Phenomenology as a tool for the description and analysis of sound and music

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Pioneers:

Music Phenomenology:

Thomas Clifton (1935-78)
Lawrence Ferrara (b. 1949)
Don Ihde (b. 1934)

Neurology:

Antonio Damasio (b. 1944)
Founders of philosophical phenomenology:

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938)

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976)

Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-61)
Thomas Clifton (1983) *Music as heard*

Phenomenon: Anything that appears to consciousness

Some essences of musical phenomena:

Time
Space
Feeling
Motion
Form
Tone quality
Husserl’s phenomenology
Direct description of experience:

Let yourself be surprised by the world
Avoid prejudices
Think in beginnings
Perform perceptual variations
Perceive richness of experience

Perception of Internal Time-Consciousness:

Retention Perception Protention
Immediate past Present Immediate future
Lawrence Ferrara (1984): Phenomenology as a Tool for Music Analysis

"One responds to questions posed by the music"

1. Open listenings

2. Listen for syntax (sound, material, texture)

3. Listen for semantic meaning

4. Listen for ontological meaning

5. Open listenings
Music

Edgar Varèse: Poème électronique (1958)
excerpt
Martin Heidegger’s phenomenology:

”Let the phenomenon show itself as it is in its Being”

Existence: Being there in the world

Interpretation is the meaning of phenomenological description

History

Culture

Concern, Action
Thomas Clifton (1983) *Music as heard*

Music is a bodily experience

Body, that is: mind, feelings, senses, will, metabolism

Music is a reciprocal relation between a person, his behavior, and a sounding object

Primordial unity between self and music

A centralizing self synthesizes the discrete perceptions of the body
Perception is a bodily action

Experience of the world is based on the unity of consciousness and body

Meaning requires contribution from the body and from the world

The senses are integrated in a unity

The body’s knowledge of the world is pre-verbal
Don Ihde (1976, 2nd ed. 2007)
*Listening and Voice*

A theory of perception is a theory of the body

Experience is global, the senses are integrated

I hear with my whole body

Music immerses, surrounds and penetrates the body

The body participates in the movement of the music
Don Ihde: *Listening and Voice*

Doing phenomenology:
”Let the things show themselves from themselves.”

Perform phenomenological variations: Listen for

Foreground and background
Focus and fringe
Motion and stability
Attack and running-off
Contact of surfaces
Reverberations and interiors
Directionality and surroundability
The just-past (retention) and the expected (protention)
Like emotion, consciousness is rooted in the representation of the body.

Consciousness begins as the feeling of what happens when we see or hear or touch.

Consciousness is an entirely private, first-person phenomenon.
Some clarifications:

Emotions are about the life of the organism
Emotions use the body as their theater
Emotions are outwardly directed, public

Emotions can engender feelings
Feelings are inwardly directed and private
Feelings can be made conscious
Feelings perform their ultimate and longer-lasting effects in the theater of the conscious mind

Core consciousness provides the organism with a sense of self about here and now: one moment and one place
The core self is a transient entity, ceaselessly recreated

Extended consciousness provides the organism with an elaborated sense of self: The autobiographical self
Antonio Damasio: *The Feeling of What Happens*

The Sense of Self process, in brief:

1a. The organism is mapped in the brain
1b. An object is also mapped in the brain

2. The object mapping changes the organism mapping

3. The relationship between object and organism is represented as mental images (e.g. sight, sound, taste, smell, touch, inner sense) in core consciousness

4. Core consciousness provides a Sense of Self: The act of knowing. ”You notice yourself knowing”
References: