations.

An oxymoron: Musicality as mathematical and ambiguous language

In a sense, music is math. When learning how to play the drum set, when I was around 12 years old, my teacher at the local music school thought me how to understand and read the different musical symbols in the notation system: metrical rhythms written within bars, with specific time signatures, measures, pauses and note values notated on a staff – a mathematical notation system, describing how to play rhythms, using specific drums and cymbals in certain tempos. The challenge was, first and foremost, to keep the tempo and coordinate arms and legs, so that the music was played “right”. In that sense, music is a mathematical, rational challenge that – as the student gradually progress and learns to master the instrument and read the sheets – can be “figured out” and played “correctly”.

Musicality – understood as an ability of musicians to produce music – was originally studied using these terms. One of the first attempts to define musicality was developed by Seashore (1919, 1967), with the ambition to measure people’s abilities to work with

and understand music. If, for a second, we turn to a general understanding of musicality, festival producers have rational, technical abilities and knowledge relevant for the production of major events, such as knowledge on sound systems, crowd safety and logistics. Just like the restaurant manager, who seeks to develop the musical experiences for their costumers, they have technical rational understandings of for example how to prepare food, arrange the dining room and provide good service at the tables.

But let us return to the world of music, as it is such a good example of musicality. In another sense, music is abstruse and ambiguous: a “poetic” language, communicating emotions, touching our feelings, like nothing else. Music is, in this sense, not about what is right or wrong – it is communicating sounds, harmonies, dynamics, but it is not evaluated in a distinct, numeric sense – but from this understanding a “mathematically bad” performance, with bad pitch, inconsistent tempo or bad interplay between the musicians in the group, can still be the best – and most musical! - performance profoundly engaging the audience (see e.g. Bonde, 2011).

Peter Bastian writes about this distinction between mathematical and poetic language:

The sentence: ‘she is neither beautiful nor ugly, and still she is the most beautiful creature I have ever seen’, is immediately understandable; we know what the author is talking about and recognize the emotional state. If we had unambiguously defined the meaning of the word beautiful, the sentence would become meaningless and of the type: ‘the book costs neither five nor ten euro, and still it costs ten euro. So, we see that by refraining from unambiguity in the parts, we can achieve an astoundingly comprehensive and precise whole.

Bastian (1987, p. 18)² [translated by the author]

² Original quote: ”Sætningen: “hun er hverken smuk eller grim, og alligevel er hun det smukkeste væsen jeg nogensinde har set”, er umiddelbart forståelig; vi ved godt hvad forfatteren taler om og genkender følelsetilstanden. – Havde vi nu lagt os entydigt fast på hvad ordet smuk betyder, ville sætningen være meningsløs og af typen: “bogen koster hverken fem eller ti kr., og alligevel koster den ti kr”. Så vi kan se, at vi ved at afstå fra entydigheden i delene, kan opnå en forbløffende omfattende og præcis helhed’.”

Scholars like Adorno (Adorno, 1984) were among the first to criticize the positivist, mathematical perspective on musicality, seeking to measure musical abilities, in arguing that the *meaning* of music is left out. Sloboda defines musicality as the ‘*ability to make sense of music.*’ (1993, p. 106), whereas Stefani argues that musical competence is the “*ability to produce sense through music*’ (1987, p. 7). Using similar terms, Blacking describes musical intelligence as the ‘*cognitive and affective equipment of the brain with which people make musical sense of the world*’ (1990, p. 72). Hence, musicality arguably demands other qualities than the “right ones” – as pointed out in the below quote, computers in the world by far outshine humans in terms of musical qualities, if the opposite was the case:

”Computers with appropriate software could do better than most humans on tests of pitch, melody, and rhythm included in music aptitude measures, but they certainly are not more musical than humans.”

(Gembris, 1997, p. 20)

Along similar lines, one could wander about the consequences for the musical experiences of other types of emergent phenomena, if merely relying on the rational, technical abilities of the concept. The festival organizers, who I encountered in the organization, found it hard to find a language for their creative process but arguably had some collective ability to work with the ambiguities of the event in a manner that most participants – based on the 50 years of success of the event – would agree is highly musical.

Although the presentation of musicality as a technical, mathematical ability that can be measured seems static (and perhaps antiquated), when we talk about musicality in the creative processes leading to emergent phenomena, we are arguably in need of both the rational and ambiguous categories. Namely because the emergent phenomenon is irreducible; it cannot be understood based on a partial, reductionist analysis or descriptions – the parts can be described individually, but the emergent phenomenon is “out of reach”, so to speak, which is why the gathering of empirical material, analysis and synthesis seems limited, if primarily relying on one or the other language.

Examples from the world of music

How are these two overall categories of languages present in methodological explorations of musical creative processes of emergence? In the following, I begin in the world of music and describe how I see them as relevant for studying the practices of musicians and, from there, develop a more general argument on what kinds of writings this methodology allows for.

Math – the rational, distinct language – is a core component of music. It should be part of the research frame and vocabulary, if researching the musicality of musicians in their creative processes. Also, the ambiguous language is present, all the time, when interviewing musicians. To give a concrete example from a recent paper, where Lene Tanggaard and I (2018) explored musicians' involvement of digital “zeroes and ones” in musical processes on stage, a key point made was that the musical way to involve computers on stage is to “crack the code”. Whereas the challenge in the analogue era was to “make things come together”, the challenge in the digital age is to make things “fall apart”. Some of the main arguments of the article are that emergence depends on “fragility”, “taking risks” and “imperilling the situation”. Here are some examples of how the musicians describe their approach towards musicality in processes of emergence:

- ‘One should have the experience, that the music comes alive (App. D:43);*
‘You need some chaos, you need a ‘margin of error’ before the music can live’ (App. F:95);
‘One could say, that the reason why we bring “real”, or analogue instruments, with us on stage – it is exactly to make the concert more vivacious’ (App. C:33):
‘In reality, it is actually just a matter of having something at stake. It is extremely important. I’m not a guitarist, but I play. I really do my best. I’m really into it. Really. I have to play the music to feel that I am passing it on to someone.’ (App. I:162);
‘Even though you do actually know that of course Bruce Willis will not die, the mood of ‘will he make it?’ makes the situation exciting. Reaching that

*point in a performance is just great. And that goes for all genres, all ages.
I'm absolutely sure about that.'* (App. F:105)

(Hvidtfeldt, 2019, appendix B-I)

The informants use both their mathematical and technical terms as well as an abstract, metaphoric language in their description of their creative practice. In the above quotes, the dialog is woven back and forth between the two, with technical, “grammatic”, symbolic and metaphorical nuances. Their creative process could not be expressed using only one or the other – it evolved in a living, open, inspired transactional dialog. My work, as an interviewer and researcher, would not be possible with an understanding of, or language for, only one or the other. Both abstract and technical conversations on how emergent phenomena serve as material for ongoing musical creative processes sets high lingual and domain-specific knowledge demands for both interviewer and interviewee.

Bilingual engagement with the creative process

In this section, I will approach the broader, general understanding of musicality in creative processes of emergence and methodological challenges related to exploring and writing about them. In my research practice, related to both the development of my dissertation (Hvidtfeldt, 2019) and ongoing work on creativity and musicality (see e.g. Hvidtfeldt, 2018; Hvidtfeldt & Tanggaard, 2019, 2021), much of my empirical material has been developed in close dialog with a field I have been engaged with as a practitioner. I have, as a musician, interviewed and observed other musicians, as we were working together on recordings. Also, I have written about creative processes at the Roskilde Festival where I have been a guest, volunteer and PhD candidate employed in the organization. I have taken part in the production process, on equal terms with the other musicians and festival participants; a special position which has given me a place and opportunity to explore creative processes up-close. I needed to get close to and explore how creative processes unfold, as processes with the informants are often unpredictable and fragile. Hence, the methodological argument for exploring musicians at this close range was to approach the creative process with specific knowledge of both technical and abstract dimensions of the domain and, arguably, the “musicality”. It is difficult – in retrospect – to explain how

music was created using written or spoken terms, and fundamentally put “music into words”.

What I needed to gain access to was the lifeworlds of the “musical experts” – especially inspired by Kvale and Brinkmann (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015) and Tanggaard and Brinkmann (Tanggaard & Brinkmann, 2015), to perceive in the interviews using phenomenological lenses, emphasizing, for example, the importance of putting “brackets” around the interviewer and openly asking the informants about their experiences with the musical practice. The challenge for me, as the interviewer, was to gain access to the “essence” of the explored phenomenon, without challenging the perspectives presented by the informants and without bias, to explore what is understood is intersubjectively valid (Jacobsen et al., 2015), seen as the “truth” about the given subject.

I did so, knowing that my informants would challenge me and knowing that I would challenge them, as I had epistemic ambitions of exploring and developing a specific theoretical position. The interviews relevant for exploring musical creative processes of emergence will often be characterized as “elitist interviews” (Harvey, 2011), with informants in a relatively strong position, holding substantial domain relevant knowledge. Therefore, it is arguably relevant, as a contrast, to leave behind the phenomenological principles and push the informants a little bit and challenge their position.

Access to the required material – the musical lifeworlds – is arguably only possible if engaging in a dialog using both the mathematical and the ambiguous languages of the domain; of speaking fluently both *of* (as the unit of analyses) and *with* musicality within the domain. This is a methodological position that enables the interviewer to challenge positions in a trustworthy and confidence-inspiring manner. The languages of different domains are obviously not the same – the interviewer needs to build an intuitive, technical and ambiguous understanding of the field, be it service industries, theatre, music or other social processes, and this is why research skills on musical creativity are not easily transferred. Further, it is paramount, from an ethical perspective (Brinkmann, 2012), to build trust with the informant who too puts something at risk. It is a challenging, fragile situation, and trust needs to be built, and while general social skills are naturally relevant, a “feel” for the domain specific bilingual engagement is key to the exploration

of creative practices, as it allows a conversation where both interviewee and interviewer can read between the lines, and new knowledge on musical engagement can develop.

If perceiving the qualitative studies of musical, creative practice in themselves, it demands having something at stake. The phenomenological approach seeks more passive engagements, putting brackets around the interviewer, enabling a “essential” understanding of the studied phenomenon. But if the studied creative process is the musical phenomenon, I would argue the interviewer needs to have something at stake too – something that cracks the interview situation and mathematical language around music, so that the interview-situation develops as a creative, musical process in itself.

Writing about the indescribable?

What consequences does this have for writing about various kinds of musical practices and emergent phenomena? How is it possible to write about a lived practice and its knowledge that flow between practitioners and hardly can be put into words? It cannot – obviously – be described in any direct manner, but with the above presented argument for a “lived”, musical methodological approach, I will argue that the mediation of creative practices in written form demands some of the same skills – the quality of a representation of musicality depends on the ability of the writer to translate in a musical manner, synthesizing the analyzed empirical material into a musical and coherent unity, irreducible to the sum of the individual linguistic parts. Musicians learn how to play music in apprenticeships and it takes years to develop a profound musical language, as the music teacher cannot *directly* tell a student how to perform with musicality – it is arguably a major challenge for the researcher to gain access to musical domains, as the dialog in the interviews depends on an intuitive, musical feel only mastered through practice – one needs to be able to “read between the lines“ when exploring the musical.

From this perspective, the writing process on creative processes starts early: When forming an intuitive understanding of both the mathematical and the poetic languages of the domain. Not to conclude anything specific of the format of academic texts and how certain writing styles are more or less musical – the main argument presented here, is that, for the researcher to formulate anything at all, which is meaningful about musicality of creative processes within any domain, and how emergent phenomena move from “chaos to cosmos”, they need a solid understanding of specific language of the domain. The

findings of these studies could obviously be presented in a number of in themselves more or less creative, musical ways, but the packaging is irrelevant, if the present is empty; if the content, the empirical data, is not profoundly saturated with musical meaning. Therefore, the first task, when writing about musical creative phenomena, is to get confident as a researcher, with the domain studied, as the interview situation will become superficial and written representation of the findings inexpressive, if all involved actors do not speak the domains specific language of musicality fluently.

There is potentially a language barrier between the musical, living domain and the written texts mediating knowledge in the scientific literature, but it can arguably be broken down, if the researcher – building on domain specific experience – interviews, observes and writes, using both the mathematical and ambiguous languages of musicality, about the temporal, fleeting musical material of the emergent phenomenon.

Conclusions

A music journalist once wrote that it is much easier to review a really bad album, than a really good one. It is somehow more difficult to describe why music works, compared to describing why it does not. Along similar lines, I have learned, both musicians and the organizers of musical concerts have a really difficult time describing the character of musical phenomena. In further developing a socio-material perspective on creative processes currently developing within cultural psychology, this article seeks to present methodology exploring and describing musical, creative processes leading to emergent phenomena.

It finds that the qualitative description of creative processes of emergence demands musical engagement in itself. The implicit, embodied language used by informants, and in the written texts, presenting prerequisites for processes of emergence, relies on a technical, mathematic and an ambiguously abstruse language – it is therefore a complex, musical task of the interviewer or observer to engage in an improvised, informal and equal conversation, challenging positions and intuitively reading between the lines.

I would not have had the chance to interview the musicians for my articles without having an intuitive access to their lifeworlds, based on my previous experiences as a musician and festival organizer. Rather than putting “brackets” around one’s self, as is

typical in phenomenological interviews, the situation must rather be equal, so that all participants have something “at stake”, to make the situation musical in and of itself. Academic studies of creative processes, typically communicated in a written language and often based on data from interviews inspired by the phenomenological tradition, are not necessarily capable of capturing and communicating the meanings of music, musicality or creative processes. Epistemological ambitions of exploring and writing about the lifeworlds of musical experts – within the various domains where they are found – is a complex, demanding task of the researcher. The arguments presented in this article suggest that studies of and writing about musical creativity demands a bilingual understanding of the specific domain. The researcher needs to translate from a technical and ambiguous musical language, to a written, formal and scientific language, without losing the essential meaning of the lifeworlds presented, which is exactly the temporal, emergent phenomenon. Hence, the language barriers between the musical and the written texts mediating knowledge in the scientific literature can be broken down, if the interviewer – building on domain specific knowledge – is able to speak and write freely – having both the mathematical and ambiguous languages of musicality as their mother tongue – about the temporal, fleeting musical material of the emergent phenomenon.

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About the Author

My background as a musician has shaped my research practice. To me, writing academic texts has become a musical activity, why I generally try to participate, listen, improvise and write based on craftsmanship and trust in intuition. In my upcoming work, I explore emergent phenomena within other domains than my stomping ground, the music industry.