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Participation and Playing A/Part

Ruth Herbert (University of Kent, UK)

13:00 UK | 20:00 HK | 12:00 UTC | Teviot Lecture Theatre and Zoom

Session chair: Raymond MacDonald (Music, University of Edinburgh)

Abstract: Music, as Christopher Small observed 'is not a thing at all but an activity, something that people do' (1998, 2). The process of musicking is inclusive of all participatory action connected with music – whether performing, listening, dancing | moving, practising, producing, recording – in live concert settings, ritualistic, therapeutic or educational contexts and everyday life. Musical participation is inevitably multisensory and multimodal, and characteristics and subjective experiences of participation are necessarily situated, arising from a systemic interaction between individual, environment and sonic attributes. Importantly, different types of participation are informed by different types of knowledge (e.g. disciplinary specialisms), different ways of knowing (e.g. non-verbal mentation), communicating and experiencing.

In this talk I consider two recent, contrasting multisensory participatory arts research projects, exploring a) the potential of attributes of different media to afford alterations of mood and subtle shifts of consciousness; b) the psychological qualities and characteristics of neurodivergent participation and creativity. Ecological, phenomenological and ethological perspectives serve to contextualise both studies.

The first project was initially developed at Chelsea and Westminster Hospital with young people aged 14-18 undergoing treatment for mental health conditions. It explores intersections between spaces, senses and subjective experience, using processes of Turkish paper marbling (Ebru) and simultaneous musical looping | layering of crowd-sourced sounds. The second (which constitutes the core focus of this talk) was a series of music and sound workshops, part of an interdisciplinary project exploring the identities and experiences of autistic girls and adolescents through a range of creative activities. I discuss an exploratory framework, emerging from video analysis of workshop sessions that identifies a series of what are termed 'modes of playing', (spontaneous and volitional responses | examples of agency, understood as encompassing musical behaviours and general | performative behaviours within a group context). At times girls appeared to play a part (for example projecting a public identity via 'masking'). Alternatively, they would play apart – present but detached | abstracted apart (marked by private or hidden musicking within the group context). Study of neurodivergent musical participation extends our understanding of the processes and dynamics of distributed creativity. As Joseph Straus has observed, 'Our bodies and minds are not all the same, and the differences among us make a difference' (Straus, 2011, 159)

Small, C. (1998). *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*. Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press.

Straus, J. (2011). *Extraordinary Measures: Disability in Music*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Respondents: **Jan Stupacher**, Institute of Psychology, University of Graz | Center for Music in the Brain, Aarhus University, Denmark | **Nate Holder**, Royal Northern College of Music International Chair in Music Education, UK.