



Experience, Body, and the Spontaneous Moment:
A Meditation upon Virtuosity and Its Possibilities for All of Us¹

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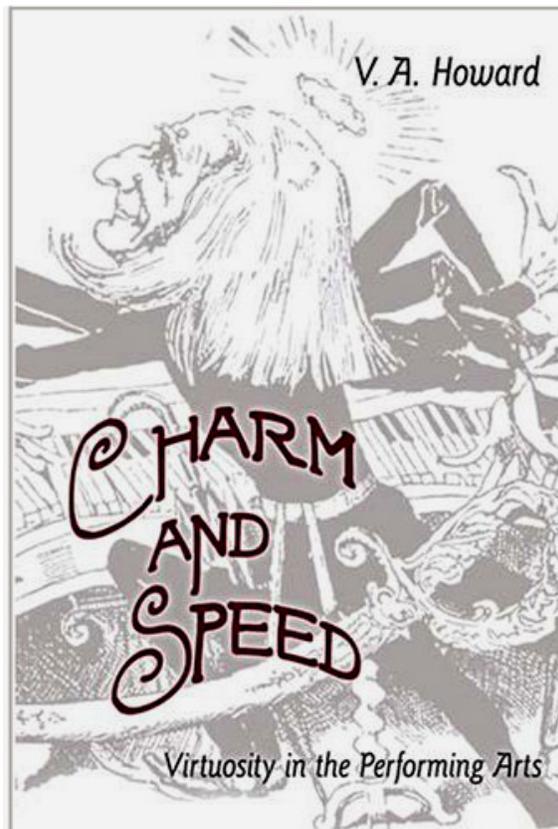
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In the Western world, we remain under the spell of the 17th Century French philosopher, René Descartes. In his now infamous assertion (“Cogito ergo sum” – “I think, therefore I am”) we continue to pay the price for his privileging of his mind over all physical reality as he seeks the one fact (which he concludes is that he is thinking) of which he might have no doubt that he knew it. What is the meaning of this “fact?” All material experience, including the body, is to be doubted because our senses can deceive us. Thus what we know cannot come from that which can deceive. Only the fact “I am knowing” is sure and this fact is established by the fact that I am, at every moment, having thoughts about the world. Thought is the only venue for indubitable truth and the “I” who I am (my existence) is non-corporeal for even the thinker’s corporeal self is an object of his/her unreliable senses and, thus, is neither real, firm, nor trustworthy. Of course, Descartes may have expressed this but he did not originate the basis for the idea. That basis comes from Plato. (Alfred North Whitehead once asserted that all of philosophy is merely a footnote to Plato.) For Plato, truth, the desired end of all

knowledge quests, can never be found in material existence since truth equals an eternal, stable, never-changing state of affairs and material existence is the exact opposite: always changing and always unstable. The truth seeker's task is to discover the unchanging essences that underlie all this changeable experience. From this perspective, we are now not just interested in Descartes' seeking of the warrant for truth and eventuating in a knowing self but we are interested in what constitutes truth about any and all knowledge of any object, action or idea we encounter. This truth comes in only one form: correct ideas about "reality." In fact, only ideas are real. All else is illusion (when it comes to truth). In parallel fashion many religious traditions have held a similar perspective found in their notions of a life beyond this material life (a spiritual metaphysics that is an analogue to the Platonic metaphysics). Present existence is not the place of fulfillment. Only the next world, which escapes this world, is the world to which we should aspire and toward which we bend all our activities now, so that we may, then, gain (earn) our place in that better "world" (world in quotes because, unlike this world, it is not material and has no flux or flaws). This is the world of truth.



In all these cases we privilege what cannot be experienced (thought, essences, a world past this world) and what can be experienced is characterized as the ever-difficult world of the here and now, replete with messiness, confusion and untrustworthiness. In this world of dross the body's status is especially compromised, being the seat of sensation and, simultaneously, being material. To gain true knowledge and bypass the error-filled dispositions of bodily experience, such experience must be distilled, purified and made "true" through correct thought (whether of rational or faith-based kind), must be cleansed of the contamination of the empirical, sensual or emotional. It does not matter whether or not the rational or faith-based conclusions are corroborated in experience. The discerned truth is "true" because I have used the correct mental processes for achieving such knowledge.

I lay out this terrain because the book about to be discussed is grounded in this privileging of mind over materiality including the body and this privileging has such a long history and is so deeply embedded in the present psyche that it possesses the status

of common sense and naturalness. It is difficult for us to think outside or against this perspective or even notice it. V.A. Howard's book is no exception. In *Charm and Speed: Virtuosity in the Performing Arts* we find a book about virtuosity in the performing arts designed to clarify what virtuosity is and what it is not and what this means for the practice and study of the performing arts and for education in the performing arts. These tasks are pursued through what I term a "distanced approach." By this is meant: treating virtuosity as a topic to understand, as a matter for intellectual work. Professor Howard's project isn't designed to understand virtuosity from the inside, from what it is like to embody it and feel it but, rather, to understand it from the outside: what we see when we encounter a virtuosic performance and the terms under which we know it to be as such. As he puts it at the outset:

My heuristic aim [in this book] is to outline the rudiments of a conceptual grid within which theorists, scientists, critics and practitioners may locate their particular insights and findings and thus speak *to* rather than past each other (even in disagreement) or at cross purposes. By clarifying what it means in a given art form to be a virtuoso and how the idea of virtuosity changes and evolves with artistic developments and tastes over time, I hope to improve both its theoretical and practical applicability in the performing arts.

This passage alerts us to the underlying cultural assumptions that mental understanding leads to improved practice *and* the mind leads the body, such assumptions directly depending upon the above outlined grounding ideas. The irony is that as the performing arts involve the body and the body often actually leads the performance in profound ways (to be described later in this essay), these privileging dualisms have some problems, the solutions to which are entertaining robustly the notion that the body might, in some ways, provide important knowledge. Such leading can guide us in pursuing virtuosity and enabling some improvement of both understanding and practice and, as will be argued, more importantly, may provide important understandings for those who are not "virtuosos." As a focus of analysis, I will try to show the places in Professor Howard's text where knowing from the inside of the body as body breaks through the text. I shall also show the ways in which flux, in the form of improvisation in the arts, provides a valid venue for discovery and for assessing what counts as knowledge. Further, I will open up the question of whether virtuosity belongs exclusively to the performing arts and what it might mean to see it otherwise. I will, of course, assess the assertions upon which Professor Howard does ground his arguments. By providing these varied responses to the text I hope to be both in critical and friendly conversation with Professor Howard's text and to offer a meditation upon experience, body, and the spontaneous moment.

We should begin with how Professor Howard goes about his task. He examines virtuosity through a mixture of philosophic traditions. There is some work done in

concept clarification à la analytic philosophy (the parsing of everyday usage), some historical work at tracing the evolution of the idea, some presenting of other philosophers' viewpoints on various topics with his responses to those analytic perspectives and some portrayal of experiences accompanied with analysis of those experiences. As I read the text, I found that this mixture did not always help in achieving the kind clarity that Professor Howard seeks. While clarity is not necessarily the mark of a high quality analysis, some measure of clear “through-theme” accomplished by adjudicating not only between various construals (as he does) but, also, between the employed philosophic traditions would have been helpful in accomplishing Professor Howard's goals.

In the first chapter, Professor Howard presents both some parsing of dictionary definitions and some presentation of the history of the concept. The attempt is to pare away the merely accidental from that which is core to the concept of virtuosity. He attempts this through, as he puts it, a logical analysis of the concept. He makes particular use of Nelson Goodman's distinction between *autographic* and *allographic* art and this distinction is usefully employed throughout the text. *Autographic art*, Professor Howard informs us, is that art “where a particular history of production or provenance is required to establish authenticity. To be *Guernica*, or any of the sketch studies towards that work, requires that each and every one of them be executed by the hand of Picasso.” (p. 6). The actual work stands alone and is not in need of performances to make sense of it. Indeed, the only performance that counts is the original performance. It matters not the history of the work's reception. The major attribute is the work's uniqueness in the world (there is only one of them). (This notion must, however, be brought under some question. Robert Rauschenberg, many years ago, challenged this notion by copying in exacting detail one of his own paintings and challenging viewers to determine which was the original and therefore, ostensibly the one truly creative act. Certainly there was a virtuosic performance involved in order to recreate a canvas so faithfully as to make them virtually indistinguishable from each other.) *Allographic art*, on the other hand, is where a work of art “is established by the existence of a score, script, text, or notation.” (p. 5) It is here, according to Professor Howard, that we find the ascription of virtuosity to be pertinent. For Professor Howard, Picasso could not be deemed a virtuoso with the paint brush because he is not interpreting the directions of an artist but is the artist himself. This assertion is based, primarily, on the attachment of the term in everyday use to performances, rather than products.

This distinction, however, runs into some trouble, even in Professor Howard's own account of the distinction. For one, he notes that there are occasions in which the creator of a work of art and the virtuoso who performs the art are one in the same person. He finds it difficult to tease apart these two roles wrapped in one person. Nevertheless, even in the face of this difficulty he privileges interpretation of scores, scripts, and choreography over the making of the same, using the distinction between *autographic* and *allographic*. The dilemma with this perspective becomes most apparent with

Professor Howard's introduction into his discussion of the *performing* art of jazz. He notes that jazz is based not on a written score interpreted by a performer but on the jazz musician creating the music in the immediacy of the moment. Given his distinction between virtuosity and creativity, the question obtains: Is the jazz musician a creator (and therefore not a virtuoso) or a virtuoso (and, therefore, not a creator)? Certainly we think of the jazz musician as a performer whose performances are not fixed in notation (thus *autographic*) although they might be as someone transcribes the performance into notation that is reproducible for others to play as the jazz artist played it (thus *allographic*). Ultimately, since this particular performance is unique in just the way a painting is unique, the jazz musician cannot be considered to be a virtuoso (her/his work is *autographic* and, thus, by definition, not virtuosic).

We need a closer look at the improvisational art practiced in the performing arts. In the case of the jazz musician, there is a range of options as to his/her version/vision of the music. In some cases there is a novel vision of the music so far distant from the original musical impetus (perhaps a well-known theme from someone else's oeuvre) that the originating theme is unrecognizable. On other occasions we will continue to hear, quite clearly, the originating motif which fulfills the *autographic* image of art as the jazz artist plays with the ideas in the motif that only work because we are aware of the motif with which the jazz artist is working. What we can see in this example is that the jazz artist is both kinds of art all at once and at every moment. And, yet, many are willing to talk about jazz artists as virtuosos in their particular domains.

An excursion into the notion of "score" (a musical term) may help clarify the dilemmas. I shall do this through examining it with a non-arts example. When you go food shopping you may write down a shopping list. A shopping list is a form of a "score" as it is a set of instructions on how to perform the act of shopping. There are many variants on this form of a score. You may, as some people will do, write the list in the order of the store organization so as to make the visit efficient. You will, then, in a monocular fashion, move through the store buying only that which is on your list. This is using a score exactly as written with no emendations, flourishes, ad hoc moments. On the other hand, you may have the self-same shopping list but, now, you allow yourself to notice other items not on the list which, based on your criteria for shopping, you may buy (because they are a good bargain or you had forgotten that you needed that item). Now you are using the score (the shopping list) more loosely although the guidance of the list still dominates. You may, on the other hand, create a shopping list that is not in the order of the store organization and may simply be a list of items as they have come to mind. Now you may, perhaps, more freely wander the store, creating an itinerary that flows with the list but is not controlled by the list. You may buy some items, not buy others, add to the list, and so forth and move through the store in a more or less ad hoc manner. Lastly, you may have no shopping list at all and simply wade in to find what you will and create a shopping experience that is guided only by what presents itself to your

imagination, what pleases you (an emotional response to the possibilities) but the choices you make are always from within a restricted set of items known and available to you based on your cultural and personal dispositions. There will be a pattern to your buying but the pattern is emergent rather than pre-set (as with the usual understanding of the word “score”). You feel your way through the event and are sensitive to the changing dynamics of seeing, sensing, and choosing. All this in a shopping list that is only a variant on the theme of improvisation.

What has been described as regards a shopping list equally applies to the jazz musician or improvisational dancer. These artists will not do just any thing but will draw from experience and previous knowledge to provide recognition of pivot moments and moments of shaping what is emerging and, even, noticing something new because it is outside the usual repertoire. They will be guided by what feels right at that very moment and follow the emerging and evolving feeling tone of the event. They will just know when they are right and it is not a rational knowing. (This understanding stems from my own experience as a dance artist, who presented, with a partner, whole evenings of improvisational dance.) Dancers who present improvisational dance rarely begin with scores but perform free improvisations from the beginning. Their skill is centered on their abilities to seize an offered movement theme, to recognize its potential with their compatriots and form a dance full blown from their minds and bodies and not from a score. From the body the dance flows outward in concert with the mind. Sometimes the mind marvels at what the body is offering. I recall a dance improvisation I performed two years ago that began with a gesture (my hand moving forward with the palm up followed by a leaning of my body) which was danced over and over again but with variations in space occupied, direction in which the gesture was offered, moving through space (in all directions including vertically), a variety of dynamics, then expanded into other movements that clearly had their genesis in that first “simple” movement, a return to the initial movement and re-new-development as an improvisational “abstract narrative” structure evolved over the course of the dance. All these variations and developments conspired to show me something about the “topic” of the dance which, as it turned out, was a begging dance: begging for attention, begging for alms, begging of multiple sorts, but all begging. I had no intention, at the outset, of a “begging” theme being present or occurring, but it did and I followed it and built a dance around its simplicity that was offered to me as my movements presented me with the opportunities of development coupled with what I know about such improvisational work. Where did the mind and the body leave off from each other? This is impossible to say but I know that what was “learned” was not a product of my mental intentionality. I do know that the audience was “with me” on this (known by later audience report), experienced that something was unfurling in front of them that was formed and yet the form was not pre-planned and yet felt “right” to them.

This description is offered as a way of showing that the body, as the simultaneous

leader with the noticing mind, teaches us something about virtuosity: the ability to pay close attention in a sustained and concentrated manner such that what the viewer experiences is the dance unspooling before her/his eyes, perceiving it as flowing out “naturally”, almost as if it were pre-planned, choreographed when, in fact, there were no plans but only the moment at hand. This ability to produce what appears to be a finished work of art that can never be repeated (thus *autographic*) but was not designed ahead of time may be a form of virtuosity.² However, given Professor Howard's account of virtuosity, he seemingly cannot allow this into its circle. It seems to this reviewer that such exclusions miss the understanding of virtuosity as “doing something with great skill such that the skill disappears and only what is meant is present (although entirely reliant on skill and intention)”. This is my summation of what I take to be virtuosity and, on the whole, I would argue it is Professor Howard's as well, as we shall see at the end of this review when I show how he, at last, portrays the experience of virtuosity.

The problem with Professor Howard's approach is this. Given his focus on how the term is used in everyday ways (as one key to what is core) and given that he acknowledges that we attach the term to performances and, given that what has been described are certainly *allographic* performances, and yet they are also *autographic* creations, the separation of creativity from performance does not seem to work well for it cannot account for a whole range of performances available to performing artists. I do not feel that Professor Howard's distinction between the creative act and the performative act necessarily serves his analysis well.

To Professor Howard's credit, he appears to be uncomfortable with it himself. He indicates that his decision is based on a favoring of what he terms the “empirical” warrant for such a distinction because it is easier to see and credit virtuosity than to see and credit creativity. In presenting his position he discusses the work of Howard Gardner and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. Gardner attempts, of course, to establish the reality of various intelligences through logic. Csikszentmihalyi establishes his warrant for creativity through a nodal analysis of observable behavior such that an act can be deemed creative to the degree that it exhibits three nodes of behavior all at once. Howard proceeds to write,

I am inclined to adapt Csikszentmihalyi's and Gardner's 'nodal' approach to creativity to the study of virtuosity. Such an approach assists us in focusing not only on the logical whereabouts but on the observable details of virtuosity in performance. To put it another way, I am more in tune with Csikszentmihalyi's empirically grounded approach to how judgments of creativity get made than with Gardner's quest for an overall 'theory' of creativity, let alone of virtuosity. (p. 18)

This reveals that Professor Howard has made more of a strategic move than a move based on analysis. It is, simply, too difficult to parse the distinction logically and, so, he will allow for behavioral evidence to stand in as the warrant for his choice to separate

creativity from virtuosity. While we can certainly agree with him as to the difficulty in determining when an act is “creative” and when it is not, this does not solidify or “prove” the point. Once again, the choice of distinction does not appear to be particularly well established.

Professor Howard's distinctions go beyond determining virtuosity as a separate category from creativity. He also attempts to locate virtuosity only in certain areas of performances and not others. Of course the subtitle of his book is *Virtuosity in the Performing Arts*, so his restriction of virtuosity to the performing arts is not unexpected. It is not his restriction to the performing arts that is the problem but, rather, the absolute manner in which he makes his choice. Rather than presenting the performing arts as just one venue for the display of virtuosity, he makes it the only venue. It is perfectly understandable if he should wish to focus on that arena in which he has the most experience (having been a singer of classical music who has both performed and studied in the area). However, making the performing arts the exclusive domain of virtuosity derails his arguments from being of greater use educationally. Had he been willing to see performing arts virtuosity as simply a species of virtuosity, his ideas might have wider application (which I believe they do) and, therefore make his theses of greater importance. I will play out the ways in which he goes about his narrowing of the scope and, simultaneously, point to the ways in which he actually undermines his own assertion of exclusivity. I will argue that this does not serve his project well as he misses important venues that might provide new insights. He has drawn too firm boundaries that are, in any event, not clearly warrantable.

Professor Howard begins, at the outset of the book, with the image of the cheetah, one of nature's great hunters. He avers that the cheetah is an example of what might be taken to be virtuosic but this cannot be the case, for obvious reasons: we tend to attach the word to human activity that is conscious of itself, rather than driven by finely honed instincts. He then makes the argument that our usual image of virtuosity, “anything of perceived superlative achievement” (p.1) (paralleling my above proffered definition) is also incorrect since it can be applied to many kinds of performances that have nothing to do with art. He notes, pejoratively, that he “once heard a surgeon describe a colleague as 'a virtuoso with a scalpel.’” (p. 2) A bit further along he writes, “Performers and performances vary greatly, ranging from political and business performances to musical and other artistic performances. What distinguishes the latter, I submit, is that the performance is *of* a work, specifically a work of art.” (p. 5) Professor Howard provides no further reasons for focusing upon the performing arts. He does not tell us why he rules out political performances or business performances or, for that matter, the performances of an adept psychotherapist or a gifted car mechanic. Their only deficit is that such people are not performing works of art.

I would argue that Professor Howard's narrowing of his scope to the performing arts exclusively has a higher price to pay than merely not seeming well-warranted and

that, in a sense, he may also feel that his narrowing is problematic. How else to explain the fact that, although he wants to retain virtuosity for performing artists, he decides to allow into the area teachers of performers (and teachers of any subject matter). He does this in Chapter 5 “Teachers, Texts, and Collaborators”, in which he attempts to make room for the teacher as a virtuoso in her/his practice. He writes, “The parallels between teaching and artistic performance remain provocative enough to suggest that cautious comparisons may illuminate aspects of teaching at its best and of what it takes to teach the exceptional learner in virtually any domain.” (p. 52) We may legitimately ask why he would make room for the teacher but not for the therapist. Cannot it not be the case that the therapist can display a performance (with a patient) that carries the kind of amazing insights and choosing of just the right therapeutic modalities deployed at just the right moment to achieve a significant outcome for the patient? What of the incredibly adept politician who knows how to speak to a group of disparate interests and yet make each person in the group feel as if the politician is speaking directly to him or her and to no one else's interests? Are these not deployments of the kinds of conscious performances Howard would restrict to the arts? In another place than here (Blumenfeld-Jones, forthcoming) I develop the argument that Gardner, in choosing exemplars to represent bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, tends to follow the icons of the area to the detriment of actually understanding what is actually significant about bodily-kinesthetic intelligence. In like fashion, by restricting virtuosity to the performing arts, Professor Howard loses sight of the very interesting ways in which virtuosity might be present and we could witness various modalities of virtuosity. The therapist, in needing to be alert to his patient's immediate state, must tailor, on the fly, a therapeutic practice that draws from all s/he knows about various techniques and understandings that could, potentially, be of help here. What might we learn about virtuosity from such a practice? The politician who can truly lead has a kind of virtuosic magic in her/his political practice that draws out the best in others. Again, what might we learn about virtuosity by understanding what the politician does and how s/he does it.

In both these cases (the therapist and the politician) there are two notable characteristics. First, neither individual came upon her/his skills natively (that is, born fully developed in this area), thus education comes into play. (Professor Howard is aware of this as he devotes a chapter to education.) Second, both individuals are working “on the fly”, improvisationally. (Given my discussion, above, of improvisation and its seeming excision from the pantheon of acceptable performances, it may be clear as to why Professor Howard cannot include the performances of these kinds as well as the surgeon's: all are done improvisationally, even the highly scripted politician some of whose best moments are when s/he is with the people and acts spontaneously and in an unrehearsed manner.) I would argue that by restricting virtuosity to the adept reproduction of another's ideas (and, of course, an interpretation of those ideas such that new dimensions may be revealed that were, heretofore, unknown) Professor Howard

misses one of the most important characteristics of virtuosity: spontaneity. It is the freshness and the immediacy of the virtuosic performance that lends such a performance some of its ability to persuade and sway. If the performance is perceived as mechanical or manipulative (the mechanisms are revealed during the performance), then the receiver of the performance will not “feel” the event in a way that draws out meanings and new meanings. S/he will be stopped at the door of meaning to only admire the workmanship of the door. I believe that Professor Howard recognizes this as there are hints of this understanding in the book but it is not well-developed. Allowing, first improvisation, and second, other venues for virtuosity in, Professor Howard's analysis would benefit from a much more robust understanding of the nature of virtuosity. (Of course, as I have already pointed out, he does not keep non-performing arts practices out of the discussion, pointing toward teachers at some length and briefly suddenly allowing politicians and business people back in momentarily. This is an example of the deconstructive adage that the repressed always find a way of returning.)

What can be said of Professor Howard's portrayal of virtuosity itself? I noted at the outset that occasionally the body broke through the text to reveal that the body may and, perhaps, ought to be given the lead in understanding. In Chapter 6 “Charisma, Physicality, and the Art of Characterization”, such a breakthrough occurs as Professor Howard begins to capture some of what it is like to perform. In his description he finds that the virtuosity performance aspires to a transcendent experience whose dimensions even elude the performer. In associating charisma (defined by Professor Howard as “favour”, “grace”, and “a commanding presence,” p. 61) with virtuosity he notes that it is ephemeral and yet crucial for understanding virtuosity. (p. 62) Further he notes that “the body shapes the mind in performance” (p. 67). Given the lead focus on the mind, here is a place in which the body cannot be kept out of the conversation although it only breaks through briefly. As Professor Howard continues in this chapter, writing of the ways in which the dancer, for instance, must stay aware of all the technique available to perform the dance (a mechanical concern) while transcending technique to achieve the dance, he alerts us to this notion of transcendence as the *sine qua non* of virtuosity.

From my own experience (not claiming virtuosity for myself but claiming having had some of the kinds of transcendent experiences to which Professor Howard refers), there are those moments on stage when the dance takes over the dancer and, once completed, the dancer stands in wonderment as s/he will say, “I know I danced that dance but it didn't feel like I was dancing at all. It almost happened without me but not in an automatic way but in a way that I knew that performance transcended the moment itself.” One will find that the audience feels identically about what they have just witnessed. They can recognize that something quite special has just occurred. Of course, such occurrences aren't mere accidents. The artist has labored long and hard, for many years, so that such a moment is available because of the intersection of developed technique with spontaneous insight and moving the dance to a level in which it feels as if it unfolds

entirely naturally, just as one would be speaking with someone without thinking about speaking and what is said surprises, in a good way, the speaker. It is difficult to convey the experience of such moments but it seems that the virtuosic performance has this quality. It is transcendent, not merely very adept.

Even in the case where such transcendence has not occurred, the highly adept performer (dare we call all such adepts “virtuosos”?) can be counted on to produce a performance of great quality. The fine dancer is one who can always achieve a level of performance that “works” well, that is strong, clear, communicative, and moving and recognized as being powerful. This situation produces a question: are all such performers, who function at a sustained high level, virtuosos? Professor Howard’s text doesn’t help us determine whether there is a distinction to be made. This situation seems to make it difficult to determine that “virtuosity” is possessed by a very few, although that is usually how we use the term. However, we need not, perhaps, trouble ourselves with distinguishing between the adept professional and the virtuoso. It may be that nothing is to be gained by such a distinction being made. And yet, behind the text lurks this unaddressed difficulty.

Moving forward with our exploration of Professor Howard’s text, he does provide us with some of the descriptions of performances that can be the leverage points for understanding virtuosity from the inside. We can locate one of these descriptions in a subsection of Chapter 6 (the section titled “Some Aspects of Awareness”). In this section Professor Howard uses Michael Polanyi’s work on the “tacit dimension” to elaborate the evanescent character of any performance (whether, in the estimation of this reviewer, that performance is in the performing arts or in sport or in therapy, and so forth). Professor Howard treats his excursion into the epistemology of tacit knowing and D. C. Dennet’s discussions of awareness as a “digression into the epistemology of perceptual and physical skills.” (p. 66). Here I think he is incorrect. It is not a digression but exactly the direction we need, educationally, if we are to begin to educate toward virtuosity (as he clearly desires). He is willing to agree that, just as the “heavy machine operator’s attention extends into the shovel at the end of the mechanical arm” and the “sailor feels the ship under his feet as the focal point of his skill”, so “performing artists . . . identify with their instruments” whether those instruments are extensions of their bodies (violins, pianos, etc.) or their bodies as instruments (as in dancers and actors). (p. 66) He is willing to admit to the possibility that dancers, musicians and actors are “bodily thinkers” (p. 67) and that focal attention can be learned. Such attention is central to virtuosity. The virtuoso, more than others, has the capacity for sustained attention that can account for the whole of the system as well as the intent of the performance. (The notion of system means, for instance in music, the musician and his/her instrument as well as connections with all those in her/his environment making music. The virtuoso is able to spread her/his attention to all the elements in play at once.) This focus on tacit knowing, identification with the instrument, and a far-ranging attention to both what is occurring

and the purposes of the performance (the intent) allows us a glimpse into the “inside” of virtuosity, rather than only an intellectual understanding of what might be. This section tells us what is.

Such discussion can lead us directly to Professor Howard's education recommendations. Here, I would suggest is the heart of the matter, both the difficulty and the possibilities, for virtuosity education can have a beneficial contribution not just to the performing artist but to all of us. In Chapter 8, “Educated Shouting, Jumping, and Make-Believe”, Professor Howard presents panoply of education experiences and images. What he presents in this case (no need to rehearse the actual descriptions which you may get from reading the book) could as well be applied to any kind of learning; it is not restricted to learning to be a performing artist. His recommendations are good for everyone. Professor Howard argues that all virtuoso education must provide the budding artist with a general knowledge of her/his field of interest and must have a good focus on technique. The budding artist ought to have access to previous virtuoso performances as exemplars from which s/he might draw insights and inspiration. I ask: who would not benefit from this prescription? Clearly, anyone would. If, as he makes clear, the provision of field familiarity, strong technique development, and exposure to exemplars do not eventuate in a virtuoso performance but are only contributory to the project, then what is missing that would turn all of this into virtuosity? I would argue that the missing ingredient (which is presented in the Chapter 6 “Charisma, Physicality, and the Art of Characterization”) is a focus on developing the inner state of the budding artist, the ability to form and sustain a vision of the desired meaning and outcome of the performance and to do so with unbroken concentration.

How do we educate for the development of an inner state, a sustained vision of desired meaning and the capacity to have unbroken concentration? On the very last page of Professor Howard's book he provides the rudiments of such an education practice when he writes,

At the level of individual psyche . . . [there is] the necessity of developing a strategic vision that reaches far beyond proven talent. . . . consummate performers . . . travel with a different view . . . immerse themselves, educate themselves to the demands of their vocation in the most rigorous ways. In effect they are also consummate *thinkers* within, about, and through their bodies (and instruments) as performers [and, I would add, creators – au.]. (p. 134).

It is the immersion in the practice (any practice). It is a dedication to the whole vision of the practice (what I am trying to accomplish in this field of endeavor that brings out this practice as a fully human practice of meaning and intent). It is an ability to conceptualize a vision for *this* work of art that carries the performance into a personal authenticity for the performer that is “read” by the audience as deep concentration and constancy. Such performances enable the viewer to trust the performer and immerse him/herself in the

performance. It is studying the practice both in its separate parts (the technical details of the practice) and the ways the parts cohere into a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. It is a devotion and dedication to quality that can lead to virtuosity in any field of endeavor. These ideas, coming on the very last page of the book, could be seen as the “real” theme of the book and the book could be, perhaps, read backwards being only about these characteristics of the inner life of virtuosity. Would that Professor Howard had begun with these insights and allowed himself the scope of telling the story of the experience of virtuosity rather than take the birds-eye view that stands outside the event. Had he done so he might have been able to develop an approach that could lead us toward a more sound education not just for the virtuoso. He could have presented a model that would benefit everyone. Some of the elements for such a model are present and I would hope he might see fit to open up his analysis to larger possibilities. Such work would provide inestimable value for education in general.

Reference

Blumenfeld-Jones, D.S. (forthcoming). Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence and Dance Education: Critique, Revision, and Potentials for the Democratic Ideal. *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*.

About the Review Author

Donald Blumenfeld-Jones is Associate Professor of Ethics and Curriculum Studies at Arizona State University. He has spent nearly 40 years as a professional modern dancer. He began his dance career in New York City where he danced with the Phyllis Lamhut Dance Company, Pilobolus, and the Mimi Garrard Dance Theater. He studied with Hanya Holm, Alwin Nikolais, and Murray Louis. He continued his professional dance career while also teaching dance at Duke University, Columbia College (Columbia SC) and the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, where he earned his M.F.A. in Dance and an Ed.D. in Curriculum Studies. He was the Artistic Director of Moving South, a professional modern dance company. Additionally, in the last twenty years he has pursued a career as a dance and curriculum studies scholar. Most recently he has written “Dance and Social Science Research” for *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research* (SAGE) and “Aesthetics Consciousness and Dance Curriculum: Liberation Possibilities for Inner-City Schools” in *Encyclopedia of Urban Education* (Greenwood Press). In addition he was the curriculum consultant to the Arizona State University Department of Dance, facilitating their curriculum re-design of their entire program, both undergraduate and graduate. He continues to dance professionally on stage. Dr. Blumenfeld-Jones can be contacted at dbj@asu.edu and, by mail, at Arizona State University, P.O. Box 871411, Tempe, AZ 85287-1411.



¹ I must make a disclaimer to this review in order to situate my response to this book. I have been a professional modern dancer for more than 38 years. Generally, as I read books on performing arts, I seek accounts of the experience of the performing arts that either resonate with my own experience or bring new dimensions of experience to me. When I do not find such accounts, I tend to find my reception of a text difficult. Since, in the case of this text, Professor Howard was not seeking to render such accounts, I found this book not entirely successful for me, except for a brief time in the middle of the book where he does attempt some account of what virtuosity is like. However, I recognize that Professor Howard was not attempting such rendering and, therefore, my response to his book must be couched in terms of his project. In feeling that the book did not sufficiently portray what it is like to be a virtuoso (potentially) or teach a virtuoso or seek virtuosity or know what virtuosity is, I found an absence of a center, for me. Certainly Professor Howard performed diligent service in working through virtuosity as a concept. But from my perspective this does not, necessarily help forward knowledge. Of course, as I have noted, if this is not Professor Howard's intent it is unacceptable of me to expect it. I have attempted to set this desire aside as I assessed his text. Despite this disclaimer and the fact that he was not attempting to render the inner experience and life of the virtuoso, I would argue that he should have done so to a greater degree than he provides. I am asserting that such a rendering would help the novice reader who has no experience with the arts as well as the reader well-steeped in the arts and/or teaching in the arts or well-steeped in studying the performing arts and seeking leverages for personal understanding of her/his practice. As I will note, however, Professor Howard does make certain assertions (that remain only brief notings but deserved greater emphasis) that can actually lead to a fruitful understanding not just of virtuosity but of learning in general. In this review, however, I will attempt to stay within the bounds of Professor Howard's process as he presents it but also show places where the presented analysis either contains nascent accounts of the kind I am suggesting or could benefit from such accounts, and why. Additionally, I will be discussing the potential of his portrayal for larger education arenas.

² I am not claiming, for myself, the mantle of virtuosity. I am only claiming there are those individuals who can produce improvisatory work which is deserving of the adjective but Professor Howard would have to deny the description based on his analysis of virtuosity.



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