

Figuring the Self: PhD Workshop,
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The Body in the Self
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An introduction to Antonio Damasio's framework of hypotheses for understanding self, mind and consciousness, proposed in *Self Comes to Mind. Constructing the Conscious Brain* (2010)

Personal motivation: My PhD project (2009-12)

Music Therapy, Phenomenology, and Neuroscience

Phenomenology and neuroscience have been considered irreconcilable approaches to the understanding of human perception, communication, thinking and feeling.

Phenomenology is based on a first-person insight in consciousness, neuroscience adheres to the ideal of objective observation and description of brain functions.

It is my intention to investigate and discuss both research strategies in order to contribute to an assessment of their relevance for music therapy.

Furthermore, I wish to elucidate theories and research which aim at reconciling the two paradigms.

Antonio Damasio:

*Descartes' Error:
Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain (1994)*

*The Feeling of What Happens:
Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness (1999).*

*Looking for Spinoza:
Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain (2003)*

*Self Comes to Mind:
Constructing the Conscious Brain (2010)*

Body and Mind

The theory of the body is already a theory of perception. Our own body is in the world as the heart is in the organism: it keeps the visible spectacle constantly alive, it breathes life into it and sustains it inwardly, and with it forms a system.

Merleau-Ponty: Phenomenology of Perception (1945/2002:235)

The body is a foundation of the conscious mind. We know that the most stable aspects of body function are represented in the brain, in the form of maps, thereby contributing images to the mind.

Damasio: Self Comes to Mind (2010:20)

Brain stem

Brains begin building conscious minds not at the level of the cerebral cortex but rather at the level of the brain stem.

Primordial feelings are not only the first images generated by the brain but also immediate manifestations of sentience.

They are the protoself foundation for more complex levels of self.

(p.22)

Mapping

The brain maps the world around it and maps its own doings.
Those maps are experienced as *images* in our minds,

and the term *image* refers not just to the visual kind
but to images of any sense origin
such as auditory, visceral, tactile, and so forth.

(p.18)

Consciousness (1)

Consciousness is a state of mind
in which there is knowledge of one's own existence
and of the existence of surroundings

(p.157)

Consciousness (2)

The conscious state of mind is experienced
in the exclusive, first-person perspective
of each of our organisms,
never observable by anybody else

(p.157)

Consciousness (3)

Conscious minds always have content

Conscious states of mind contain an obligate aspect of feeling

(p.158)

Mind

The mere presence of organized images
flowing in a mental stream
produces a mind,

but unless some supplementary process is added on,
the mind remains *unconscious*.

What is missing from that unconscious mind is a *self*.

(p.10)

Consciousness (4)

Conscious minds begin when self comes to mind,
when brains add a self process to the mind mix,
modestly at first but quite robustly later.

(p.22)

The Self, first stage: The protoself

The *protoself* consists of a gathering of images that describe relatively stable aspects of the body

The main product of the protoself is spontaneous feelings of the living body (*primordial feelings*)

(p. 180-81)

The state of the body is felt to be in some variation of pleasure or pain, of relaxation or tension

(p. 97)

Second stage: The core self (1)

The *core self* results from establishing a relationship between the *organism* (as represented by the protoself) and any part of the brain that represents an *object-to-be-known*

(p.180-81)

The core self (2)

A pulse of core self is generated
when the protoself is modified by an interaction
between the organism and an object

and when, as a result,
the images of the object are also modified

The modified image of object and organism
are momentarily linked in a coherent pattern

(p. 181)

The core self (3)

The relation between organism and object is described in a narrative sequence of images, some of which are feelings

(p. 181)

(Note: The narrative sequence of images is non-verbal, cf. p.70-71. EC)

Third stage: The autobiographical self (1)

The third stage allows multiple objects, previously recorded as lived experience or as anticipated future, to interact with the protoself and produce an abundance of core self pulses.

The result is *the autobiographical self*.

(p. 181)

The autobiographical self (2)

The autobiographical self occurs
when objects in one's biography generate pulses of core self
that are, subsequently,
momentarily linked in a large-scale coherent pattern

(p.181)

The conscious mind is a composite of different images

One set of those images describe the *objects* in consciousness.
Other images describe *me*, and the *me* includes:

- (1) The *perspective* in which the objects are being mapped
- (2) The feeling that the objects are being represented in a mind belonging to me (*ownership*)
- (3) The feeling that I have *agency* relative to the objects
- (4) *Primordial feelings*, which signify the existence of my living body independently of how objects engage it or not

(p.185)

Primordial feelings precede all other feelings

They refer specifically and uniquely to the living body that is interconnected with its specific brain stem.

All feelings of emotion are variations of the ongoing primordial feelings.

All feelings caused by the interaction of objects with the organism are variations of the ongoing primordial feelings

Primordial feelings and their emotional variations generate an observant chorus that accompanies all other images going on in the mind

(p. 193)

Happy memories!

