Music as an Experiential Mirror:
An Essay on Musical Performance as a Self-reflexive Experience
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Introduction

This paper seeks to defend the claim that the structural conditions for the possibility of having an existential experience are made explicit in the aesthetic experience of performing music because such experiences can be self-reflexive insofar as the object of experience (music) is an objectification of the tacit, implicit structure of human existence (Dasein) out of which they emerge. As was just mentioned, the transcendental structure of having an experience is embodied by music insofar as music is the objectification of the process of producing it. The reason for this has to do with the special nature of musical performance. Musical performance is special in the sense that the artist is simultaneously a listener and producer of the music, indicating that the structure of the artist's experience of producing the object (music) is identical with the structure of her experience of contemplating that object. In this sense the music she puts before herself, embodying those structural conditions, acts as a mirror; reflecting the artist's experience of producing the music back onto itself by way of the artist being simultaneously a contemplator of that music. One could even say the very object of contemplation in the experience of musical performance is the experience of producing it from [within the same structural framework]. In other words, the experience of musical performance is oriented toward itself, and thus the structural conditions which initiate the experience become illuminated, and are experienced explicitly in the process of the single aesthetic experience, i.e. of musical performance, as it unfolds.

At this point the claims made above stand in need of philosophical justification. To the purpose of defending these claims, the structural layout of this paper will go as follows. In section one I explicate the particular notion of experience assumed in this paper, specifically a notion of experience extrapolated from the overlapping ideas of thinkers such as the American pragmatist John Dewey and the German phenomenologist Martin Heidegger. We can consider this the existential notion of experience (henceforth just ‘experience’). Here, in section one, I contrast the Deweyan-Heideggerian experience to the traditional Cartesian use of the word ‘experience’, which refers to the perceptual content of a subject’s mind. This is radically different from what Dewey and Heidegger mean; in this paper we are concerned with using the word ‘experience’ in the sense of, e.g. the [experience] one has of writing a paper, or recording an album, or performing a (musical) set. In section two I appeal to Dewey further, using his Pattern of Inquiry (loosely I must note) to draw out the phenomenal structure of the conditions for the possibility of having the type of experience explicated in section one. Here I
walk through the phenomenology of writing this paper using Dewey's Pattern, for Inquiry is an experience of its own kind and upon deeper analysis reveals the structure of an experience as such. As is demonstrated, the fundamental structural elements necessary to an experience turn up to be: Concern, environment-materials, and Time. Once this structure is established I then, in section three, argue that music embodies this structure. Lastly, in section four, I discuss how given the special nature of musical performance, in that the artist is simultaneously the producer and a receptive listener to the music, the experience of musical performance is a self-reflexive one, making the implicit structural conditions of the experience it arises out of explicit.

I will now turn to the discussion of what is meant by ‘experience’.

I. The Explication of the Meaning of ‘Experience’.

Experience was central to the thinking of the American philosopher, John Dewey and the German philosopher, Martin Heidegger. The notion of experience assumed by these thinkers is the one this paper presupposes. But what is special about this notion of [existential] experience? Dewey writes:

Experience occurs continuously, because the interaction of live creature and environing conditions is involved in the very process of living. Under conditions of resistance and conflict, aspects and elements of the self and the world that are implicated in this interaction qualify experience with emotions and ideas so that conscious intent emerges. Oftentimes, however, the experience had is inchoate. Things are experienced but not in such a way that they are composed into an experience...we have an experience when the material experienced runs its course to fulfillment. Then and then only is it integrated within and demarcated in the general stream of experience from other experiences. A piece of work is finished in a way that is satisfactory; a problem receives its solution; a game is played through; a situation, whether that of eating a meal, playing a game of chess, carrying on a conversation, writing a book, or taking part in a political campaign, is so rounded out that its close is a consummation and not a cessation. Such an experience is a whole and carries with it its own individualizing quality and self-sufficiency. It is an experience.1

An experience: this is the crucial thing. By ‘an experience’ I interpret Dewey to mean the factual state of affairs which obtain successfully between two points in time occurring as a transaction between Dasein and environmental conditions (world). To the purpose of understanding what Dewey's particular notion of experience is, let us take a look at an historical example of what it is not: Cartesian. Along the way we’ll see how this overlaps with the thinking of Heidegger.

1 Dewey, Having an Experience.
The Cartesian tradition speaks of experience at large, referring to the
content occupying an individual’s mind. Let’s get a caricature sketch of what
such a view might look like. The Cartesian representational realist, for
instance, holds that each person who is conscious and aware of their
existence does so from within their own individuated experiential mind-
bubble, presumably located in the head (the mind). Objects outside of this
mind-bubble cause a perception, as it were, filling it up with phenomenal
content one can be conscious and aware of, and thus have experience of,
assuming there are no cognitive malfunctions. The content said to be
experience is a representation of the object(s) ‘out there’ in the world because
the perception is indirect, in the sense that what gets perceived is an image
produced by a complex physical process involving the eye organs and a
system of activity taking place in the brain or, as a Kantian would have it,
occurring as a synthesis of given sensations acted upon by the a priori
categories of the understanding. According to this view, it seems, experience
is isolated from person to person and somehow separate from the world
being experienced. Moreover, this traditional use of the word ‘experience’
focuses on merely the content of the mind and the origin of that content. This
leaves one with epistemological problems such as whether or not our
representations are accurate depictions of reality. After all, the mental
representation of an object is not itself the object that gets represented; how
can we know for sure that the world isn’t different from how it appears?

Indeed for the modern era, starting with Descartes, the worries of
epistemology reigned as the leading philosophical difficulties; Descartes
sought to determine whether or not we had corresponding internal
knowledge of the “external world”; Kant sought the conditions for the
possibility of experience, which consequently led him to reduce epistemology
and metaphysics to the same project—theory of mental representation. A
consequence of such a view (i.e. of thinking there to be a world external to the
mind, of which it achieves knowledge, and moreover of thinking this
relationship to be what is primary to the human situation) is it leaves one
committed to the notion that experience cannot be shared; how could it when
each person experiences the world from within their privately individuated
mind-bubble, looking out at objects distinct from it? By way of the Cartesian
model, it seems, we are left the distinction between the subjective and the
objective; experience is a subject’s perception of objects whose existence
obtains outside the mind-bubble in which the phenomenon of their Being is

2 Even for the Kantian transcendental idealist who says that an object as it appears is constructed in
the mind from noumenal chaos prior to there being an outer experience of empirically real objects,
‘experience’, one could say, still refers to something private, namely those possible objects of experience
disclosed in a subject’s mind, which accordingly is their own. Of course Kant thinks it is necessary that
creatures like us experience things ‘objectively’, but the possible objects of experience are mental
representations.

3 Such a rhetorical questions amidst this rhetorical sketch of no particular Cartesian figure assumes
a pre-Kantian problematic. As most readers might be keen to acknowledge, Kant seemed to have answered
adequately such ‘skeptical’ concerns in the Critique.

4 Hanna, Kant’s Theory of Judgment.
deposited as the consequence of certain causal relations obtaining. That is not the case for thinkers like Dewey and Heidegger.

As Philip Jackson points out, “Dewey invites us to think of experience differently. He asks us to abandon the convention of looking upon experience as something that happens exclusively within us, that is, as an essentially psychological concept.” Although the “cognitive science” models of experience mentioned in the paragraph above may be true—i.e. when considered a scientific theory of perception or mental representation—and although it may raise interesting traditional questions as to the origin of the content of our perception-representations, this is not the way in which Dewey wishes to use the word ‘experience’ because [for him] it isolates man and experience from nature—by way of developing certain mental habits I assume Dewey would say (see Rorty (1976) quote below). This can be detrimental when it comes to dealing with the practical everyday concerns of man, for practical everyday concerns are said to be concrete, and for Dewey the traditional questions of the modern period leave us with abstractions.

I believe Rorty puts it well when he says “Dewey sees the epistemological problems of modern philosophy as the adjustment of old metaphysical assumptions to new conditions ... Dewey sees the quest for certainty and fixity which the ancients satisfied by non-natural objects of knowledge as, in the modern period, transferred to show that the 'conditions of the possibility of knowledge' are of an 'ideal and rational character'. Moreover, Dewey treats the distinction between objective facts and subjective emotions, problems, and doubts as another 'product of the habit of isolating man and experience from nature'.” This concern with practical everyday issues is the reason Dewey rejects the Cartesian subject/object dichotomy and most of the classical questions that follow. We may each be individuals with unique experiential perspectives, but talk of subjects and objects presupposes a metaphysic that tacitly adopts certain philosophical difficulties which divert our attention away from the “issues of Man”. Dewey was interested in the concrete phenomenology of experience in order to better understand social activity. Dewey wanted a way to make it possible for us to share experience, so to speak, and it is very difficult to do that when you consider the world in a theoretical way. One could say the pragmatists plead for something like an anti-Cartesian, ontological shift in Philosophy, advocating being and doing over knowing, but it was Dewey and James, in contrast with Peirce, who anticipated Heidegger by addressing pragmatic philosophy as historically minded phenomenologists (in a wide sense), treating experience and nature as coextensive, complete, whole, and changing together.(Dewey admits that his reading of Hegel as a youth left a “permanent deposit” in him as a historically minded thinker. Upon reading Dewey one

6 Rorty, 1976, pg. 290.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 Dewey, *From Absolutism to Experimentalism.*
can tell this is an accurate self-description, for his emphasis on looking at an idea as something which evolves just as an organism can be said to evolve\textsuperscript{10} indicates his keenness toward the idea, as it were, that ideas have a past which influence the shape they currently hold. This is very much an anticipation of later Heidegger and other forms of postmodernism.)

All of this is by way of explaining the origin of Dewey’s particular use of the word ‘experience’. His understanding of what philosophy was and did lead him to a “metaphysical outlook” that required him to talk about experience as “an experience”; as something unified and organically changing with the ‘experiencer’; as something non-abstract; as a composition of events that take place over time as founded upon the right environmental conditions; as a transaction between organism and environment.

According to Dewey there are “common patterns in various experiences, no matter how unlike they are to one another in the details of the subject matter. There are conditions to be met without which an experience cannot come to be.”\textsuperscript{11} The question I want to ask is: what is the phenomenal structure of the conditions for the possibility of an experience in general? It will be of great importance to grasp this structure because, as I will discuss later in section III, it is that which is built into and embodied by works of art.

II. Uncovering the Structure of Experience.

In his essay, \textit{The Pattern of Inquiry}, Dewey provides a phenomenology of the step by step procedure behind the activity of Inquiry\textsuperscript{12}; this Pattern cuts deeper than just an understanding of Inquiry in the following way. Prior to the conception of Inquiry as an isolated region of study—as something humans do—it is an action that takes place constituting an experience, as something which is lived and carried out to a close. This Pattern of Inquiry, therefore, gives insight to the Pattern of having experiences. In the following paragraphs I will use, in a loose way, Dewey’s Pattern of Inquiry to analyze our Dewey an notion of experience in order to draw out its structural elements. This paper is an inquiry (of a philosophical type), therefore the experience of writing it will suffice as an example to the purpose of drawing out the conditions for the possibility of an experience in general, i.e. the structure of having an experience.

2.1 The Antecedent Conditions of an Experience; the Indeterminate Situation.

To say that an experience is a determined state of affairs which obtain between two points in time presupposes that there was a point at which it was undetermined and incomplete; there has to be a starting point. Before any existential situation yields an experience, something indeterminate is encountered initiating the experience. What is thus encountered, leaving one to feel as if their situation is indeterminate, is the absence of some object

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\textsuperscript{10} Dewey, \textit{The Influence of Darwinism on Philosophy}.
\textsuperscript{11} Dewey, \textit{Having an Experience}.
\textsuperscript{12} In widest sense of the word ‘inquiry’; such as scientific or common sense inquiry.
which one becomes concerned with. In this particular case that absent object is my thesis (was my thesis?). One day, for whatever reason, I encountered the thought of this paper, i.e. of writing an honors thesis in order to graduate with departmental honors. (I say I encountered the thought of the paper because the physical object you are reading right now was absent—it had not been written.) This thought sparked my interest in such a way that I found myself projecting the object into the future as if it could come to be something tangible. From this point onward, any action I take toward that object is an action oriented toward its completion in one way or another. But before we talk about any actions I take toward the completion of the object which I have projected into the future (my paper), this fact—that something indeterminate has been encountered and projected into the future as a potentially complete object—presupposes the “institutionalization” of this object as a problem.

2.2 The Institution of a Problem

Dewey writes of the institution of a problem:

The indeterminate situation becomes problematic in the very process of being subjected to inquiry. The indeterminate situation comes into existence from existential causes, just as does, say the organic imbalance of hunger. There is nothing intellectual or cognitive in the existence of such situations, although they are the necessary condition of cognitive operations or inquiry. In themselves they are precognitive. The first result of evocation of inquiry is that the situation is taken, adjudged, to be problematic. To see that a situation requires inquiry is the initial step in inquiry.\(^\text{13}\)

The initial encounter of an indeterminate situation is precognitive, and therefore pre-epistemic, in the sense that that which does the encountering is the ontological condition giving rise to the possibility of cognitively recognizing the encounter as indeterminate, and potentially having a solution. To recognize the encounter as such is to “institutionalize” the indeterminacy of the situation a problem. But what is there to say about this precognitive, ontological condition that does the encountering?

To say that I have institutionalized a problem is to say that I have cognitively recognized a practically possible way to go about obtaining the absent object encountered in my indeterminate situation. Identifying the potentiality of solution to a problem is only possible on the grounds that there is an element to the structure of having an experience which precedes the activity of being-concerned with solutions (an act of knowing) because “knowing is a mode of Being of Dasein as Being-in-the-world, and is founded ontically upon this state of Being”\(^\text{14}\) (emphasis added), and hence ‘Solutions’ then are epistemically founded. What then is that element which makes being-concerned with solutions possible? If it is being-concerned with

\(^{13}\) Dewey, *Pattern of Inquiry.*

solutions that is to presuppose the first element of our structure, then it must be Concern as such which makes being-concerned possible; there must be Concern if it is to be possible to be concerned in an epistemic way. The first element in the structure of having an experience, then, is: Concern.

Before I go any further I would like to take a moment and address this notion of Concern. For those readers familiar with Heidegger, my use of the word ‘Concern’ is akin to his proclamation that Dasein is fundamentally Care.15 ‘Concern’ is spelled with a capital ‘C’ because it is intended to mean that at the root of Human Existence (Dasein) there lays an ontological structural element [not an epistemically founded activity] which is Concern, or the precondition of having a mattering-opinion toward our world. We find ourselves amongst, or of, a world which is significant, and it is in that the world is disclosed as being significant, i.e. mattering in such a way that we circumspect the environment for certain “reasons”, which indicates to us that before we know we are beings concerned with the world, we were always already Concern, because without such a structural element built into our ontological make up, knowing that we are concerned with the world would not be possible. As Heidegger notes, “Being-in-the-world, as concern, is fascinated by the world with which it is concerned. If knowing is to be

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15 Heidegger, Being and Time, book 1, chap. 6. Of course Heidegger uses the word ‘concern’ in other contexts. I find it more appropriate to use ‘Concern’ where he uses ‘Care’ because of the potential misunderstanding in coming across the word ‘Care’, where we typically mean to be loving, or to be not indifferent. ‘Concern’ seems to suggest something more like: being in a state such that things matter and invoke urgency in our dealing and coping with the world—we become “so-concerned”.

16 In regards to the meaning of ‘Human Existence’, it may be a bit misleading to see one word —‘Human’—in front of another word—‘Existence’—giving the impression that there are two ‘things’ to be analyzed. Less superficially though, it is misleading by the token that some philosophers have taken Existence as what is merely assumed of certain things once they have been metaphysically demonstrated as a part of the Real. In other words, if something makes the list of ‘All that is the Case’, what it shares with everything else on that list is the property of existing. Accordingly it would seem that so long as ‘Human’ was amongst the various things that are real, insofar as it is real, it exists, and in order to understand what ‘Human’ is (what sort of properties constitute ‘Human’) one must look no further than its essence—what is essential to being Human. But this seems circular. What is this act of existing by which something is constituted in its essence? To assert what a human organism ‘is’, in essence, when some regional Thing—namely, ‘human organism’—is metaphysically analyzed as such is to pass over a more primordial, archetypical layer in the structure of Being upon which such activities as ‘analyzing’ are founded. By the time we commit ourselves to analyzing some concept, ‘Human’, we find that we have already started with certain preconceptions as to what a Human ought to be. Here what I wish to mean by ‘Human Existence’ is rather that structure in which, or by which the existence of things encountered in the world is constituted. For all intents and purposes one could simply drop the ‘Human’ and understand our discussion to be focused primarily on ‘Existence’. For Human is something with an essence, and here we are starting with the assumption that Existence precedes Essence. But we still say ‘Human Existence’, however, because we, those who take on projects of ontology and who just so happen to arbitrarily be ‘Human’, are the entities in which Existence is disclosed. Therefore, any adequate ontological interpretation of Being must be understood in terms of ourselves because it is our own personal experience of being in the world that is the source of all ontological questions in general.

This is what Heidegger has shown us: to understand Being, we must apply a hermeneutic to ourselves, but not in a present-at-hand way. A hermeneutic is always an action, a doing, and therefore if one wishes to understand Being by way of looking at the being (human) which is the doer of such actions, then one has been led astray. For what we wish to understand in asking after the meaning of Being is not the being that acts by asking, but the doing of such an action itself. Keeping this in mind, do not be thrown off by reference to the biological organism. Existence, then, can be understood as that set of conditions which give rise to, or make possible, human experience, i.e. the activity of living as a human being.
possible as a way of determining the nature of the present-at-hand by observing it, then there must first be a deficiency in our having-to-do with the world concernfully." [emphasis added]

The stream of everyday life was broken as I encountered the idea of my paper; something absent. My situation was therefore found indeterminate. I recognized that there was a way to go about writing my paper—there was a solution. As soon as I am aware of the potentiality of a solution, it is presupposed that I have “institutionalized” my situation as a problem; I need to write the paper. This needing, (or wanting perhaps); this desire to attain some object which is projected into the future; my interest in the object which is presupposed by my recognition of it as a problem with a solution, indicates that I am concerned with it. The initial encounter would not have yielded anything further had I not taken some interest. Therefore, in our structure thus far, we can consider Concern to be at the root of an experience.

2.3 The Determination of a Problem-Solution.

Above I mentioned that an indeterminate situation is the antecedent condition of having an experience. This situation is institutionalized as a problem once it is identified as something with a potential solution. We understand this as being-concerned. Once Concern encounters indeterminacy making possible the identification of something as a problem (presupposing that it is recognized as potentially having a solution) the next step is in the procedure of an experience unfolding is to look at the surrounding facts of the situation in order to design an actual plan of execution. The surrounding facts are a necessary consideration because they are what dictate the actions that can be made within the environment toward settling the problem adequately. In order to write my paper, I must figure out a way to do it—this involves using the resources around me to determine a solution.

The way to this object is through the environment, which is both my landscape of navigation as well as my scrap yard of resources. By environment I mean an interwoven nexus of equipment ready-to-hand; these are the materials of our everyday world. An experience is had in and through an environment. This is to say that our environment—the space which we find ourselves in at any given moment—provides us with the


It is not my intention to imply that we are, at every moment, consciously aware of our circumspection. The point is that this type of language can be used as a metaphor illustrating what our behavior does in orienting concern toward something that it seeks to attain; we become “problem solvers”.

See Heidegger, Being and Time, chapter3, sec 15. Heidegger makes the distinction between two modes of Being that entities encountered in the world can be said to possess. The mode of Being entities have in themselves, at least phenomenologically speaking for Heidegger, is ready-to-hand. Entities are in this mode when they are totally transparent. For instance, all day long we are breathing oxygen, but hardly take note of this fact (for the exception of my mentioning it here); one could say that oxygen is ready to be handled by Dasein. In this respect one would say that the oxygen atoms, those particular beings, when they are in the back ground of attention, helping make possible the (sometimes) unconscious function of breathing, are transparent and non-present. But, however, once the oxygen is brought to one’s attention, and the being (or beings in this case) is revealed such that it can be understood theoretically it is said to be in a present-at-hand mode of Being; the being becomes ‘present’.
materials necessary to carry our experience through to a close. For example, one cannot walk to the kitchen without legs and a ground: these are entities which are embedded in and make up the surrounding environment, and thus make possible the activity of walking to the kitchen (at least in the way just described). So it seems that if Concern is to carry an experience through to a close, then, it must have i) something (some piece of material—the object of concern) to be concerned with, and ii) an environment of tools with and through which it can navigate its concern toward that object. The second element of the structure of having an experience then is: environment-materias.

Equipment ready-to-hand always has an inherent assignment which refers to other items of equipment which have their own assignment referring to more equipment, so on and so forth. For example, paper refers to writing, writing refers to pens, pens refer to ink, ink refers to etchings on paper, etchings on paper refer to words, words refer to reading, etc. When our situation is institutionalized as a problem, we begin to search this totality of equipment for possible ways to settle it. When I encountered the situation of needing (perhaps wanting) to produce a paper, meaning that it has been recognized as something which I am concerned with, I looked to (I “reasoned” with) the surrounding facts of the situation to help design a game plan by which I could complete my projected task, namely writing a paper. I wanted to write my paper, so I considered the things around me that could help me obtain my object. Questions were asked: what is the thesis? How do I know I qualify for honors consideration? Do I need a mentor? I recognize that the end object is roughly fixed—the due date is at least sometime before the end of the semester; certain reading sources, as well as the ideas presented in them, are afforded to me; certain technologies are at my disposal, there are people to converse with on certain matters, and there are those matters which are the subject of such conversations, etc.

The plan may go something as follows: first I need to figure out what the criterion is to see if it is even worth my time; I will email my professor to see if he will be a mentor; I will need to register for an honors thesis course; I will need to think a lot about my thesis; I will need books to read and a computer to type my ideas on, etc. All possible combinations of these constituent parts—of the equipment ready-to-hand—as determined by their different functions mark the various possible routes, or game plans, that could be applied to achieve my goal of unifying my situation as a whole; to have made it an experience. The plan just mentioned is only one arbitrary and quite mundane combination of equipment ready-to-hand, but there are a myriad of blueprints one could draw.

2.4 The Execution of a Course of Action through Time.

Lastly, and most briefly, once the plan is laid out, the next item of business is to progress the project along. The only other element to our

20 Heidegger, Being and Time, book 1, chap. 3, see section 15, 17, and 18.
structure which is required for this plan of execution to be carried out is: *Time*. Once Concern has identified a problem-solution and mapped out a route to the object by determining the operational character of the constituent parts of the environment, the only other necessary component left is time to carry out this plan. The object is projected into the future and therefore the only possible way this future could be met is by way of temporality. Concern exerts itself upon an environment through time, and once the particular object which initiated the actions oriented toward it is attained, the experience comes to a close; the consummation of events, as they unfolded, was an experience. From the time I encountered my idea to write this paper, to the time it is completed and turned in, every action that took place in order to bring that closing moment about constitutes the whole of my experience; as an experience of writing this paper. Concern exerts itself through an environment over time toward an object, until finally that object is obtained. Once the situation has been closed successfully in any respect, an experience has been born. The structure of having an experience, we now can see, is comprised of three primary structural elements: Concern, environment-materials, and Time. We uncovered this structure by examining an everyday experience. In the next section what I hope to show is that the aesthetic experience of performing music (specifically music with room for improvisation) is distinct from an everyday experience in that the object produced (music) in aesthetic experience of performing music embodies the structural elements of the experience it comes out of. As I shall try to show later, this structural embodiment in music brings the structure of experience to the foreground, thus becoming explicit in the experience of contemplating the object.

In the following section, the philosophical goal will be to argue that music *embodies the structure of experience*.

### III. The Structural Embodiment of Experience in Music via the Aesthetic Experience of Producing Music.

When I speak of aesthetic experience of performing music in this paper, I suppose it to have two sides. There is aesthetic experience of *producing* the music—the aspect of playing—and aesthetic experience of *contemplating* the music—the aspect of being a receptive listener/engager with the music one is simultaneously producing. This first aspect—production; creation—is what I will discuss in this section to the purpose of arguing that music embodies the structural elements of an experience.

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21 For Heidegger, Time, or temporality, is the horizon for an interpretation of the meaning of Being. This notion of temporality—as a deep structural element to the possibility of concernful projection—is what I assume in my use of time as a structural element to an experience. See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, book 2, chapter 3 and 6. Also see Husserl, *Phenomenology of Internal Time-consciousness*, sec. 1 on the exclusion of Objective Time.

22 This is but one form of aesthetic experience. I am not suggesting that music is the only kind of aesthetic experience, but rather that aesthetic experience of music is the particular kind I am concerned with addressing in this paper.
3.1 The General Distinction between Aesthetic and Everyday Experience

The experience of producing music takes the same structure as an everyday experience, for I considered this structure to adhere to all experiences of the kind stipulated in section 1, but, however is distinguished from an everyday experience in the following way. The object (music) which obtains over the course of the aesthetic experience’s temporal unfolding is produced for the sake of itself, as a temporally unfolding event, and thus each move made toward the complete attainment of this event is embodied by that object, whereas the same cannot be said of the object attained at the end of an everyday experience.

Let me contrast aesthetic experience to everyday experience with a metaphor using a close relative to the musical arts, namely that of painting. In a painting, the markings of paint that comprise the aesthetic object in consideration, every painted line and face and shade of color that goes into the image which one can observe is the trace of a brush stroke that was made specifically for the whole of the object. The same is true of a song played on the guitar: each note that comprises the song in its entirety is a sound produced by the pluck of a string made for the sake of that sound, at that moment, so as to fill out its place between the others. In the object, explicitly, are the traces of a concern for it’s being there (the object is not one that came about by accident). There are also traces of the materials that were used to assemble it into something tangible (paint or sound vibration), and time that allowed for this assembly to obtain. The same, however, cannot be said of a single footstep among many others during a walk to the library for the sake of getting a book because, although the footstep plays a major role in making the event happen (the experience of going to retrieve a book), the footstep is not embodied by the final product—the footstep is nowhere to be found in the book we retrieved. The footstep is merely a means to an end—the book. Let us examine this further by considering the step by step process of producing music from the artist’s perspective.

3.21 The Structure of Production: the Element of Concern.

In section two I considered the structure of having an experience to be comprised of three primary structural elements: Concern, environment-equipment, and Time. As is the case with any experience, the artist first develops a concern for some object that is missing. At some point before the art object comes into being, the artist encounters her inspiration; I call this encountering the idea. In encountering this idea (of an absent object—the music), the artist finds herself in a situation where she is so concerned with the absence of that object that she begins taking actions toward manipulating the materials in the surrounding environment, through a period of time, to make that object become present; to manifest that idea. (Insofar as the music is not present the idea is indeterminate.) At this point all the artist knows is that she has a sudden urge to create—she has been inspired.
Having been inspired, Concern comports itself toward it's concerned comporting; the goal of initiating the experience was for Concern to manifest an idea in music, and that idea is manifested by way of Concern strategically navigating its way through the environment over time, i.e. by way of its concerned comporting.²³ The concerned comporting is objectified, i.e. embodied, in the sounds of music as it executes certain actions to produce that sound. But before it can be objectified by the materials in this way, to become organized sound, Concern must set itself the project of expressing itself in sound. Accordingly, the project—namely that of producing music—is “institutionalized” as a problem, as something that potentially has a solution; as something that can practically be accomplished by taking certain steps toward that object.

3.22 The Element of Environment-Materials.

She [the artist] looks to her environment and determines a course of action. There may be a guitar lying around, she knows certain scales and modes; she has hands with which she can pluck the strings to produce the sounds. (All of these entities—the guitar, her emotions, her memory of certain scales, her hands, sound frequencies, etc—are a part of the environment.) The artist determines her course of action, navigates her way through the environment, uses the equipment of the environment to build the song, as it were, and if she is really getting into the groove of things, lets the inspiration flow through her. The equipment-materials make up the song; after all, it is sound that is being heard. Concern, in a sense, gathers the materials in the surrounding environment and strategically places them in a certain order so as to construct the song; the sound heard is the objectification of the idea becoming manifest by the way Concern comports itself toward the production of that sound. Concern is embodied by music insofar as the sound is an objectification it’s comporting, and insofar as this objectification is represented by the surrounding environment-materials (sound), the materials are embodied as well (for they were always already embodied). But the structure is not yet complete in its embodiment. This course of action takes place temporally; this is our element of Time.

3.23 The Element of Time.

One thing that is special about music is that it is not merely something to be attained through certain means. In fact music is the product of each one of the steps taken towards its completion. In an everyday experience, say like the one mentioned above about retrieving a book, each step made towards attaining that object is a means to the end (the book). In contrast one could say that in producing music the means in total are the end. This has to do with the temporal nature of music. Granted, even when one is staring at a painting they are subsisting over time, but one can never point at a still object and say

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²³ One could say that which Concern is concerned with is the unfolding of the aesthetic experience for the sake of just that—letting it unfold.
that is a song. A song is always only a whole object over a period of time. In this respect, music is constantly fleeting; it is a fleeting art which is only captured over its duration. Once the song is complete, the experience is complete; however not in such a way that the object is attained at the end, but rather the end is the culmination of every sound that came before the songs close. Everything that was up to that point (the consummation) is the song. To put this into perspective take what Kant says of organisms as natural ends in his Critique of Judgment: “Now the first requisite of a thing, considered as a natural end, is that its parts, both as to their existence and form, are only possible by their relation to the whole.”24 This relation between each individual note comprising a song in full is a temporal relation. One note, \( N \), at a time, \( t \), is heard, and another note, \( N' \), at a time, \( t' \), is heard, but the melody, \( M \), heard is in fact \( N \) at \( t \) and \( N' \) at \( t' \) in conjunction with one another, occurring consecutively:

\[
N \text{ at } t & \text{ } N' \text{ at } t' = M. \tag{25}
\]

Accordingly music embodies Time insofar its object in full unfolds this way. (One might even say music is one mode of Time.)

To put it in recap briefly: Concern encounters an indeterminate idea, namely that of potential music. This idea invokes certain actions through the surrounding environment. It is through and with this environment that Concern gathers the surrounding materials and with them expresses its comporting toward the production of organized sounds, i.e. Concern objectifies itself through (the navigational landscape) and with these materials (the sound as well as the resources used to produce that sound). The idea that Concern comports itself toward is in fact the materials being strategically placed next to one another over time insofar as those materials are the music. But do not forget: there would be no process without Time, and in fact there would be no music or aesthetic experience of music without Time because music and experience are necessarily temporal phenomena. All of this adds up to: Music becomes what it is as it unfolds temporally. It is an objectification-expression of Concern in materials found in the environment, becoming what it is in full through time. Music is a temporal expression of Concern in and through environment-materials. This is the way in which music embodies the structure of the experience which produces it.

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24 Kant, Critique of Pure Judgment, sec. 65.
25 There is a historical reference, namely Husserl, which this claim relates to. Husserl discusses the phenomenological status of time in the experience of a melody: “When we speak of the analysis of time-consciousness, of the temporal character of objects of perception, memory, and expectation, it may seem, to be sure, as if we assume the Objective flow of time, and then really study only the subjective conditions of the possibility of an intuition of time and a true knowledge of time. What we accept, however, is not the existence of a world-time, the existence of a concrete duration, and the like, but time and duration appearing as such. These, however, are absolute data which it would be senseless to call into question. To be sure, we also assume an existing time; this, however, is not the time of the world of experience but the immanent time of the flow of consciousness. The evidence that consciousness of a tonal process, a melody, exhibits a succession even as I hear it is such as to make every doubt or denial appears senseless.” See Husserl, Phenomenology of Internal Time-consciousness, section 1.
At the beginning of this section I considered the aesthetic experiencing of performing music to have two sides—the production side, and the contemplation (receptive) side. As a musical performer one gets the benefit of being both the producer of the sounds as well as a receptive listener to the sounds, i.e. a contemplator of the sounds. I will now turn my discussion to the contemplation aspect of the experience of performing music with the purpose of arguing that the structural conditions of an experience are made explicit in the experience of performing music.

IV. The Structural Conditions of Experience made Explicit in the Experience of Contemplating Music.

It is my contention that in aesthetic experience of performing music, the structural conditions which constitute an individual’s experience as such becomes self-realized and temporarily bracketed apart from the ordinary objects of our everyday concerns. Schopenhauer says in aesthetic experience one becomes “pure, will-less subject of knowledge”\(^ {26} \). I want to say that in aesthetic experience of listening to music that one is simultaneously producing, one becomes “pure, will-less” beholder of the structural conditions for the possibility of one’s experience. But how are we lifted to this state? It is because in the experience of listening (contemplating) to music as one produces it, the structure of experience turns back around on itself in the face of the music, which plays the role of an experiential mirror, reflecting back onto the experience its own structural conditions. It does so in the following way.

4.1 Music as an Experiential Mirror.

Think back to my discussion of how music embodies the structure of experience:Concern encounters an idea, namely absent music, and it adopts the task of concernfully comporting itself through the environment such that this comporting becomes the objectification-expression (manifestation) of the idea in sound over time as materials in the environment are manipulated to the purpose of producing that sound. In this experience, there is no end object distinct from the moves made toward that object which Concern strives after because, in fact, the end object is always already found in Concern’s comporting toward an ideas objectification in sound (because of the temporal relation between music’s constituent parts—think back to Kant’s idea on natural organisms).

When an individual is engaged in contemplation of music they are simultaneously producing, the individual is contemplating the structure of their own experience of producing that music. This is because the artist’s having-an-aesthetic-experience-of-contemplating-music is founded on the same structural conditions as that which is embodied in the object being contemplated, namely the structural conditions of having-an-aesthetic-experience-of-producing-music. The object (the music)acts as a mirror which

\(^ {26} \) Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, pg. 179.
turns the aesthetic experience of that object back around on itself in the sense that, in aesthetic experience of performing music (simultaneously producing and contemplating), an artist puts before herself the very structural conditions which produced the thing she is putting before herself; the input—the music the artist is contemplating—embodies the structure of having an experience. Therefore the artist is having an experience of the structure of having an experience, i.e. the structure of having an experience is having an experience of the structure of having an experience! When the artist hears herself playing, she is filtering an idea through her mind, she gathers materials in the surrounding environment to manifest that idea, and as it is manifested through time, she becomes receptive to those materials, and in a sense, the structural conditions producing that sound come back into her where the objectification of the idea is thus filtered through again causing a feedback loop. The experience of contemplating the object unfolds with the production of the music; the production of the music guides the aesthetic experience of contemplating it along. That which flows into the individual performer—the music—embodies the structure of her own experience of producing that music, thus making the structural conditions of her experience explicit—there is only the present production-contemplation of this structure (in music) with no outside distractions, assuming that one is really engaged with the experience in the way I have articulated. Can more be said about the structural conditions of experience being made explicit?

4.2 Explicit Structural Disclosure vs. Tacit Structural Hiddenness. The object which Concern is comporting itself toward in the aesthetic experience of performing music is not some end object which is projected into the future, but rather the object is the very activity of comporting from moment to moment. In everyday experience, the object of our concern is an end projected into the future where the course of action leading up to the attainment of that object is merely a series of means, most of which, I would image, are not ‘in’ the object I am orienting myself toward, and most of which go unnoticed. In this respect, the structure of experience in having an everyday experience goes tacit, and falls into the background; the structural conditions of experience, in everyday experience, is always behind the actions which are oriented toward the end object. In aesthetic experience of performing music, the structure of having an experience becomes explicit and brought to the foreground in the form of the art object being contemplated.

To further illustrate this “being made explicit” vs. “being tacit” (i.e. with respect to the structure of experience), imagine the structure of having an experience as the conditions which give rise to a particular situation, namely the phenomenon of having an aesthetic experience of performing music. Sometimes in our everyday concerns we are tempted to focus on only one part of our whole situation, such as if one were to try and examine a single note of a song in itself as an independently occurring object. One could say that it has such and such properties, is in such and such a location, has a certain
frequency of vibration, etc. In doing this we lose sight of all that goes into constituting that situation as a situation which is occurring here and now. To say that the structure of experience can get washed out in the background is to say that sometimes when we focus on the particulars of life—when we are caught up in our everyday mode of being concerned with things ahead of us in the future—the structure which constitutes the experiences we have gets buried; most of what goes into the occurrence of an everyday experience is overlooked when the focus is merely on the end, and not the means as ends in themselves (which is the case for music). In everyday concern, the structure of experience is hidden and put in the background as dormant and unrecognized.

On the other hand, take the set of conditions mentioned above: Concern, environment-materials, and Time. In the production of music this structure is built into the object. In contemplating this object—by way of the same structure—the structure of experience experiences the structure of experience, in some sense. In aesthetic experience of performing music, each action made toward the manifestation of the music in their coherent totality are what the experience is. To understand the occurrence of an aesthetic experience of performing music as a situation in this way, as a whole unity of conditions, physical and metaphysical, brings the structure of having an experience to the foreground because the experience, as a whole, is now what the focus is on, for the end is always already found in the activity of concerful-comporting. When we have an aesthetic experience of performing music, the music being produced acts as a mirror which reflects experience upon experience, allowing the experience to purely be what it is in the foreground, clean of distractions.

**Conclusion**

The thesis identified at the beginning of this paper was: *the structural conditions for the possibility of having an existential experience are made explicit in the aesthetic experience of performing music because such experiences can be self-reflexive insofar as the object of experience (music) is an objectification of the tacit, implicit structure of human existence (Dasein) out of which they emerge.*

To the purpose of justifying my claims I sectioned the paper up, addressing each issue that required attention in order to make sense of my thesis. Accordingly in section one I explicated what to meant by the word ‘experience’ as it is used in the paper, namely as an existential experience. I extrapolated this notion of experience from Dewey and Heidegger, who in contrast with the Cartesian tradition—which used the word ‘experience’ to refer to a psychological phenomenon, i.e. the perceptual content of a subjects mind—make experience out to be the phenomenological account of the successful state of affairs obtaining completely between two points in time occurring as a transaction between Dasein and world. Dewey
once claimed that there are “common patterns in various experiences, no matter how unlike they are to one another in the details of the subject matter. There are conditions to be met without which an experience cannot come to be.”

This led me to ask what the phenomenal structural conditions for the possibility of having an experience are.

Using Dewey’s Pattern of Inquiry, in section two I drew out the structural conditions to having an experience. I pointed out that Inquiry is an experience of its own kind, and therefore cutting at a deeper analysis of Inquiry would reveal the conditions for the possibility of an experience as such. These conditions showed up to be Concern, environment-materials, and Time. An experience is founded on first encountering an indeterminate situation. The indeterminacy of the situation is ones becoming concerned with the absence of an object, institutionalizing the attainment of that object as a problem such that the object is projected into the future along with a plan of navigation toward its attainment. Since being-concerned (the initial point of departure for an experience coming about) is an act of knowing, merely one “mode of Being of Dasein as Being-in-the-world ... founded ontically upon this state of Being” (my italics), the ontological condition giving rise to the possibility of being-concerned, then, was show to be Concern as such. Accordingly the first structural condition to the possibility of having an experience was shown to be Concern as such.

Concern becomes so concerned with the absent object encountered in its indeterminate situation that it maps out a route toward the attainment of this object, and therefore since the way to this object is through that environmental landscape, the second structural condition for the possibility of an experience being carried out to a close was shown to be environment-materials. Sometimes, especially in the case of creating, the environment, as equipment ready-to-hand, must be manipulated in order for the object to appear, but apart from creation, environment-materials is still the second condition insofar as the environment is the landscape through which the activity of attaining the object takes place, as well as the ‘whence’ of the object of concern.

Intimately related to this condition of environment-materials is the condition of Time or Temporality. For the plan of action which is to be executed for the sake of attaining the object must be carried out over a period of time; it is temporalized insofar as temporality is the meaning of Concern. Here we exclude, with Husserl and Heidegger, Objective time, for it is far too controversial an issue, and adopt the phenomenological account of internal Time-consciousness as the horizon for the possibility of an experience obtaining.

Once I established the structure to having an experience as Concern, environment-materials, and Time, I went on to argue that music embodies this structure. At the initiation of an aesthetic experience of performing

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27 Dewey, *Having an Experience*.
music, the artist first encounters the idea of music, the absence of music. Concern maps out a plan of navigation toward the manifestation of this idea and concernfully comports itself along this path manipulating materials such that sounds are produced. The music unfolds as Concerns concernful comporting manipulates the environment such that sounds are produced which indicate that the music just is the objectification of the comporting from moment to moment. (The structure of the unfolding of music is founded on the structure of the unfolding of the experience of producing it given the special temporal nature of music.) In this sense, music embodies the structural conditions which produce it.

Musical performance is special in that the artist is the producer of the music while simultaneously a contemplator of it from within the same structural framework. The experience of producing music becomes the object of contemplation for that very same experiential structure because the music produced embodies the structure, acting as a mirror, turning the structural conditions for the experience of producing it back onto itself. In this way the aesthetic experience of producing music makes the structural conditions of having an experience explicit.

**Potential further research.**

Perhaps there is something the conclusions presented in this paper can do for explaining the phenomenon of intense aesthetic experience where an individual seems to “lose themselves”. The idea is still in its infancy, and definitely requires further research, which is why it has been excluded from the main content of this paper. The idea goes as follows:

Let us suppose the Self is nothing more than the first person aspect of an experience constituted by certain relations amongst things, i.e. the Self is as certain factual relations obtain founded on Concern. Accordingly we say that the Self, upon philosophical analysis, is, in-itself, nothing more than a freedom from things, i.e. the Self is nothing, or better yet to be true to the Heideggerian spirit, no *thing*. This would mean that if you took everything else in the world out of the picture—every other person or object of concern—the Self would vanish for there would be no relations constituting it. Consider the paradox of self-reflection. I cannot conceive of myself as a subject because the thing I come to grasp, at best, is an object. There is always a presupposed ‘I’ which is the beholder, so the thing that is beheld is not I-myself, i.e. the Self, but rather an objective interpretation of myself as a relation. I can of course relate to myself as an object, and thus constitute my own existence, but to truly grab hold of my Self as such, to attain something phenomenal or metaphysical which can be point to as ‘the Self’ that I am, is impossible.

Now consider the structure of having and experience. The Self, as mentioned above, is merely the first person aspect of this structure, ontically “experiencing” the phenomenal disclosure of the experience unfolding as it is founded upon being-concerned with objects. In aesthetic experience
performing music, especially with pockets for improvisation, we experience this structure as it is the case that music embodies this structure. Essentially this is like saying that we are experiencing ourselves, for one (the Self) just is the phenomenal disclosure-opening of the structure that one experiences in the aesthetic experience of performing music. Because in aesthetic experience of performing music all outside concerns are stripped away, in the sense that there is nothing to be concerned with other than oneself, the experience becomes self-reflexive and one becomes totally absorbed in the Self, truly self-conscious. But the self is nothing in particular so how can it be that one becomes self-conscious? Is this a violation of the seeming impossibility of self-reflection? No, but one has indeed achieved true self-consciousness, just not in the way one would normally think when considering the act of self-reflection stated above. In aesthetic experience of performing music one truly becomes oneself, but remember, the Self is nothing so one becomes just that—nothing. This is why in retrospect one seems to have “lost their Self” in the experience: the individual was totally absorbed in the Self, as there was nothing else Concern was being-concerned with, and because the Self is nothing, the first person beholder of the phenomenal disclosure of the experience—the Self—therefore, vanishes.

References


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