

# Drumming as Embodied and Mindful Performance: Observations on the Aesthetic Theories of Bill Bruford and Shaun Gallagher

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*In this article, I explore some questions concerning the aesthetics of musical performance. I approach this topic from a perspective influenced by some theoretical works of Bill Bruford, Shaun Gallagher, and Richard Shusterman, and choose the musical practice of drumming as a promising case to exemplify certain concepts and themes. Following various insights inspired, in particular, by Bruford and Gallagher, I argue for a conception of drumming as embodied and mindful performance, in contrast to other influential conceptions (sometimes suggested by philosophers, other times by drummers) that understand musical performance in general, and the art of drumming in particular, as mindless activities; namely, as a sort of selfless 'flow' without thought.*

1.

This article will focus on the aesthetics of musical performance. To investigate this topic, I will centre the discussion on the embodied nature and the mindful character of musical performance, drawing upon the theory of enactive aesthetics and, in part, somaesthetics. I will then use the art of drumming as a promising case study to demonstrate my findings.<sup>1</sup>

In some of my previous works, I have philosophically investigated the art of drumming, with specific reference to the somaesthetic approach. Somaesthetics was originally introduced by Richard Shusterman in the late 1990s and is defined by him as 'the critical study and meliorative cultivation of the body as the site not only of experienced subjectivity and sensory appreciation (*aesthesis*) that guides our action and performance but also of our creative self-fashioning through the ways we use, groom, and adorn our physical bodies to express our values and stylize ourselves' (Shusterman 2019: 15). 'An ameliorative discipline of both theory and practice' (Shusterman 2000: 101), somaesthetics

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1 The concept of drumming employed in this article refers to the standard jazz/rock drum kit. It does *not* refer to all forms of drum or percussive playing. For example, parade drummers who march with the bass drum and other similar practices are *not* included in the concept of drumming in this article. I am grateful to the first reviewer who anonymously evaluated my article for suggesting that I clarify this point.

represents ‘an interdisciplinary field of research, rooted in philosophical theory, but offering an integrative conceptual framework and a menu of methodologies not only for better understanding our somatic experience, but also for improving the quality of our bodily perception, performance, and presentation’ (Shusterman 2017: 101–3). On this basis, somaesthetics has been applied by Shusterman and other scholars to a variety of topics. In my previous research, for example, I have attempted to adopt a somaesthetic perspective to inquire into some phenomena concerning pop-rock musical performances (Marino 2022) and jazz improvisation, with reference to the art of drumming and the different ‘somatic styles’ exhibited by great drummers in the history of jazz (Marino 2019).

In this article, I will deepen my analysis of the aforementioned questions (musical performance; popular music; embodiment; drumming) by applying an enactivist approach to aesthetics. By ‘enactivism’ I refer here to a set or family of philosophical conceptions of various thinkers that share fundamental features, notwithstanding their differences on specific questions such that some authors veritably speak of ‘varieties of enactivism’ (Ward, Silverman, and Villalobos 2017: 365). These shared features may include: ‘a focus on *sense-making* as a situated, embodied activity’; a general view of ‘situated meaningful action that remains connected both to biology and to the hermeneutic and phenomenological studies of experience’; an effort to ‘reconcile the study of cognition with the systematic examination of human experience’; and an attempt to ‘offer a radical alternative to representational accounts of cognition that divorce cognition from embodied action’ (Baerveldt and Verheggen 2012: 165–6, 168).

These ‘varieties of enactivism’ thus refer to the existence of ‘a variety of distinct but overlapping “enactivisms”’ (Ward, Silverman, and Villalobos 2017: 365). While differences exist between enactivisms, all enactivist philosophers seem to agree that ‘the best explanation for a large share of cognition is non-representational in kind’, and that, ‘instead of focusing solely on factors interior to an agent, a good part of cognition is to be found in the link or coupling *between* an agent and the external world’, where this link is understood as ‘fluid, dynamic, and active in a variety of ways’ (Ryan and Gallagher 2020: 1–2). Accordingly, the notion of ‘enactive aesthetics’ described in this article refers to some recent approaches to aesthetic questions that are inspired by enactivism and have emerged in the context of enactivist philosophies, such as those that have been proposed by Alva Noë (2015) and Shaun Gallagher.<sup>2</sup> Within these approaches, ‘enactivist theorizing’ that explicitly understands human mind and experience as ‘embodied, embedded, extended and affective’ (Ward, Silverman, and Villalobos 2017: 369) has been applied to the field of artistic performance due to its embodied component. Although, artistic performance is only one among the various topics in aesthetics that can be explored from an enactive perspective, and so it would be misleading to simply identify enactive aesthetics in its entirety with the aesthetics of performance.

As readers can see from the title of my article, this contribution will focus on Gallagher’s enactive aesthetics and, in particular, his concept of mindful performance, which he

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2 Gallagher has sometimes emphasized some differences between his approach to enactivism and Noë’s, with specific reference to the investigation of art and aesthetic experience (see Gallagher 2022: 434–6).

describes in his book *Performance/Art* (2021). Of course, my emphasis on Gallagher's theory in this article does *not* imply that no other author in this field has made similar points. Rather, it is possible to find various similarly themed works in the aesthetics of performance (and, in particular, in music aesthetics and dance aesthetics), for example, by scholars such as Aili Bresnahan and Einav Katan. In *Performance/Art*, Gallagher himself relies on a stimulating variety of sources that include, among others, some writings by David Borgo, Donald Glowinski, Simon Høffding, Dorothée Legrand, Barbara G. Montero, Martin Norgaard, Martin Rosenberg, John Sheperd, Evelyn Tribble, and other authors. In particular, some recent writings in the field of dance aesthetics, like Falk Heinrich's somaesthetic account of performative beauty in Argentine tango (Heinrich 2023) or Aili Bresnahan's work on tap dancing (Bresnahan 2019), can be fruitfully connected to some of the ideas that can be derived from Gallagher's enactive aesthetics.<sup>3</sup>

Rather, my approach in this article is limited to Gallagher's aesthetics of performance (while keeping the insights of other authors in the background) as his theory of performance is particularly suited to enter into dialogue with the other major source for my article: Bill Bruford's aesthetics of drumming, which he outlines in his book *Uncharted: Creativity and the Expert Drummer* (Bruford 2018). As such, I will try to establish a relation between Gallagher's enactive perspective of performance and the aesthetic theory of an important rock drummer, Bill Bruford, who became famous for his musical work with Yes, King Crimson, and other bands,<sup>4</sup> and who, after his retirement from music in 2009, obtained a PhD in 2016, eventually publishing a book on creativity in musical performance with a specific focus on the art of drumming.

## 2.

In a recent interview published in the *European Journal of Pragmatism and European Philosophy*, Gallagher has observed: 'If enactivism would proclaim, as it has done, that it is a new (or even radically new) way of thinking about the mind or even nature, it would be odd to think that there would be no implications for [...] other areas of research', including 'ethics, feminism, social philosophy' and 'specifically, aesthetics' (Gallagher 2023: 6).

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3 I would like to thank the first reviewer who anonymously evaluated my article for these bibliographic suggestions. In particular, Bresnahan's article on tap dancing is also relevant to the issue of percussion. In fact, Bresnahan considers 'whether or not tap dance might be categorized as a kind of feet- and body-created jazz percussion rather than as a musical form of dance' (2019: 183). Moreover, in her investigation of this topic, Bresnahan takes into consideration factors such as the role of the body, arguing that, for instance, 'what [can] be called "dance percussion" includes forms of dance that highlight audible percussion with the feet [...] as well as body percussion and the use of musical instruments or sound-making objects while dancing' (2019: 187). Bresnahan also mentions aspects concerning drums, when she clarifies, for example, that 'in the arts, "percussion" typically and most commonly refers to "percussion instruments" in music, such as drums, cymbals, and (technically) piano', but also 'JTD [jazz tap dance] is percussive' (Bresnahan 2019: 187).

4 It is important to note that Bruford, as a drummer, was also very active in the field of jazz, with Earthworks (a jazz band precisely led by him) and other notable collaborations with Ralph Towner, Eddie Gomez, Allan Holdsworth, Jeff Berlin, and many others.

With regard to the question: ‘How do enactive ideas change our thinking about aesthetics’, Gallagher suggests that ‘one approach to this question is to start with the performing arts’ (Gallagher 2023: 6). For Gallagher, ‘we should [...] consider a variety of experiences’ and, in particular, we should try to ‘take the perspective of the performer and ask what aesthetic experience is for them’ (Gallagher 2023: 6).<sup>5</sup>

Gallagher’s approach to the aesthetic of performance is characterized by a strong focus on embodiment, in a way that is fully coherent with the radical embodied character of his enactive philosophy. As Gallagher claims, ‘aesthetic experience is embodied experience’, although this does *not* imply that ‘all experience’, insofar as it is embodied, ‘is aesthetic experience’ (2021: 63).<sup>6</sup> Other thinkers have also emphasized the embodied character of perception, action, and performance. For example, according to Erika Fischer-Lichte, performances

essentially differ from texts and artifacts. The latter are products that exist separately from their creator(s); they are not tied to the bodily presence of their creators. [...] In contrast, a performance has very different *medial conditions*, stemming from its reliance on bodily co-presence. [...] Performances require the willingness and openness of spectators to experience others and themselves as *embodied minds*, strongly present in the here and now. This is [a] *radical concept of presence*. It emerges when a performer brings forth their phenomenal body and its energy, so that they appear as an *embodied mind*. In the presence of the performer, the spectators experience both self and other as an *embodied mind*. [...] The energetic exchange between performers and spectators affects everyone present and, thus, creates the performance. (Fischer-Lichte 2021: 160, 163)

Similarly, Shusterman describes the somatic character of playing music, when he emphasizes that our body is ‘the instrument of instruments’ (Shusterman 2008: 126). In fact, ‘more than guitars or violins or pianos or even drums’, for Shusterman, ‘our bodies are the primary instrument for the making of music’, and ‘more than records, radios, tapes, or CDs’, our bodies are ‘the basic, irreplaceable medium for its appreciation’ (Shusterman 2008: 126). In general, from a somaesthetic perspective, ‘our bodies are the ultimate and necessary instrument for music’ at all levels (Shusterman 2008: 126).

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5 As Gallagher also confirms in *Performance/Art*, his main interest is in ‘the aesthetic experience of the performer – the musician, the dancer, the actor, etc’ (2021: 28).

6 Gallagher’s philosophy is characterized by the ambitious aim to make enactivism ‘even more embodied’. That is, Gallagher aims to strengthen the component of embodiment, understanding it in a more complex, encompassing, sophisticated, and nuanced way than other thinkers. As he and Bower explain, ‘the focus on sensorimotor contingencies’ by various enactivist thinkers reveals ‘a narrow conception of embodiment in terms of neuro-muscular function’ (Gallagher and Bower 2014: 233). In contrast, Gallagher critically suggests that ‘these versions of sensorimotor enactivism need to be made more embodied’, by broadening the concept of embodiment and including in it ‘affectivity, intersubjectivity, and a dynamic attunement theory of brain function’ (Gallagher and Bower 2014: 233). For Gallagher, ‘the mind is relational, and the brain plays its part in that relationality’, but ‘cognition doesn’t exist if there is just a brain without bodily and worldly factors’ (Gallagher and Bower 2014: 242).

In this context, the case of drumming is particularly interesting because this form of musical performance is characterized by a unique relation between the whole body of the performer and his/her musical instrument, namely the drum kit. This relation involves the synchronization and coordination of all of the limbs of the musician, which must ‘resonate’ with the different percussions included in the drum kit (drums, cymbals, bells, etc.) in an appropriate, coherent, and meaningful way.<sup>7</sup> For this reason, following a maxim by Stewart Copeland (the famous drummer of The Police), a drummer can be defined as a person who is capable of uniting ‘many rhythms in one body’.<sup>8</sup>

Bruford has highlighted how the drum kit emerged as a collection of instruments designed to be played by one musician by unifying all limbs in simultaneous action. In *Uncharted*, he notes that, ‘after approximately a century of development, a collection of some seven instruments appears to have emerged as the norm for a standard “kit”, which is ‘played seated with some combination of all four limbs in play’ (Bruford 2018: 5). This differentiates the art of drumming from the musical practice of other percussion instruments. As Bruford observes, ‘assuming a four-limbed drummer is playing a standard seven-piece drum set’, he/she

may strike any combination of seven instruments with any combination of up to four limbs. Conceptualizing each of these combinations in terms of unpitched ‘chords’, they may be likened to the 60-chord family of the jazz pianist, the five qualities of seventh chords available on each of the 12 degrees of the chromatic scale. (2018: 106)

According to Bruford, in this history of modern drumming, it was Max Roach in particular who ‘came to see the instrument as one whole’ (Bruford 2018: 49). From this point of view, Roach truly revolutionized the art of drumming and established anew the fundamental norms of this form of musical practice. As Bruford emphatically observes:

There was Western kit drumming before Roach and after him. The two were qualitatively different. [...] Max Roach (1924-2007) has come to embody everything reasonably considered to be creative on the drum kit. In the short period from 1944 to 1953 he redefined the role of the drummer in several areas [...]. His unaccompanied drum pieces are conventionally regarded as the gold standard of creative practice. [...] In discussions of Roach’s work, the word ‘conversation’ is in frequent use, specifically

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7 I borrow here the concept of ‘resonance’—applied to aesthetic experience and, in particular, to musical performances—from Giovanni Matteucci (2021).

8 More precisely, Copeland explains that with the invention of the drum set—ambitiously defined by him as ‘the greatest invention of modern American music’—different percussion instruments, that once ‘used to be played by [...] different guys’, were now ‘played by one guy’, thus becoming ‘one instrument’. For Copeland, ‘it made sense for the band leader to get one player to do three jobs’, and then ‘a strange thing happened. One drummer doing all created groove. Many rhythms united in one body’ (<https://www.facebook.com/StewartCopeland/videos/1555053304976468>). Not by chance, it is possible to find useful tutorial videos for drummers on YouTube that are precisely entitled: ‘How Do We Control 4 Limbs Simultaneously With One Brain?’ (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I0M-8bDvhPE>).

to describe the interaction between his limbs [...]. Like fingers on a piano, his four limbs on any combination of the seven (standard) instruments could produce chords, colors, and semi-definitely pitched melodies.

(2018: 35–6, 48–9)<sup>9</sup>

Focusing our attention now on Gallagher's theory of embodied and mindful performance, it is important to note that in some of his recent writings on the aesthetics of performance, Gallagher has claimed that 'enactivist conceptions of perception and action [...] involve aspects of mindfulness that [...] do *not* interrupt embodied performance' (2018: 6; emphasis added). Gallagher assumes as his starting point a critical analysis of a debate between Hubert Dreyfus and John McDowell on the mindless or mindful character of human perception and action,<sup>10</sup> and he relies on a variety of examples from the phenomenology of performance. In particular, Gallagher argues for the existence of certain types of self-awareness that are '*not* disconnected from the performance', but are rather 'part of expertise'; namely, 'a dimension of the flow rather than something different from it,' and 'a practice in continuity with embodied coping' (Gallagher 2021: 35; emphasis added). While Gallagher emphasizes mindfulness as part of embodied performance, Dreyfus describes performance with the ideas that the actions of expert performers are 'mindless rather than mindful', and the latter know what to do 'without thinking'; that 'embodied practice leads to habit formation where doing becomes automatic', and expert performances entirely rest on an 'intuitive grasp of the situation', involving 'the ability to be mindlessly in the flow'; and that 'finely tuned motor control processes' represent 'all the expert needs' in his/her 'skilled coping' during the performance (Gallagher 2021: 31–2, 36–7).<sup>11</sup>

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9 Of course, this does *not* prevent Bruford from recognizing the unique character of the style of other great drummers. This is testified, for example, by his explicit reference to the notion of 'the *embodied constructs* of "touch" and "feel" [...] commonly applied to the *expressive aspects of individual performance* and [...] interpreted as indicators of creativity. [...] Tony Williams' "feel," for example, is qualitatively and quantitatively different from that of Elvin Jones', as Bruford explains. '*All top players* have, by definition, a unique touch and a unique feel'; for instance, according to Bruford, it can be said that 'drummer Jack DeJohnette "created another language"' (2018: 47, 175; emphasis added).

10 Readers who are interested in the original sources of the debate are obviously invited to read the papers of Dreyfus (2005) and McDowell (2007), cited by Gallagher. The debate is not cited directly here, but quickly summarized on the basis of Gallagher's critical presentation of it, because the main focus of this paper is precisely on Gallagher's enactive theory of embodied and mindful performance (without denying for this reason that also other authors have offered valuable contributions in this field), in order to establish a connection and a comparison with Bruford's theory of creativity in the art of drumming.

11 In Gallagher's interpretive scheme, McDowell's conception represents the very opposite to Dreyfus'. For Gallagher, McDowell's theory of action and performance can be summarized with the ideas that perception and embodied agency are intrinsically 'conceptual/rational', and that action always depends on rationality and involves a 'reflective stepping back' (Gallagher 2021: 34). From Gallagher's critical point of view, this is an 'intellectualist view', according to which 'knowing-how to do something is a species of propositional knowing-that, and skill depends on having such knowledge', so that, according to a conceptualist and intellectualist view like McDowell's, 'skill or know-how involves the rational, concept-driven mind' (Gallagher 2021: 35–6). Gallagher, however, deems these ideas unconvincing, although for different reasons than in Dreyfus' case.

Quite interestingly, sometimes the ‘mindless rather than mindful’ character of performance has also been accepted by musicians, including drummers. For Stewart Copeland, one of the most famous rock drummers, ‘drumming is something you feel and play *without thought*’ (Copeland in [Bruford 2018](#): 135): namely, it is something that supposedly happens in a purely intuitive, immediate, and mindless way. Furthermore, according to Vinnie Colaiuta, another influential drummer and great innovator in the history of this musical instrument,<sup>12</sup> ‘thought is the enemy of flow. [...] If you’re thinking even for a second, even a nanosecond’, according to Colaiuta, ‘things just ain’t gonna happen. [...] In flow, everything takes care of itself’, as Colaiuta explains, ‘as it should be. [...] There are just events [...], and things just happen’ (Colaiuta, in [Beato and Colaiuta 2023](#)).<sup>13</sup>

This idea of ‘being in a flow’ seems to correspond very well to a specific conception of performance that Gallagher defines in terms of ‘what [some] musicians call “blackout,” or what others call immersion, trance, or non-dual forms of experience’; an idea of performance as a ‘mindless (self-less) experience’ ([Gallagher 2021](#): 58). However, Gallagher ultimately criticizes and considers this ‘blackout’ or immersive performance untenable. More precisely, the idea ‘is not to affirm or deny this possibility, but rather to question whether one who enters into such a state can then report on it’ ([2021](#): 59). In fact, for Gallagher, even being ‘minimally mindful’ implies that ‘I am able to report on my experience’, which is also coherent with ‘the phenomenological claim that pre-reflective self-awareness is a necessary condition for reflective consciousness’ ([2021](#): 57).

Furthermore, some other implications of the terminological use of ‘mindless’ or ‘mindful’ can be noted here. Drumming, as the musical practice of a particular instrument, usually belongs to genres such as jazz and pop—understanding here the notion of ‘pop’ with a very broad meaning, as suggested by Noë, for whom pop music includes ‘a whole gamut of musical forms: rock, rhythm and blues, soul, hip-hop, top forty, reggae’, etc. ([Noë 2015](#): 168).<sup>14</sup> Indeed, it is precisely in musical genres like jazz and pop that

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- 12 Colaiuta, as a drummer, is famous for his musical talent and outstanding technical skills, which have sometimes led other musicians to emphatically define him as ‘a freak and an alien’ (as did Steve Vai in dialogue with Colaiuta on his ability in sight reading and musical performance: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u-3vfVmy6FI>). Colaiuta’s technical skills also led a demanding composer and band leader like Frank Zappa to define him as the most accomplished drummer he had ever worked with, and one of his favourite drummers throughout his entire career, especially because of Colaiuta’s unique capacity to understand and perform polyrhythms. The latter, indeed, famously play a particularly important role in Zappa’s conception of composition and improvisation. In Zappa’s own words: ‘A (guitar) soloist choosing to work in this odd style ultimately winds up as a hostage – he can go only as far into the “experimental zones” as his rhythm section will allow him to go. The problem lies in the polyrhythms. The chances of finding a drummer, a bass player and a keyboard player who can conceive of those polyrhythms – let alone identify them fast enough to play a complementary figure on the moment, are not good. (The grand prize goes to Vinnie Colaiuta, the drummer for the band in 1978 and ’79)’ ([Zappa 1989](#)).
- 13 This quotation is taken from Colaiuta’s conversation on ‘flow’ with Rick Beato, available on Beato’s YouTube channel (<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=IUM0SqoEJQs&pp=ygU UdmlubmlIGNvbGFpdXRhIGZsb3c%3D>) ([Beato and Colaiuta 2023](#)). On YouTube it is also possible to find a stimulating conversation on music between Colaiuta and Bruford (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F29OC-H8uIQ>).
- 14 From a terminological point of view, concepts like ‘rock’ and ‘pop’, strictly understood, refer to musical forms that are sometimes based on different principles and have diverse aesthetic traits ([Mecacci 2011](#): 147–62).

drums, as a relatively recently invented instrument, have mainly played an important role. However, it is also a well-known fact that pop music has often been understood by aestheticians and intellectuals ‘as *mindless*, tasteless trash’, as critically observed by Shusterman (2000: 169; emphasis added). In fact, as Shusterman notes, the popular arts—which also include pop music—[have] not been popular with aestheticians and theorists of culture [...]. When not altogether ignored as beneath contempt’, these arts have been ‘typically vilified as mindless, tasteless trash’ (Shusterman 2000: 169).<sup>15</sup>

Shusterman’s use of the terms ‘mindless’ and ‘tasteless’, in this context, is intriguing, revealing, and also thought-provoking. In reminding us that the popular arts, *as a whole*, have been often considered by aestheticians, musicologists, and art theorists as ‘tasteless’, Shusterman underscores interpretation patterns that have been predominant in theories of contemporary culture. Some of these theories have classified the popular arts as ‘kitsch’ (Greenberg), ‘low culture’ and ‘masscult’ (Macdonald), and so on. This has resulted in a critical interpretation of popular music that, in opposition to so-called ‘serious music’, has been rather understood as *always* standardized and based on the mere repetition of clichés (Adorno 2009: 280–90). Furthermore, in strategically using a term like ‘mindless’, Shusterman also reminds us that the popular arts, *as a whole*, have often been understood by intellectuals as ‘stupid’; that is, as lacking adequate intellectual contents and unable, in principle, to stimulate us and enrich us at a cognitive level.

This understanding of popular music as mindless and tasteless has created a prejudice that has negatively impacted the aesthetic appreciation of pop music *as such*. It can be argued that similar prejudices have also infected the aesthetic evaluation of some of the most typical instruments that have defined the history of pop music, thus leading, for instance, to frequent critiques of the supposedly primitive character of the ‘dull pounding of “power” chords’ played by the electric guitar (Noë 2015: 169), or, in our specific case, of the so-called ‘drum fills’ and other distinctive techniques of drumming. As I will try to

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Moreover, some scholars have argued that ‘rock’, and not ‘pop’, must be understood as ‘a universal language’, because ‘rock is both Elvis and Brian Eno’, and ‘even what does not sound like “rock,” in principle, falls within its history’ (Maurizi 2018: 141). This might lead us to the conclusion that ‘rock’ should not be included in the concept of ‘pop’ but, on the contrary, certain artists and bands commonly defined as ‘pop’ should be included in the history of ‘rock’. As Robert Fripp, the guitar player and founder of King Crimson, states, ‘rock is the most malleable musical form we have. Within the rock framework you can play jazz, classical, trance music, Urubu drumming. Anything you like can come under the banner of rock. It’s a remarkable musical form. [...] One can, under the general banner of rock music, play in fact any kind of music whatsoever’ (Fripp, cited in Tamm 1990: 20–1). Anyway, as has been noted by other theorists, ‘musical category is a matter of genealogy as much as sound’: ‘In viewing a large chunk of popular culture as rock, we operate at a relatively abstract level [...]. As such, “rock” operates largely as an ideological abstraction, not as the label of an observable property of the phenomena it unifies. [...] The concept of rock’, like the notions of jazz or pop, is ‘an umbrella for a wide range of musicians and performance styles with some common antecedents and influences’ (Gracyk 1996: XI, 5). On the relation between the notions of ‘popular music’ and ‘rock music’, see also the contributions of Fisher (2011) and Moore (2011).

15 On this topic, with a specific focus on the aesthetic denigration of the popular with reference to pop-rock music, see also Gracyk (2007: 1–8, 139–43).

show in the next section of my article, this particular critical nuance that, as Shusterman suggests, is sometimes present in the use of terms like ‘mindless’ in the aesthetics of pop music, can have significant consequences and implications also at the level of a typical and, indeed, critical understanding of the art of drumming.

Returning now to the Dreyfus/McDowell debate that Gallagher uses as a starting point for his own investigation of the aesthetics of performance, we can say that Gallagher identifies ‘two theoretical extremes’ (Gallagher 2021: 31), represented by a paradigm of mindless action and, vice-versa, a model of (intellectualist, cognitivist, conceptual) mindful performance respectively. From Gallagher’s point of view, however, ‘there is room between these two extremes’ (2021: 36). More precisely, there is ‘good phenomenological evidence’ for the possibility of what he calls ‘a kind of middle ground – a non-intellectualist, but nonetheless mindful practice of *phronesis* in performance’ (2021: 36). So, rather than ‘an all-or-nothing matter’—namely, rather than an immediate ‘all-or-nothing “automatic” versus “full cognitive” control’ scheme—it appears reasonable for Gallagher to recognize the existence of ‘degrees of mediation’, indeed an ‘enormous number’ of variable degrees of awareness (2021: 44–5, 47).

In comparison to the aforementioned perspectives on the intuitive/mindless or, vice-versa, conceptual/mindful character of human performances, Gallagher situates his embodied and enactive proposal ‘between the extremes’. On this basis, Gallagher notes that the conception of an embodied mind allows us to recognize, on the one hand, that ‘mind and reason are not excluded from movement or performance, but redefined as the expression of an embodied intelligence’ (2021: 34). On the other hand, Gallagher notes that, at the same time, ‘there are different kinds of mindful self-awareness practices’, and *not* all of them involve a reflective ‘stepping back’ like the one universally postulated by the supporters of a more intellectualist account (2021: 35). Thus, Gallagher’s position can be described as one that aims to avoid *any* form of ‘all-or-nothing’ scheme: *no* ‘measured reflection’ in performance, on the one hand, but also *no* complete ‘mindlessness’, on the other hand (2021: 38). From Gallagher’s point of view, (expert) performances are *neither* comparable to a completely intuitive ‘flow’, *nor* understandable in terms of complete conceptual awareness and reflective ‘stepping back’. Rather, Gallagher calls attention to what he calls the ‘subtle [...] nuances in the mesh’ (2021: 93). Phenomenologically, for him, it is indeed possible to distinguish variable and different ‘types of awareness’, which can be also ‘different in different performances’ (Gallagher 2021: 37, 39).<sup>16</sup>

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16 Relying on both phenomenological and somaesthetic studies of human action and performance, Gallagher suggests to identify a form of ‘performative self-awareness’ that is different from both an ‘opaque awareness’ (namely, a form of ‘thematic, reflective awareness that objectifies the body’ during the performance) and a ‘transparent awareness’ (namely, a form of awareness in which ‘the body is experienced nonthematically, prereflectively and as an aspect of the acting subject’) (2021: 40). In Gallagher’s view, expert performers are able to ‘shift along a full register between explicit conscious control and prereflective consciousness’, and he believes that ‘trained awareness may include a range of possible foci posited in varying circumstances’, including forms of ‘minimal mindfulness’ that, however, do *not* imply that one is ‘unconscious’ or in ‘mindless states of being in the flow’ during a performance (2021: 41, 59–60).

On this basis, Gallagher recommends an investigation into what he calls ‘different kinds of mindful self-awareness practices’ (2021: 35), with a particular focus on the experience of the performing arts (including music). Gallagher’s aim is to explore ‘the phenomenology of attention and self-awareness during [...] different types of performance’ (2021: 29). This leads him to ask ‘whether we should describe them as mindless’, that is, ‘lacking self-awareness’, or rather as ‘mindful, and in the latter case, what that would mean’ (2021: 29). According to Gallagher, there are good reasons—on the basis of both theoretical observations and reviews of ‘empirical and phenomenological studies’—to believe in the existence of ‘different degrees of mindful awareness operative in expert performance such as dance, and including group (intersubjective) performance, as in cases of playing music together’ (2021: 29). The result is a ‘complex and dynamic [...] meshed architecture’ of embodied awareness that is at work in human performances (2021: 29).<sup>17</sup>

Performance is understood here as a ‘meshed architecture’ that includes various factors, mutually intersected and integrated with each other, so that ‘the integration’ can be also conceived ‘as a fusion’ (2021: 45). Such factors may include ‘motoric automaticity’, ‘body-schematic control’, ‘cognitive control’, ‘intrinsic control’ (which, importantly, for Gallagher is ‘not entirely top-down’, but also includes ‘important bottom-up processes that are not automatic’), ‘intersubjectivity’ and ‘affectivity’, and finally ‘environmental, social and normative factors’ (2021: 43–4, 49). It is important to understand that, for Gallagher, ‘neither body-schematic processes nor affective processes are isolated from the agent’s environment’; rather, such processes are ‘attuned to both stabilities and variations in environmental factors, including other agents’ (2021: 52). More specifically, ‘the environment where performance takes place’, as Gallagher observes, ‘is not only physical, but also socially, culturally, and normatively defined’ (2021: 52).<sup>18</sup>

Ultimately, according to Gallagher’s enactive conception, performances are ‘distributed and temporally extended processes that include all relevant variables – embodied, ecological, intersubjective/social and cultural’ (2021: 55). This invites us to recognize that actions and performances are ‘not the accomplishments of narrow processes taking place just-in-the-head, or strictly on a vertical axis’, but rather ‘processes that extend into the world, meshed with the structures of our intercorporeal and material engagements’ (2021: 55). In conclusion, the investigation of various forms of performance, based on the guiding concepts of Gallagher’s theory that I have examined so far, shows that, ‘beginning

17 Gallagher defines his original perspective as ‘a hybrid view’, based on a ‘complex conception of [a] meshed architecture’ that involves ‘both vertical and horizontal integration’ (2021: 44): namely, what Gallagher also calls ‘the meshing of the horizontal and vertical axes’ (2021: 53). This perspective can be fruitfully applied to the study of ‘many different forms of performance, including dance and musical performance’ (2021: 43).

18 Here, it is possible to establish a connection with a famous distinction that had been originally proposed in the fields of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and philosophical anthropology (Scheler, Gehlen, Heidegger, Gadamer), and has been later developed also by diverse thinkers, including McDowell: the distinction between the non-human animal mode of living in an environment (*Umwelt*) and the uniquely human mode of inhabiting a world (*Welt*) (see Marino 2015). On this basis, we can argue that Gallagher’s idea of ‘the environment where performance takes place’, as an environment that is ‘socially, culturally, and normatively defined’, implies that the space in which our actions and performances actually take place is not a mere *Umwelt*, but rather a *Welt*.

with performance, with a minded rather than a mindless behavior, and with a rich (vertical and horizontal) meshed architecture, we can start to reconceive what we mean by the embodied mind, and whatever aesthetic experience it may have' (2021: 62).

### 3.

At this point, let us shift our attention from Gallagher's theory of performance to Bruford's aesthetics of drumming as an embodied and mindful form of musical practice. As I will try to show, several elements that have previously emerged from my analysis of Gallagher's enactive aesthetics of performance can be fruitfully connected to Bruford's investigation of the art of drumming and what we may call his phenomenology of the different degrees of creativity in drumming (also supported by many interviews with various professional players).<sup>19</sup>

Bruford's investigation of the art of drumming consists of a 'microlevel analysis' of the ways in which drummers 'make sense of their practice' and of how they 'enact creative performance': that is, what different drummers do 'for creativity to be enacted'. More specifically, Bruford's analysis aims to offer 'an advocacy for the *power of human performance*' and for 'the hunt for something extra that is required to establish significant communicable difference', especially in a field, like drumming, in which creativity has been often underrated and downplayed (2018: 2–3, 47, 126; emphasis added). Bruford's aesthetic conception fundamentally relies on a general Deweyan idea of the musician as 'a sentient organism [...] in perpetual interaction with the musical environment', along with the 'Deweyan view of culture as a prolonged and cumulative interaction with environment'. From this perspective, Bruford understands culture, as pragmatist thinkers often do, in terms of 'the outcome of interaction with environment': namely, in terms of 'the process by which meaning is extracted from that interaction' (2018: 69, 129, 133).

Bruford's Deweyan perspective represents a noteworthy element in the present context (Bruford 2018: 25–7). In fact, Gallagher's 'phenomenologically informed enactivism', although primarily influenced by phenomenologists like Merleau-Ponty, also has 'close ties with pragmatism', especially with Dewey's conception of art as experience (Gallagher 2021: 27, 62–3). Unsurprisingly, one of the things that Gallagher emphasizes in *Performance/Art* is the coherence between his embodied and mindful perspective on the performing arts, on the one hand, and 'a strong [Deweyan] claim about the continuity

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19 An important part of Bruford's inquiry into the various forms and the different degrees of musical creativity, as they are expressed by the art of drumming, relies on his long, instructive and insightful interviews with diverse expert drummers, such as Peter Erskine, Mark Guiliana, Cindy Blackman Santana, Chad Wackerman, and many others. The way in which Bruford's book offers a rich phenomenology of different types of musicians is extremely interesting, including 'high-level composing drummers [like] Terry Bozzio and Gavin Harrison', 'the culture's icons (for example, Max Roach, Buddy Rich, Ringo Starr, John Bonham)', the 'iconoclasts (Keith Moon, Rat Scabies, Andrew Cyrille)', the 'drummer as guru-teacher (Freddie Gruber)', the drummer as 'movie star (Gene Krupa)', the 'drum hero (John Bonham, Buddy Rich, Carl Palmer)', the drummer as 'hell-raiser (Keith Moon, Ginger Baker)', and finally the 'drummer-as-animal or intellectual (Max Roach, Terry Bozzio)' (2018: 46, 132).

between everyday experience and the aesthetic', on the other hand (2021: 62).<sup>20</sup> Having cited Shusterman's somaesthetics at the beginning of my article, it is worth remembering that somaesthetics, as a disciplinary proposal, originates from Deweyan-inspired pragmatist aesthetics (see Abrams 2022: 23–121). Furthermore, a philosophical discipline like somaesthetics, which is based on the concept of soma, bears clear traces of both pragmatist and phenomenological influences. In fact, the soma is defined by Shusterman as 'the lived, sentient, intentional body that involves mental, social, and cultural dimensions' (Shusterman 2011a: 315), and as 'the sentient purposive body' that is 'both subject and object in the world', 'both *Körperhaben* and *Leibsein*', using a strictly phenomenological terminology (Shusterman 2019: 14–5).

Before proceeding with a more detailed analysis of the convergence between Gallagher's and Bruford's approaches, it is important to briefly summarize some of the main elements that form the background of Bruford's 'advocacy for the power of human performance' and his investigation of musical creativity in drumming. First, Bruford's general conception of performance is understood as a 'mediated' and 'significant situated action in context'; for Bruford, 'action generates lived experience, which is interpreted and assigned meaning, in turn informing further action' (2018: 3, 15). In relation to the centrality and, indeed, the veritable primacy of the dimension of embedded and embodied performance in music *as such* (namely, for the definition and the existence of music *itself*), Bruford's claims are exemplary and particularly clear. He explains that 'without performance, there is no music', and that musical compositions must be seen, in general, 'as existing *in the performance*' (2018: 12–3). Therefore, music must be understood 'less as an object, more as an activity with others', because 'the fundamental nature of music lies in action, in what people do' (2018: 13, 29). Bruford describes musical performances as '*embedded* within a meaningful shared experience around collaboration and community' and, moreover, he argues that 'creative meaning lies in making it (i.e., the music *embodying* the performance) work, and then making it matter' (2018: 209; emphasis added). It is also notable that, according to Bruford, 'feedback from the environment to the organism, or the field to the creator, is both an embedded and useful component in creativity' (2018: 133).

The component of agency in Bruford's theory, which has already been alluded to in the quotations above, coincides with the action-oriented paradigm that lies at the basis of contemporary philosophical approaches like enactivism and somaesthetics. The emphasis on agency and the crucial role played by embodiment in Bruford's theory are confirmed, and indeed strengthened, by his explicit recognition of the 'action-theoretical lens' adopted in his inquiry into the art of drumming. In fact, Bruford is aligned with the concept of agency as outlined in the approach of the 'phenomenological mind' (Gallagher and Zahavi 2008: 153–70). Bruford recognizes that his investigation 'converges with the contemporary line of thinking that interprets music creativity as a sociocultural, intersubjective, and interactive construct': namely, 'as an action in between actors and their environment

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20 See also Gallagher (2024) on the 'tapestry of phenomenology and pragmatism' in his conception of science and art.

rather than “inside” individuals as a psychological phenomenon entirely located within the individual mind’ (2018: 28). For Bruford, embodied agency

is crucial to both the way music is *experienced* and the meaning that it is made to carry. The *corporeality* of this kind of meaning-making is emphasized in the developing field of embodied music cognition; the way music action is understood *through the body*. [...] Drawing together the three elements of culture, individual, and action, all seen as *inseparable* from one another as well as *mutually constitutive*, action theory offers an appropriate way to understand the learning and negotiation of meaning that goes on between (music) actors. (2018: 27–8; emphasis added)

Bruford understands ‘creative music performance’ as a ‘culturally situated behavior characterized as recombinational, exploratory, or transformational (or a combination of these)’, and also as ‘located within an interactive network of people cooperating’ (2018: 9–10). Along with some aspects of an enactive aesthetics of performance, the notion of intersubjective, cooperative, and distributed creativity implies a shift from the traditional idea of the ‘locus of music creativity’ placed in ‘the person or product’ to a new idea of creativity focused on ‘processual aspects such as those of collaboration and interaction’: ‘process and product’, as Bruford explains, ‘are now construed as being *embodied within the performance*’ (2018: 12; emphasis added). According to this paradigm, creativity must be conceptualized as ‘meaningful action, distributed between actor, action, artifact, affordances, and audience’, or also as ‘a quality of the relationship that connects two or more people in a common search for meaning’ (2018: 51).<sup>21</sup>

With Bruford’s ideas in mind, let us now return to Gallagher’s enactive aesthetics of embodied and mindful performance, and explore its connection with Bruford’s conception of the art of drumming. As I explained in the previous section, Gallagher’s theory offers an accurate, persuasive, reasonable, and sustainable conception of performance. If applied to the specific case of drumming, this theory can be also useful to prevent or

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21 It is against this general background that some other important features of Bruford’s approach to the aesthetics of creative performance—specifically investigated by him through the example of the art of drumming—stand out. This includes three basic dimensions of Bruford’s theory. Firstly, what Bruford calls the ‘SDCA framework’, according to which creativity depends on processes of Selection, Differentiation, Communication, and Assessment (2018: 15; see also 82–181). Secondly, his ‘IMCM model’, according to which creativity is explainable through an Integrated Model of the Circulation of Meaning (2018: 15; see also 31–7). Thirdly, what Bruford defines the idea of a ‘functional/compositional continuum (FCC) of control’ in the different forms of ‘individual drummer creativity’ (2018: 15), which may typically include two opposite polarities, i.e. ‘two modes of performance’ in drumming, respectively, defined by him as ‘functional’ and ‘compositional’ (2018: 38–40). In particular, the drummer’s *functional* mode of performance is fundamentally aimed to ‘supplying the expected’, whereas the *compositional* mode of musical practice is typically inclined to ‘supplying the unexpected’ during the performance (2018: 40–2, 45–8). Nonetheless, after having introduced this explanatory dichotomy, Bruford also recognizes in a pragmatic way that, in practice, ‘most drummers tend to occupy a middle ground between the extremes’, represented by the two aforementioned ‘absolute poles of the continuum’: therefore, in this field, one must reasonably acknowledge the existence of ‘varying degrees of creativity’ (2018: 40, 52).

correct certain stereotypes and misconceptions about the musical practice and the aesthetic experience of drumming.

In the previous section, I explained that drumming, as the practice of a particular musical instrument, usually belongs to the fields of jazz and pop music. These genres, particularly pop, have often been criticized by traditional aestheticians and theorists of culture as ‘mindless’ (as explained by Shusterman in *Pragmatist Aesthetics*), in the sense of poor, defective, lacking of adequate intellectual content and meaning, or stimulating only at a superficial somatic level. For example, as Adorno critically observed, ‘*popular music*, in all of its many varieties’, is merely ‘a somatic stimulant and therefore regressive vis-a-vis aesthetic autonomy’ (Adorno 2002: 116). Furthermore, it can be suggested that drumming has, at times, been conceived as ‘mindless’ in the sense of being understood as a purely bodily activity; namely, as a musical practice that is supposedly based on merely automatic motoric processes which are *not* accompanied by thinking. Finally, Bruford’s insightful analysis shows that drumming has often been considered as lacking creativity, at least in comparison to other musical instruments that have been used in so-called ‘serious music’ and in jazz and pop. In fact, as Bruford critically notes, ‘the link between creativity and the popular music instrumentalist is casually assumed but little examined’; in particular, ‘drummers are generally not associated with the phenomenon [of creativity] by those outside the music community’ (Bruford 2018: 2). For Bruford, even ‘within the drum culture’—that is, the ‘community of practice’ that ‘largely determines and shapes drummer action’ (2018: 8)—creativity is often underrated and downplayed.

The notion of ‘drum culture’ plays a fundamental role in Bruford’s theory of the art of drumming. What emerges out of ‘drum culture’ is a sort of dialectical process with a circular logic that is reminiscent, for example, of Georg Simmel’s idea of ‘reciprocal effect’ or ‘interaction’ (*Wechselwirkung*) in aesthetic, cultural, and social phenomena. For Bruford, ‘drummers shape the drum culture’ and, reciprocally, ‘the drum culture’—that is, ‘the “worldview” of the drum community’—‘shapes drummers’ (2018: 133). Let me try to freely establish here some parallels between different but comparable fields. The influence of the philosophical community arguably plays an important role to shape the individual philosopher’s idea of himself/herself as a philosopher; similar processes veritably occur also in the communities of psychologists, sociologists, painters, poets, mathematicians, piano players, guitar players, singers, etc. In a comparable way, also the influence of the ‘drum community’ on the individual drummer is fundamental. Indeed, the impact of what Bruford calls ‘the drum culture’ can play a huge role in determining the drummer’s image of himself/herself as a musician, and also his/her general views about the meaning and value of the musical practice of drumming as such. It is precisely in this context that, according to Bruford, some unfortunate implications associated with drumming emerge. ‘We drummers’, as Bruford explains,

have come to be positioned (and to position ourselves) as a breed apart and a breed below. Our activities are governed by a cultural tradition that regulates and shapes the experience of creative practice, and take place within a community that mediates and promotes the psychological behavior and meaning-making of the individual. This is the case in all community-based activities. Embracing a particularly corrosive

ideology, however, the broader drum culture (that enfolds the community) is something of an extreme case.

(2018: 16; see also 129 ff.)

According to Bruford, this negative association emerges out of cultural prejudices and stereotypes, which demonstrate, first of all, ‘the extent of the impact of the Cartesian mind/body split upon performance perceptions’ (2018: 128). For Bruford, the implications of Cartesianism are so vast, manifold, and multilayered, that they extend far beyond strictly epistemological or metaphysical problems; indeed, the consequences of what he calls ‘the Cartesian mind/body split’ ultimately stretch so far as to reach the domain of the evaluation of musical instruments, including drums. Then, in his critical examination of some stereotypes about drumming, Bruford also highlights ‘the degree to which intellect is downplayed in practice’ in the art of drumming. Finally, he also refers to ‘a set of questions about performance on instruments of indefinite pitch’, like drums (2018: 128). Bruford critically speaks of a veritable ‘pitched-instrument prejudice’ that, for him, ‘running deep in the culture’, has informed ‘the attribution of creative meaning’ (2018: 126). According to Bruford,

[a] powerfully corrosive Western art music ideology has nurtured a sense of inferiority of those who perform on unpitched instruments to those who perform on pitched instruments. Embedded in a racist misconception and spawning the falsity of the mind/body split, this ideology exacerbates the separation of thought from feeling and the concomitant downplay of intellect among unpitched or indefinite-pitch practitioners [like drummers].

(2018: 136)<sup>22</sup>

#### 4.

In the context of a philosophical discourse, guided by the categories of somaesthetics and enactive aesthetics, the question concerning ‘the impact of the Cartesian body/mind split’ on what Bruford calls ‘the drum culture’ is of particular interest. In the second section of this article, I have already called the readers’ attention to Vinnie Colaiuta’s conception of performance (with a particular focus on improvised music), defined by him in terms of ‘flow’, in a way that, in my opinion, is comparable to what Gallagher critically calls ‘mindlessness’ or ‘blackout’. Stewart Copeland makes similar claims, as he states (in a passage cited in Bruford’s book), ‘drumming is something you feel and play *without thought*’ (Copeland, cited in Bruford 2018: 135). In this regard, drumming is

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22 Bruford critically notes that ‘instrumentalists on unpitched or semi-definitely pitched instruments’ have often been the target of negative stereotypes. For example, these musicians ‘have a long history of being seen initially as noisemakers and subsequently as inherently less creative than instrumentalists on pitched instruments’, such as, for example, ‘the process of drumming’ compared to ‘the process of guitar playing [...] within current Western popular music’ (2018: 13).

explicitly defined as a process that supposedly happens in a purely immediate, intuitive, and mindless way—and also in a seemingly ‘de-subjectified’ way, that is, in a state of total abandonment of subjectivity, which usually requires, instead, some degree of thought, concentration, mental presence, etc.

With all due respect to the opinions of great innovators and true masters of drumming like Colaiuta and Copeland, on the basis of the idea of embodied and mindful performance that has previously emerged, it appears reasonable to agree with Bruford when he critically notes that ‘many who have attempted to coordinate four limbs playing four instruments simultaneously in one coherent rhythm will testify to at least a minimal amount of mental involvement’ (2018: 135). From this, what emerges is a promising conception of the art of drumming as mindful. In my view, Bruford’s idea of ‘mental involvement’ does *not* point in the direction of a disembodied view of mindfulness, but rather must be understood in a fully embodied, embedded, enacted, and even extended way; that is, in terms of an integration, or even a sort of fusion, between the body of the musician and the musical instrument, which fascinatingly ‘resonate’ together during the performance.<sup>23</sup> For Bruford, ‘musical rhythm is as much a mental as a physical matter’ (2018: 135), which does *not* imply any separation between the mental and the physical, but rather their reciprocal co-presence, co-dependence, co-influence, and perhaps even co-emergence. In fact, once we achieve with Gallagher and other contemporary thinkers a non-reductive, complex, and nuanced concept of the embodied mind (or soma, in Shusterman’s terminology), then we can understand and appreciate the mutual entanglement of the mental and the physical that characterizes the experience of our musical performances as guitarists, bassists, pianists, saxophonists, and drummers.

This strong emphasis on the dimension of mental involvement and (embodied) mindfulness must *not* lead us to totally exclude the existence of some aspects in our practice of musical instruments that are characterized by a certain level of automation. For example, in the specific case of drumming, it is reasonable to argue that once the musician acquires a certain level of familiarity with basic patterns like the so-called drum rudiments (namely, techniques like single strokes, double strokes, paradiddles, flams, etc.), they can be practiced in a quasi-automatic way by his/her limbs; namely, *as if* the drummer’s hands and feet had internalized the somatic know-how that is required to perform those patterns, *seemingly* without thought. Expert players, then, are capable of applying those techniques not only to the snare drum (on which drum rudiments are usually practiced) but also to the whole drum kit, fluently and creatively distributing the various notes and

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23 With this concept of ‘resonance’, it can be interesting to refer to [Ryan and Gallagher \(2020\)](#), who adopt as their starting point the general idea that ‘the brain resonates with the world instead of representing it’ (2020: 2). They then turn their attention to the analysis of music experience: more precisely, to ‘a particular case of what happens in the brains, bodies and environments of musicians during music performance’ (2020: 6), specifically choosing ‘heavily improvised performance practice as [their] case study’ and exploring ‘the concept of resonance and its possible role in understanding the dynamical processes of brain-body-environment’ ([Ryan and Gallagher 2020](#): 7, 11). I am grateful to the second reviewer who anonymously evaluated my article for this bibliographic suggestion.

accents on the entire set that may include bass drums, tom toms, floor toms, rototoms, bells, cymbals, etc., thus creating fascinating combinations of sound textures during a musical performance.

The existence of this quasi-automatic functioning, which happens with the process of learning drum rudiments, is *not* incompatible with sophisticated conceptions of our (embodied) mindfulness like the ones that we can find in Bruford's and Gallagher's theories of performance. As observed by Gallagher, the concept of mind, if opportunely rethought from an embodied and enactive perspective, may well include 'action-oriented, sensory-motor processes' (2021: 36). However, a careful analysis of 'motoric processes', especially in the context of complex actions like those required by musical performances, shows that these processes are 'smart, not-so-automatic, and attuned to the particular situation in ways that are not automatic' (Gallagher 2021: 36), or at least not so automatic as one might be inclined to think *prima facie*. According to Gallagher's theory of performance, which strongly aligns with Bruford's investigation of the art of drumming, 'the expert player is *not* on automatic pilot' (2021: 37, emphasis added). In expert performances 'there may not be time for measured reflection', and some motoric processes may take place in a seemingly quasi-automatic way, but this 'does *not* imply mindlessness' (2021: 38, emphasis added), at least in the emphatic meaning of this term, which may problematically suggest a complete absence of thought during the musical performance.<sup>24</sup>

Nonetheless, there has been a certain tendency in recent music culture and theories of performance to develop a 'conception of drumming as "mindless"', which, according to Bruford, must be connected to 'the context of the low status of drummers' and largely depends on 'the corrosive influence of the [drum] culture's organizing ideology' (2018: 133, 135). As Bruford critically notes, 'several aspects of the shared [musical] ideology act as cultural identifiers, reinforcing distinctions between the culture of drummers and other instrumentalists' (2018: 133). Such aspects, for Bruford, 'may, in part, be the source of Western music culture's perceived predisposition against the "rhythmatist"' (2018: 133). In a philosophically stimulating and challenging way, Bruford notes that the

historical insistence that notions of aesthetics, [disembodied] mind, harmony, and the intellect are superior to hedonism, body, rhythm, and the 'natural' [...] has become embedded in a drum ideology [...] buried deep in 19<sup>th</sup>-century primitivism myth. We can trace this view back to René Descartes and the 17<sup>th</sup>-century dualist notion of the 'mind/body split'. Simon Frith traces how the equation of 'serious' with the mind and high culture, and 'fun' with the body and thus low culture, became established in the United States and Europe in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. (2018: 133)

It is not difficult to establish a connection between Bruford's observations, in this quotation above, and Shusterman's idea that the traditional objections that have been raised

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24 At a terminological and conceptual level it is important to note that, in the context of Gallagher's theory of performance, terms like 'pre-reflective' are *not* merely identical to 'mindless' or 'selfless', just as concepts like 'habitual' or 'attuned' are *not* simply synonymous of 'fully automatic' (2021: 48).

against the popular arts largely depend on the fact that ‘critics of popular culture are loath to recognize that there are humanly worthy and aesthetically rewarding activities other than intellectual exertion’ (Shusterman 2000: 183). For Shusterman, the most typical indictments against the popular arts (including pop music) betray a ‘simplistic conflation of all legitimate activity with serious thinking, of “any effort” with “mental effort” of the intellect’, thus failing to recognize that in the wide and plural field of aesthetic experiences, there are also ‘other, more somatic forms of effort, resistance, and satisfaction’ (Shusterman 2000: 183–4). Shusterman highlights the example of rock music, as he states:

Rock songs are typically enjoyed through moving, dancing, and singing along with the music, often with such vigorous efforts that we break a sweat and eventually exhaust ourselves. [...] Clearly, on the somatic level, there is much more effortful activity in the appreciation of rock than in that of high-brow music [...]. The term ‘funky’, used to characterize and commend many rock songs, derives from an African word meaning ‘positive sweat’ and is expressive of an African aesthetic of vigorously active and communally impassioned engagement rather than dispassionate judgmental remoteness. The much more energetic and kinesthetic response evoked by rock exposes the fundamental passivity of the traditional aesthetic attitude of disinterested, distanced contemplation – a contemplative attitude that has its roots in the quest for philosophical and theological knowledge rather than pleasure, for individual enlightenment rather than communal interaction or social change. Popular arts like rock thus suggest a radically revised aesthetic with a joyous return of the somatic dimension which philosophy has long repressed to preserve its own hegemony (through that of the intellect) in all realms of human value.

(Shusterman 2000: 184)

## 5.

In conclusion, by drawing upon enactive aesthetics and somaesthetics, it is possible to argue that a philosophical investigation into the art of drumming showcases the problematic character of certain aesthetic categories that result from dichotomous distinctions, like the one between the body and the mind. This dualism has played a fundamental role in modern epistemology and metaphysics by exerting a powerful influence into what we may call a traditional concept of the mind as a supposedly disembodied entity (a concept that, however, recent approaches in the fields of philosophy, psychology, and cognitive science have convincingly put into question). As we can learn from authors such as Bruford, Gallagher, and Shusterman, the implications of the body/mind separation have *not* left untouched the field of aesthetic experiences, including musical performances.

For Bruford, the ‘musical dichotomy of aesthetic/mind versus hedonistic/body’ results in an understanding of ‘bodily responses’ as brainless or ‘mindless, now a term of disparagement’: the brain, connected to intellectual understanding and understood as higher, ‘came to be associated with art music’, whereas ‘brainlessness’ (i.e., lack of intellectual content and mere bodily enjoyment, understood as lower) became associated

‘with popular music’ (2018: 134). It is precisely in the field of pop music and jazz that drums, as a modern musical instrument, were invented and then flourished. In the particular case of jazz, relying on insights offered by the jazz historian and critic Ted Gioia, Bruford connects purely aesthetic considerations with socio-political observations about racist prejudices and Eurocentric discriminations, observing that

the French intellectual view of the ‘primitive’, the myth of the ‘noble savage’, meant that jazz was heard as emotionally charged but largely devoid of intellectual content [...]. African music [was] held to be more ‘primitive’ or ‘natural’ than European music, [...] *more in touch with the body* – the difference between the two being *the emphasis on rhythm*. By such a racist and convoluted ideological route has the Western kit drummer thus become imbued with the *primitive*, the *sexual*, and the *mindless*. (2018: 134; emphasis added)

Against a backdrop characterized by the aforementioned problems, the positive implications of embodied and mindful approaches to the aesthetics of performance, like those offered by somaesthetics and enactive aesthetics (fully coherent, as I have said, with an approach like Bruford’s, due to their common Deweyan background), are manifold and significant. In this context, Bruford’s (2018: 135) claim that ‘the conception of drumming as “mindless” [must] be revisited’ is consistent with Gallagher’s detailed critique of certain conceptions of performance as ‘mindless’ or ‘selfless’, in favour of a different perspective that is capable to unite a strong focus on mindfulness with an equal emphasis on embodiment. As I have tried to show, on the one hand, theoretical approaches like enactive aesthetics and somaesthetics are useful to investigate various forms of performance, including musical performance and, in particular, the practice of specific musical instruments. On the other hand, the practice of playing musical instruments (like the art of drumming, in this case) can offer useful examples and stimuli for a philosophical investigation of performance.

Although Gallagher examines ‘various forms of performance’ (2021: 62), including sport, dance, music for string quartet, various kinds of performance art, and acting (2021: 35–6, 44, 49–51, 62, 83–4, 99 ff.), he does *not* mention music for percussion instruments, which often involve the component of embodiment in particular ways. Drumming represents an important case study that can be added to Gallagher’s examples of enactive theories of performance. As noted by Martin Rosenberg, ‘*different instruments have agency in shaping the spatial cognition and proprioceptive behavior of the individual musicians in startlingly different ways*’ (Rosenberg 2019; cited by Gallagher in 2021: 50; emphasis added). From this point of view, a study of the musical practice of drumming from an enactivist perspective (of which the present article is only a first step, in a sense) can represent a potential expansion of a theory of embodied and mindful performance like Gallagher’s, also in terms of a detailed study of both the affinities and the diversities between the musical practice of different instruments.

As I explained at the beginning of my article, the case of drums (in the sense of the modern jazz/rock drum kit, as I said) can be especially intriguing, because of the particular way in which this musical instrument—usually consisting of an assemblage of different percussions, various cymbals, etc.—requires a synchronized use of all our hands

and feet, which can arrive at great levels of complexity especially in polyrhythmic or even polymetric music.<sup>25</sup> The art of drumming requires the capability to incorporate and unite ‘many rhythms in one body’, following Stewart Copeland’s aforementioned formulation. On this basis, beside the examples of other musical instruments, like piano, that Gallagher takes into examination in his enactive inquiry into performance (2021: 39–40), the art of drumming represents an interesting case study to investigate the coordinated functioning of all our limbs together and, at the same time, our mental involvement during the musical performance (on the basis of a fully embodied conception of the human mind). As Gallagher observes in a passage of *Performance/Art* specifically dedicated to music, when we think about music and the relation between the musicians during the performance, what emerges—from the perspective of an enactive approach to the aesthetics of performance—is the ‘conception of the meshed architecture’ that incorporates various factors, in which

ecological, normative, cultural and intersubjective aspects of physical and social environment, including physical and social affordances, play a role. As one engages in a particular performance one’s agency (or sense of agency) may be modulated by affect but also by the quality and quantity of affordances available. The musical instruments, the performance space, and the music itself can shape the musical performance. Just as we incorporate tools and instruments into our body schema, in musical performance we incorporate our instruments so that body-schematic processes add to the music itself as mediated *via* movement on the instrument. But it also goes the other way: material engagement with the instruments elicit specific kind of movements, and the music moves us; it is something that engages the body schema through its links to rhythm, material resonance, muscle, movement, and action.

(2021: 50)

A detailed study of the ‘somatic style’ of different drummers (as part of what is truly distinctive of their diverse musical styles) is aligned with Gallagher’s enactive approach to the aesthetics of musical performance. In reference to the role of ‘somatic styles’ in the art of drumming, it can be noted that

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25 On this difference, see the remarks of Theodore Gracyk: ‘African drumming is characterized by polymeters. While rock music is normally polyrhythmic, it is almost never polymetric. Western musical language is so impoverished with respect to rhythm that this distinction does not even appear in many specialized dictionaries of music. [...] Most African drumming is polymetric, creating contrapuntal cross-rhythms, and not merely polyrhythmic. [...] In short, the distinct rhythms of a polyrhythm share the same meter. In a polymeter they do not. [...] True polymeters dropped out of the music in the African journey to America. The democratized beat and its polyrhythms were retained (Gracyk 1996: 143-4)’.  
Of course, if pop-rock music is ‘almost never polymetric’, as Gracyk notes, there are important exceptions in this genre that testify the presence of a polymetric structure and organization of the musical performance, as in the case of compositions by Frank Zappa, King Crimson, Soft Machine, and various bands in sophisticated forms of progressive rock or sometimes also heavy metal.

different musical styles in [...] drumming, as exhibited and displayed especially in improvisations, are indeed not only revealing of different technical skills, different aesthetic choices and taste preferences in the use of certain cymbals or drums, different shades and nuances in the application of single- or double-stroke rolls, paradiddles, single- or doublebass drum pedal techniques, and all other ‘rudiments’ for drumming, but are also revealing of different ‘somatic styles’ [...]. Consider also how much the distinct drum styles of various drummers enrolled in a certain band in different years are also connected to, and reflected by, their dissimilar somatic styles; and how much, this, in turn, can influence the entire band’s practices of musical composition and performance at various levels. [...] Finally, consider how relevant and striking, eye-catching, impossible-to-pass-unnoticed is the connection between the purely musical dimension of drumming and its somatic dimension on the occasion of drum duets starring musicians characterized by heterogeneous styles.

(Marino 2019: 34; the notion of ‘somatic style’ is borrowed from Shusterman 2011b)

Finally, it is important to mention that applying enactivism or somaesthetics to the investigation of drumming can be relevant *both* at a purely theoretical level (e.g. with reference to the possibility of a more adequate and detailed understanding of the phenomenology of processes that actually happen during a musical performance) *and*, at the same time, also at a practical, ethical, and existential level. A theory of creative performances like Bruford’s can lead to a development of a clearer and more accurate conception of the nature of drumming as a form of embodied and mindful musical performance. This can improve a drummer’s self-understanding of their own unique musical practice, which extends more generally to anyone belonging to the ‘drum culture’ and the music community.<sup>26</sup>

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26 To Giovanni and Richard: For everything you have taught me about pragmatism and the philosophy of mind.  
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