

Call and response: Social affordances in virtual Egyptian music and dance performance

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Disciplinary background A. Ecological psychology and distributed creativity. The theoretical framework of the research drew on Gibson's (1979) ecological psychology and concept of affordances, considering the role of technology and music as social affordances. The distributed and inherently social nature of music and dance (Linson & Clarke, 2021; van der Schyff, Shiavio, Walton, Verlado, & Chemero, 2018) and online creative participation (Literat & Glăveanu, 2018) was considered, drawing on ecological perspectives from the fields of human-computer interaction (Norman, 2013), music (DeNora, 2009; Duby, 2019; Krueger, 2014; Magnusson, 2010; Martinez & Villanueva, 2018) and creativity studies (Glăveanu, 2012).

Disciplinary background B. Participatory Action Research. The work took the form of a participatory action research (PAR) project, exploring the creation of a virtual music and dance performance in ashra baladi, an Egyptian improvisational form of dance and music by six experienced arts practitioners. Participatory action research centres local knowledge and needs, aiming to involve members of the community in the research project and create social change in the process (Brydon-Miller, 1997; Lykes, 2013; Smith, Rosenzweig, & Schmidt, 2010). During COVID-19 lockdown, arts practitioners were required to adjust rapidly to changing circumstances to maintain their livelihood, and this research investigated this process. As community-based arts practitioners, the researchers further investigated how virtual improvisation might be applied for social connection in larger culturally diverse settings.

Abstract

The research aimed to explore:

- The affordances and constraints encountered by practitioners creating an asynchronous improvised virtual music and dance performance
- The social processes involved in collaborating remotely
- The role of digital platforms and music and dance engagement in facilitating intercultural understanding

During COVID-19 lockdown participatory music engagement during COVID-19 lockdown was adapted using digital means. A popular approach was multi-tracking, asynchronous, virtual performance where individual contributions are recorded in isolation and made synchronous in post-production. Asynchronous approaches are often centrally coordinated through the distribution of guide videos, music scores and click tracks, however this performance was developed collaboratively with practitioners building and layering on previous contributions. As well as the constraints of ashra baladi which has an underlying structure and conventions based on Arabic maqams (melodic modes) and rhythms, the collaborative process was constrained by the remote and asynchronous nature of the task. Although there is a strong body of literature investigating music improvisation, much of it considers contingencies and immediate feedback between participants. The main contribution of this research is its consideration of how coordination and collaboration emerged in the absence of direct contact and shared temporality, requiring anticipation and imagination and complete awareness to

create a cohesive end product. Finally, there were implications for digitally mediated embodied practice in facilitating intercultural understanding, with a range of online mediums providing opportunity for mindful and deep engagement with the sociocultural background of the music and dance form.

Interdisciplinary implications. The research underscores the importance of lived experience and social interaction as an object of study in ecological perspectives. The work also contributes to emerging research methods adapting phenomenological approaches to include digital trails as data.

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