



HAL
open science

Emotion, Motion, and Abstract Notions: Insights in the role of imagination in professional musicians practices from semi-guided interviews

Ken Déguernel, Gabrielle Cecchetti, Steffen A. Herff

► To cite this version:

Ken Déguernel, Gabrielle Cecchetti, Steffen A. Herff. Emotion, Motion, and Abstract Notions: Insights in the role of imagination in professional musicians practices from semi-guided interviews. 2023. hal-04142158

HAL Id: hal-04142158

<https://hal.science/hal-04142158>

Submitted on 13 Aug 2023

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License

Emotion, Motion, and Abstract Notions: Insights in the role of imagination in professional musicians practices from semi-guided interviews

Ken Déguernel (a), Gabriele Cecchetti (b), Steffen A. Herff (b,c)

(a) Univ. Lille, CNRS, Centrale Lille, UMR 9189 CRIStAL, Lille, France,

(b) École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne, Switzerland,

(c) The MARCS Institute for Brain, Behaviour and Development, Western Sydney University, Australia

Keywords: Imagination, Creativity, Interview, Multi-modal imagery, Music cognition, Music perception.

Introduction

Music can evoke multi-modal, emotionally loaded, imagination in listeners (Küssner, Taruffi, & Floridou, 2022). Recent empirical studies further demonstrated music's ability to systematically affect vividness, as well as imagined physical distance and the passing of time in listeners' imagined content (Herff et al., 2021). Vice versa, imagination is often considered to play a pivotal role in the creative process (Stokes, 2014), yet, how exactly high-profile, contemporary musicians deploy multi-modal imagination within the creative process is not well known.

Aims

The present study investigates the role of imagination in the creative process and in the personal experiences of high-profile, contemporary professional musicians through a content analysis of a series of semi-guided interviews.

Methods

Ten professional musicians were each interviewed for ~45 minutes via recorded video-calls. The interviewees had at least 5 year of professional experience varying in musical background — including western classical, jazz, contemporary music and movie/video-game music — and musical practice — composers, improvisers, performers. The interview process was divided in two parts following a scripted series of questions: first, some general questions regarding their musical experiences, and a second part more specifically directed towards the role of imagination. The responses were made in a quasi-conversational setting, with the interviewer acting as an interlocutor only asking follow-up questions or clarifications when needed. The interviews were then transcribed and anonymised. We then analysed the content of the interviews following a pre-defined literature guided coding scheme (Charmaz, 2006), dividing each relevant ideas into five categories: Emotion, Motion (i.e. related to time and space), Abstract Notion (i.e. related to various non-specific concepts such as colour, energy), Specific imagery, and Musical techniques.

Results

A total of 250 codes were extracted from the interviews ($M=25$, $SD=6.38$). 29 for Emotion (11.6%, $M=2.9$, $SD=2.26$), 53 for Motion (21.2%, $M=5.3$, $SD=4.05$), 76 for Abstract Notion (30.4%, $M=7.6$, $SD=3.01$), 42 for Specific imagery (16.8%, $M=4.2$, $SD=2.40$), and 50 for Musical techniques (20%, $M=5$, $SD=2.19$). Although the distribution of each category varied between participants, a significantly higher prevalence of Motion and Abstract Notion compared to Emotion was observed.

Discussion

Results suggest that although imagining emotions is indeed part of the toolkit used by musicians in their creative practice — and therefore an interesting topic of study —, it is not as prevalent in musicians' practices as other imagination-based concepts such as the relationship between music and (imaginary) time and space, or other abstract concepts such as “colour” or “energy”. We hope that this investigation will encourage further more quantitative studies regarding the relationship between music and multi-modal imagination.

References

- Küssner, M. B., Taruffi, L., & Floridou, G. A. (Eds.). (2022). *Music and Mental Imagery*. Taylor & Francis.
- Herff, S. A., Cecchetti, G., Taruffi, L., & Déguernel, K. (2021). Music influences vividness and content of imagined journeys in a directed visual imagery task. *Scientific reports*, 11(1).
- Stokes, D. (2014). The role of imagination in creativity. *The philosophy of creativity: New essays*, 157-184.
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing Grounded Theory. A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publishing.