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Qualitative Inquiry, Reflective Practice, and Jazz Improvisation

Abstract:

This article, based on my PhD empirical study, suggests that qualitative investigations, seen as reflective practices, have much in common with – and probably much to learn from – jazz improvisational practices. The complex processes of hermeneutic understanding include laying bare the researcher's pre-understanding as well as, in the interpretation of statements, the dynamics between their holistic coherence and the agent's intentions. Through interview excerpts, the important phenomenon of *breaks in the conversational flow* is shown to have great significance to qualitative inquiry as a reflective practice, pointing to improvisational practices as relevant providers of solutions to the problematic dynamics of understanding, pre-understanding, self-understanding, and misunderstanding.

Keywords: qualitative inquiry, reflective practice, jazz, improvisation, knowledge construction

This article aims to shed light on the interrelations between life, research, and improvisation – and, in turn, on these activities as ways of reflective practice towards new knowledge. Jazz music will serve as a frame; the base and source of this attempt is an empirical investigation, by way of open-ended interviews, on how jazz musicians conceptualize their craft (Bjerstedt, 2014).

A few words ought to be said about this choice of framework. Needless to say, musical improvisation is a vast field; there are many different approaches to improvisation within jazz and several more in other kinds of music. The argument presented in this article has been inspired by my experiences from the empirical study. When I analysed my interviews with Swedish jazz performers, it occurred to me that not only was improvisation the *topic* of our talks; the reflective *processes* in which the interviewer and the interviewee indulged together were themselves improvisatory to an important extent.

I will argue that this observation may be of general interest to reflective practice. According to the views and approaches of qualitative investigations – taking their points of departure in the view of human knowledge as a constructed form of experience, a reflection of mind – knowledge, rather than constituting an object of discovery, is made. Arguably, our understanding of these investigations as reflective processes will increase if we acknowledge the roles and functions of their improvisational ingredients.

Life, research, and improvisation

Bresler (2006) states that 'life [...] requires improvisation' (p. 33). On a similar note, Bateson (1990) suggests that jazz is a suitable metaphor for life, which is an improvisatory art. Her collection of comparative biographies of five women is, in her own words, 'a book about life as an improvisatory art, about the ways we combine familiar and unfamiliar components in response to new situations, following an underlying grammar and an

evolving aesthetic' (p. 3). In a sense, then, it might be argued that any living creature would know in principle what jazz improvisation is about.

Indeed, examples from the jazz world may be quoted as corroboration of this perspective on jazz as a metaphor for life. Speaking of how bebop musicians handled and protested against the conditions of life in the racist society of the United States in the 1940s and 1950s, Gillespie and Frazer (1979/1999) employ the metaphor of musical improvisation:

Within the society, we did the same thing we did with the music. First we learned the proper way and then we improvised on that. (p. 163)

Inspired by Bateson's perspective, Oldfather and West (1994) address methodological issues in a playful attempt to shed light on the nature of qualitative inquiry through a metaphor of qualitative research as jazz. Oldfather and West point out that jazz music is characterized by its unifying structures and common body of knowledge as well as by the open-endedness of its improvisatory nature. The uniqueness of each improvisation, they hold, corresponds to the adaptive methodologies and contextually bound findings of each qualitative inquiry.

Arguably, in qualitative inquiry and reflective practice, both content and form may relate to the improvisatory arts. The suggestions put forward in this article regarding the interrelations between life, research and improvisation are based on concrete experiences from a recent empirical investigation. Focusing on the interview study with jazz musicians mentioned above (Bjerstedt, 2014), I suggest that the subject matter of that investigation and its methodology were united by their relation to improvisation, by their inherent improvisatory nature.

Importantly, Brinkmann (2013) argues that there is much to learn from interviews that contain 'misunderstandings or other breaks in the conversational flow': 'Aspects that stand out as strange may often prove to be valuable to understanding how talking about the subject matter in a specific way constructs what we may know about it' (pp. 65–66). In order to elucidate these issues further in the course of this article, I will make use of a number of interview excerpts.

Storytelling as a Conceptualization of Jazz Music

The term 'storytelling' denotes a way of conceiving of jazz improvisation through a concept that music has borrowed from the narrative arts. Jazz instrumentalists, when improvising solos, have no words at their disposal. Still, storytelling is arguably the most common prestige word in descriptions of jazz improvisation (and arguably with a much longer history there than in its function as a buzzword or catch phrase in several other contexts). In a similar fashion, it seems to be a widespread notion in jazz discourse that if jazz tells no story, it is simply no good. Clearly, though, the borrowed concept of storytelling is not used with exactly the same meanings in the field of jazz improvisation as elsewhere.

The aim of the recent investigation mentioned above (Bjerstedt, 2014) was to clarify the ways in which this concept is used by Swedish jazz practitioners; the meaning(s) they ascribe to this term; as well as the artistic and educational implications of this conceptual loan. The means to attain this was by way of open-ended interviews. This presents, analyses and discusses a few interview excerpts. From the jazz context, a number of perspectives are

extracted that may be seen as relevant and applicable to more general questions of qualitative inquiry and reflective practice.

Hermeneutics in Theory and Practice: Interpretation and All That Jazz

In order to contextualize the interview excerpts in a relevant interpretive frame, a brief overview of hermeneutic theory and practice is called for. In any theory of interpretation, the role played by the sender's intention will pose an important problem. Even those theorists who consider the text – the work, the message – to have an autonomous meaning will probably agree that this meaning necessarily depends on contextual conventions; and so, text autonomy notwithstanding, its author's intention or motives will be of relevance. The dualism of Dilthey (1883/1989, 1986) between *Verstehen* and *Erklären* is denied by several writers on hermeneutics. In their view, explanation of the causes of a text presupposes understanding it, and understanding it presupposes the explanation of its causes. There is a necessary connection, they argue, between what and why. When hermeneutics is perceived as an act of disclosure of truth (potentially including meanings, reasons, and causes), the polarization between subject and object may be dissolved. Gadamer (1960/1975), on one hand, could be said to diminish the scope of hermeneutics through his denial of the methodological claims of Dilthey; on the other hand, he clearly expands it through his view on hermeneutics as a fundamental condition of human existence. Of particular relevance to studies within the field of qualitative inquiry is Gadamer's emphasis on the dynamic, dialogical interaction between our understanding and our self-understanding, or tradition.

The understanding of a text necessitates some presupposed assumption about its nature. Gadamer calls this *Vorurteil*, prejudice. The interpretations of the individual parts of the text are determined by this presupposition. Hence, the parts will confirm the presupposition, i.e., will render the interpretive process subjective. Interpretation depends, Gadamer insists, as much on the interpreter as on that which is interpreted. Indeed, in his view, our existence in the world consists in our interpretive apprehension of the world. Our life condition is to be hermeneutic creatures. We cannot possibly recover the original meaning of a work, according to Gadamer; we can only interpret its meaning as best we can.

Truth, Gadamer (1960/1975) summarizes, is larger than the result of criteria-based judgment. His concepts of truth and understanding are holistic ones. Truth is fundamentally something that happens to us; an event in which we encounter something beyond ourselves. Following Gadamer, qualitative researchers have no other alternative than to acknowledge the inescapable condition that their own thought and understanding necessarily involve a constant interplay between themselves as interpreters and that which they attempt to interpret. Consequently, it is vital that researchers remain conscious throughout the investigation of the fact that their horizon of understanding is affected by the tradition that has shaped them.

Aspects and Themes of Interpretive Processes

Regarding hermeneutic interpretive work in practice, two perspectives in particular deserve to be highlighted:

- (i) the need for openness as a guiding principle of investigation with regard both to the way we seek information and to the way we lay bare our pre-understanding;

(ii) the complex and dynamic character of the interpretive act.

It is essential to hermeneutic practice (i) to provide explicit arguments upon which one's interpretations are founded; and (ii) to problematize one's own interpretations in a thorough and systematic fashion.

To a large extent, hermeneutic theory has been put forward with a high level of abstraction. Most, if not all, sources of hermeneutics focus on philosophical conceptions of reality rather than methods and techniques. Ödman (1971/2007) attempts to formulate in general terms a few aspects and guiding principles for hermeneutic interpretive work. One aspect of his overview has to do with researchers' interpretive approach. According to the principle of openness in their questioning, they ought to seek information that might change their present views and interpretations (our pre-understanding). The same principle of openness also applies to their pre-understanding; they ought to report their relevant views on which their interpretations are based (Ödman, 1971/2007, p. 237).

An attempt to sum up the aspects put forward by Ödman (1971/2007) may indicate the complexity involved in the practical process of hermeneutic interpretation: as a hermeneutic researcher, one needs to indulge in a dynamic, dialogical process which takes into consideration relations between the phenomenon under study and (i) one's own pre-understanding regarding it; (ii) new information about it; (iii) its history and future; (iv) its details as well as its totality, in its sociocultural context; and (v) questions regarding 'what' and 'why' (explanation and understanding).

Hastrup (1999) proposes three rather drastic metaphors to illuminate the qualitative researcher's demanding task. The interpretive process, she suggests, on one hand includes the aspect or position of devoted identification and empathy (shamanism). On the other hand, it also includes the aspect of complete distancing from the object of research (cannibalism). Furthermore, the interpretive process typically includes a continuous oscillation between empathy and reflection (schizophrenia).

In brief, these are complex processes which seem to be defined by their instability, their continuous oscillation and their 'leaps'.

Criteria for Understanding

In general, the knowledge, meaning, and understanding potentially generated in qualitative investigations may be seen as contextual and relational, and as dynamic rather than static. What does it mean to understand, what does it take to understand, and how do we know for certain that we understand correctly? Such philosophical issues are among the most vast and difficult imaginable. When it comes to interpreting interview statements, nevertheless, to address them is unavoidable.

For the aim to understand the meaning of something such as a linguistic utterance, one question becomes crucial: meaning to whom? According to the methodology of Skinner (1988), that question can be given three interpretations: (i) what is the (lexical) meaning of the words? (ii) what is the relevance of the text to us? (iii) what is its relevance to the author (historical meaning)? Skinner applies the terminology of Austin (1955/1976). The illocutionary dimension of an utterance is in the focus of Skinner's interest: the intention or point of the agent (Bjerstedt, 1993).

So how do we know that we interpret and understand something correctly? Gadamer's criterion of coherence and Skinner's criterion of intention are two mutually complementary attempts to answer this question. On one hand, Gadamer's holistic criterion points to the

coherence of the details with the whole. On the other hand, according to Skinner's agent criterion, the researcher's interpretation should agree with the intention of the author or agent. The application of these criteria will be characterized by a certain dynamic openness; a tension that may be seen as quite in tune with basic epistemological perspectives on meaning and knowledge production as the result of dynamic, contextual, and relational processes. In brief, two aspects of an interpretation of an interview statement may be considered crucial: (i) its details ought to be coherent with its whole, and (ii) it ought to agree with the intention of the informant.

Pre-understanding, Contexts, and Interview Dynamics: Two Examples

The researcher's pre-understanding must be considered of importance. Familiarity with the studied cultural context can facilitate the researcher's striving for access, trust and knowledge of the interviewees.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) advocate *prolonged engagement* as one of several techniques by which a researcher can ensure that the research results meet criteria of trustworthiness. Through the investment of time, certain purposes may be achieved: learning the 'culture', testing for misinformation, and building trust, which is 'not a matter of applying techniques' and 'not a matter of the personal characteristics of the investigator' but a 'developmental [...] time-consuming process' (p. 303).

The aim of the empirical investigation in question (Bjerstedt, 2014) was to generate knowledge regarding the use of certain concepts and the meanings ascribed to them. My own background includes several decades as a performer in the same artistic field as the informants. The informants are asked to contribute actively to this analytical endeavour. If one were to employ the terminology of *emic* and *etic* perspectives, it might be fair to describe the interviews as attempts to let the researcher and the interviewee together indulge in processes of understanding that were continuously oscillating between these two perspectives. Consequently, the researcher's pre-understanding regarding the subject matter, jazz improvisation, as well as the informants' pre-understanding regarding theoretical framework – and, needless to say, vice versa – must be considered of importance.

Similarly, the dynamics between different perspectives of pre-understanding must be taken into consideration. Bouij (1998), in his thoughtful considerations regarding interview methodology, views the interview as a meeting of two subjects where something is problematized which has not been reflected on earlier. In Bouij's view, the interviewer's task is 'to lay bare an individual's coherent and in its own way consistent perception'; when studying a field with which the interviewer is familiar, it is vital not to take for granted that 'you have the same perspective as the interviewee' (pp. 42–43; my translation).

Kvale (1996) offers a thorough descriptive and prescriptive presentation of features, procedures, and potentials regarding qualitative interviews. Several of his statements of a more general nature are very much in tune, I believe, with prevailing learning ecologies of jazz contexts: this holds for the view of conversation as a basic mode of knowing, as well as the view of knowing as a right to believe rather than as having an essence, and the view that we constitute ourselves and our worlds in our conversational activity. I find very fascinating the notion that the interviewer/traveller (in Kvale's metaphor) may not only gain knowledge but *change* in the course of the interview/journey. This outlook on the interactional power of the interview is particularly interesting and a bit paradoxical, I think,

in relation to Kvale's observation that the interview is no conversation between equal partners but rather a situation which is defined, controlled, and structured by the interviewer/traveller. The expertise, skills, and craftsmanship in the interview researcher is crucial according to Kvale's description. In a way, then, the potential for change in the interviewer would seem to be in proportion to her or his interview skills.

It is now time to return to the perspective emphasized by Brinkmann (2013): how the inherent resistance of collective reflective practice – in particular, 'misunderstandings or other breaks in the conversational flow' (p. 65) – may serve as important potential knowledge sources in qualitative inquiry. In order to provide a richer picture of the dynamics in an interview situation, I include three extensive excerpts from my talk with alto saxophonist Amanda Sedgwick. In them, there are, I believe, a number of rather instructive examples of how perspectives of the interviewee (AS) and the interviewer (SB) may differ at some points and coincide at some, and how the interview works as a sort of mutual journey towards a deeper understanding of issues in question.

Following the three excerpts, I will discuss briefly four points of agreement or disagreement (marked with bold font and letters A–D in the excerpts). I believe that the illustrations of conversational dynamics regarding these issues provide the basis for interesting reflections on how understanding was construed in the interviews.

1. Excerpts from Interview with Amanda Sedgwick

Hässleholm, Sweden, 15 March 2011

Excerpt 1

SB - What makes a good jazz improvisation good?

AS - To me it's impossible to take that out of its context. I think what makes a musician good is a whole life. I don't think you can pull it out of its context. A musician who has something to say, something important, is a whole and interesting human being, full of nuances.

SB - And you can hear that in the music?

AS - Yes, of course. That's how it works. It's a very spiritual thing we're into. A spiritual or universal principle. If it's in a certain way within, that will show.

SB - Let's turn it around: what sorts of things could prevent you from being a whole person in the way that is relevant here?

AS - That's a good question, I think, because I think it's exactly that way of viewing things. That may be another question, but that view is common in today's education, I think. **I'm very much against that (A)**, and so are many colleagues. But I'm digressing from the question, sorry, ask again.

SB - Well, if you say the condition is to be a whole and... well-integrated human being...

AS - **No, I don't think that you necessarily have to be well-integrated (B).**

SB - No, I'm sorry, I made that word up myself. But an interesting...

AS - Interesting. To be that you don't have to be balanced or integrated or even intelligible. There are many bizarre and difficult people who are great musicians. But I think you have to be an interesting person in order to have something to offer.

SB - You used the word whole.

AS - Yes. Good that you mentioned that. I don't mean whole as in balanced, but whole as in honest.

SB - That's a big difference, of course. But if you try to nail that which comes out in the music, in the jazz improvisation, what is it that can prevent that?

AS - Yes. It's exactly this kind of view, I think: what makes a jazz improvisation good?

SB - That it's a too narrow view?

AS - Not just too narrow. It has nothing whatsoever to do with creating. And that brings me to this sidetrack about jazz schools.

SB - Yes, I'm very interested in that, so I'd like you to follow that track.

AS - I believe, like many others, that jazz schools have ruined a lot of the music life. It's just an intellectual view, and the way of teaching is very narrow. To learn this and this style. And many believe you can think it out, like...

SB - I'd very much like to get at the things I believe you're thinking of now.

AS - You're welcome to put words in my mouth...

SB - Yeah, and then you can correct me. What is done in teaching may to some extent be guided by the fact that it's easier to teach things that can be written down?

AS - Partly that. And partly that people have an idea about creativity... that it has to be something new all the time. And they miss out on the fact that the new stuff, the creative stuff, happens in the moment, it happens because you're honest. And they miss out on that it's necessary to know the tradition. You have to have roots.

[...]

Excerpt 2

[...]

SB - The storytelling view on jazz solos might help to get around some of these problems?

AS - How do you mean?

SB - You say: there is a whole and honest human being. What does she do when she plays? Isn't that to tell stories?

AS - Sure. Whether she likes it or not. If you're honest, it'll show.

SB - Maybe you don't have to intend to tell a story; maybe you just want to seem like a cool guy. But then that's what people hear: aha, she wants to seem like a cool guy.

AS - **Yeah, exactly! [Laughs.] (C)**

SB - Of course, that's far away from the teachings in jazz schools.

AS - Yeah, of course. And these are things you really can't learn in a school, no matter how good the teaching is.

[...]

Excerpt 3

[...]

SB - Can you imagine jazz music that actively and consciously strives to tell no stories?

AS - No. Why would one do that, what do you mean?

SB - Maybe music always tells of something?

AS - No... There's lots and lots of music that doesn't tell of anything, but it's so boring to listen to. Why should you aim at that? That's awful.

SB - If that happens, it's a disadvantage.

AS - Yeah, then it's only because you have nothing to say. Then it's just technical.

SB - It's a natural aim to say something?

AS - **No, I don't think it's a natural aim (D).** But it's a natural result of having something to say. The natural aim is that you want to play. You have a natural impulse and passion to do whatever you do, in this case, to play music. You know, it's not as if you're thinking: now I'm going to tell this story.

[...]

Comments

I will comment briefly on issues **A–D**. Obviously, these comments are based on my interpretations of the dialogue. By presenting and discussing them as openly as possible, I hope to provide readers with the possibility of developing their own view of the conversational dynamics and the construction of understanding in the interview.

A. Amanda Sedgwick is annoyed by my formulation of the initial interview question, 'What makes a good jazz improvisation good?' In her opinion, this formulation is problematic in ways that relate closely to problems she perceives as acute and very distressing in jazz schools. Fundamentally, Sedgwick believes that you have to be a 'whole' person in order to play good jazz improvisations. The question 'What...?', however, may indicate a mistaken presumption that one could point out isolated qualities that are sufficient in order to make jazz solos good. Sedgwick relates this formulation to her view of the 'narrow' teaching at jazz schools, as well as to what she perceives as the schools' mistaken views (and focus) on creativity.

B. In her first response, Sedgwick mentions the condition that a musician ought to be 'whole and interesting'. Returning, after a few moments, to that statement, I misrepresent her phrasing and intention by saying, 'whole and... well-integrated'. As Sedgwick protests, I respond, 'I'm sorry, I made that word up'. This was not entirely true; the view that a jazz soloist ought to be a psychologically well-integrated human being had been put forward shortly earlier by another of my interviewees. This mistake on my part had at least two

positive consequences. First, Sedgwick found reason to offer even more careful and thorough formulations of her own view regarding necessary personality traits in the successful jazz soloist. Second, as a consequence of having exposed Sedgwick to another interviewee's opinion (one she did not agree with), I gained material for an interesting comparison of diverging opinions regarding which psychological qualities may be valuable when improvising jazz.

C. At one point during the interview, I suggest that the storytelling concept may provide a solution to some of the problems that Amanda Sedgwick and I have been discussing. At first, however, she does not see my point. I try to explicate my suggestion by way of an example: if a jazz improviser is 'whole and honest', then her solos will tell stories. Sedgwick agrees, and she adds, 'Whether she likes it or not. If you're honest, it will show.' In making this remark, Sedgwick addresses the crucial question whether storytelling in jazz improvisation requires an intention to tell a story on the part of the soloist. Clearly, in her view, it does not. After I expand on this perspective, her strong agreement with what I say is emphasized by her laughter and her words, 'Yeah, exactly!' Concrete examples in this excerpt (the suggestions that listeners will hear stories in the playing of the 'whole and honest' improviser but also in the playing of the improviser who only wants to seem like a cool guy) provide the ground which enabled interviewer and interviewee to reach a mutual understanding and agreement regarding crucial issues in the field of investigation.

D. Yet another important aspect of the relation of intention to storytelling was touched upon as a consequence of my questions regarding non-storytelling music. Sedgwick holds that even though such music is very common, you should never strive at playing music that tells no stories. If the music doesn't have anything to say, she adds, it is because the musician has nothing to say. On the other hand, Sedgwick insists, in direct reply to one of my questions, that storytelling is not the aim of the musician; her aim is to play music, and saying something is a consequence of this aim (provided that she has something to say). Interestingly, the formulation of these important distinctions came about as a result of Sedgwick's response to a series of seemingly rather banal yes-or-no questions.

This is the place, I think, to also try to shed some light on more general difficulties involved in talk about elusive issues such as music, metaphor, and meaning. It is quite natural that an interviewee may feel uncomfortable with perceived expectations in the interview situation, if she feels it to be her task to produce some sort of definitive analytical formulations regarding difficult issues. The following excerpt from my talk with singer/violinist Lena Willemark provides, I believe, an exemplification of this phenomenon.

2. Excerpt from Interview with Lena Willemark

Stavsnäs, Sweden, 17 October 2010

[...]

SB – You said at the beginning that there must be [in music] the wish to communicate. I'm interested in the image of music as storytelling. Do you find that an apt image of your craft, that you tell stories?

LW – Yes, I think so, in a way. [...] You know, we have some expressions in order to explain things without going very deep into them. It may be great to leave some expressions a bit open; maybe it isn't always so good to have concrete meanings. Because then it's there, and what should I fill it out with myself then? If it's so precise,

what should I fill it with? But now that you ask the question, and I have the time, and you're listening... I think I feel that presence is very... presence and discovery, some sort of discovery of... discovery of being present. Some sort of... Well, many have said it before but it's... Well, the great discovery of being present.

SB – I think that's a great way of putting it.

LW – Yes, actually. Maybe that's what storytelling is. It comes out. That discovery comes out. Yes.

[...]

SB – You had this way of putting it that I was very fond of: the great discovery of being present, and to communicate that. [...] It seems that you bring meaning to the word storytelling, what it's really about. Do I get you right?

LW – I think so. But this discovery... It's right then. Wow! It was there, you know, you didn't even have time to think. You don't have that time. That's why everything we're talking about, the great discovery of being present... – it already has been... You said you're so fond of this way of putting it. Because you want to, that's what you do, so it's no bad thing, but... 'yeah, great, now maybe we can get it in here'... [Laughs.] But that's just it: I just discovered it. And now – no, now has been. But it is this connection, to be in the present and communicate it. That's it, I think... to me at least.

[...]

Obviously, Lena Willemark's sound scepticism towards the researcher's aim to 'get it in here' is very much to the point. The delight at a *bon mot* must not obscure the need for reflective interpretation. From an ethical point of view as well as on grounds of fact, interview statements should be treated with thorough respect and cited with relevant reservations.

Willemark's remark 'no, now has been' stands out as a pregnant formulation of Fröhlich's (2009) observation that lived experiences unfold in 'presentness'; because experiences of music are non-repeatable, 'the natural phenomenon of music-making escapes the empirical fishing-net' (pp. 495, 497). It is noteworthy that Willemark's concise statements, on the whole, sum up several theoretical and methodological considerations of the greatest importance to the present investigation: the need for open-ended interpretations of metaphors in this field; the elusive, temporal, subjective nature of the phenomena in question; and the unsuitability of simplistic, schematic formulations in order to capture them.

Coda: Jazz as a Conceptualization of Reflective Practice and Qualitative Inquiry

Needless to say, I do not consider it meaningful or even possible to draw conclusions of a general nature on conversational dynamics from the observations made in connection with the excerpts from the Amanda Sedgwick interview. Interviews do not proceed in accordance with mechanisms; they develop in different and unpredictable ways. The point I wish to make is simply that these excerpts can be viewed as exemplifications that indicate considerable similarities between "life as an improvisatory art" (Bateson, 1990, p. 3), jazz, qualitative inquiry, and reflective practice as improvisatory art. These similarities would seem to regard, for instance, the need for structure as well as continuous impulse fluidity,

and the need for receptivity as well as initiative. In particular, it is illuminating to observe how knowledge, meaning, and understanding can be generated as direct consequences of "breaks in the conversational flow" (Brinkmann, 2013, p. 65); in the excerpts from the Sedgwick interview, this is exemplified by the four issues **A–D**. Notwithstanding, the excerpts cited above are nothing more than a few scattered examples of how processes of deepened understanding may develop. The notorious richness of this field, obviously, calls for a careful, sensitive, and thorough analytic approach.

Clearly, these excerpts may serve as concrete exemplifications of Gadamer's (1960/1975) analysis of the dynamic, dialogical interaction between our understanding and our self-understanding. *In nuce*, they provide interesting and multi-varied perspectives on the dynamics between, on one hand, the phenomenon under study and, on the other, the researcher's as well as the informant's own pre-understanding regarding it; the dynamics between its details and its totality, in its sociocultural context; between the criterion of holistic coherence and the criterion of the agent's intention; between prolonged engagement with artistic practice and with reflective conceptualization; between agreement and disagreement; between empathy and reflection; as well as between explanation and understanding.

Among the most crucial faculties for jazz improvisation is the complex ability to relate simultaneously, by way of qualities such as openness, wholeness, and listening, to both internal and external impulses, to both structural and communicative aspects of the music, and to both one's own individuality and the tradition in which one is situated (Bjerstedt, 2014). Interviews, it could be argued, are similar to jazz improvisation in several respects. They are similar, not least importantly, in that it is not only *what* is said that matters, but *how* it is said. This analogy – and the close interrelations between life, research, and improvisation – will be of consequence for qualitative inquiry and reflective practice as ways towards knowledge.

In research methodology, the member check (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), of course, is an attempt to minimize the risk for misunderstandings. However, such a risk can never be completely eliminated in qualitative inquiry and reflective practice where knowledge is attained through processes that are characterized, among other things, by their improvisational features. Obviously, during the investigation cited here (Bjerstedt, 2014) it was considered crucial to avoid misunderstanding the informants; but the exemplifications that have been presented and discussed here indicate that there are indeed no guarantees; no matter how sensitive and thorough one's research approach is, a researcher in these fields cannot be certain to have succeeded in avoiding misunderstanding.

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