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Presentation Title: The Relational Interface: On Tacit Engagement

Abstract:

I investigate dialogue as improvised performance, where the collective movements of our bodies (body includes voice) perform pragmatic salient phatic-prosodic moments that express how we are relating to each other.

Moving well with someone has an aesthetic and ethical quality, be it to shake hands, dance, make music, or have a wonderful conversation. This foregrounds the relational qualities also inherent in music (Cross 2012), such as rhythm and pitch. Dialogue will be considered as improvised performance, i.e. 'a personal act of knowing', that is about moving with uncertainty and trust and handling doubt, and allows us to come to share, for example, a sense of what is a beautiful shade of colour or a graceful dance step. I reflect on this 'tacit knowing' by exploring how experiencing together in physical space facilitates my seeing as you see. This has a mediational structure (a 'comprehensive entity') of tacit knowing within dialogue, and in particular, rhythm. A collective rhythmic act involves at least two people sharing the knowledge of the same comprehensive entity, namely, of their joint skilled human performance. 'These comprehensive entities include, apart from our own performance, both the performance of other persons and these persons themselves' (Polanyi, 1966: 49). Discussions on 'skill' and 'knowledge', including those on tacit and explicit knowledge, have made the distinction between 'know-how' and 'know-that' (Ryle 1949). However anticipation and action, and making a judgement, are temporal. Hence, skilled performance is also about 'knowing when': it is relational. Skilled performance is a personal act of knowing in which we are our authentic selves, simultaneously mediating the experience of knowing- how, knowing-that, and knowing-when.

Mutual sense- making may be said to be carried by very fine timing / synchrony that is different from the kind of continuous and stable synchrony that we see in most laboratory experiments, seeming to be fragmentary whilst imbued with purpose to sustain and facilitate. In embodied improvisation, we come to know when we can change or reject the synchrony or pattern that we have found with someone without producing negative emotional or social/artistic effects. This shift is desirable, for example, for a Jazz musician to find their own way distinct from a Jazz master (Iyer 2016), through 'indwelling'. This picture of pragmatic salient prosodic rhythms leading to climaxes (crescendos) of entrainment, may be a way of considering how we are able to improvise whilst being together. Salient moments of bodily synchrony perhaps carry within them an intention to rebuild the connection even though it is mutually understood and desirable that a break of some kind is necessary for the connection to be sustained and to evolve.