

Playing no solo imagination: Synthesising the rhythmic emergence of sound and sign through embodied drum kit performance and writing

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Disciplinary background A. Artistic performance practice: years of firsthand experience performing the drum kit, live, mainly in the context of experimental and improvised music, and creative writing.

Disciplinary background B. Embodied music cognition.

Abstract

This presentation is a creative demonstration of the interconnected contribution of non-verbal, sensory, and intersubjective imagination to musical play. The work addresses the theme of Participation through the presentation of practice-led research, contributing argument and evidence for the manifold ways of knowing music which sit beyond discursive norms. In particular, I will demonstrate how an ecological, growth based methodological and conceptual ground was established in response to the following initial questions:

- (a) What is the felt relationship between listening and inscription?
- (b) How do particular words, diagrams, real and imagined materials affect the sound of drum performance?
- (c) How do movements of the body relate to semantic and timbral conventions?

I present practice-based research that explores musical imagination through examining the relationship of embodied musical performance and writing. The drum kit, and writing, were treated simultaneously as artistic materials and critical technologies. This allowed the sensations, signs and sounds, grown through practice, to simultaneously illuminate both analytical and poetic aspects of the subjective experience of the musical imagination.

Motivated by the complex firsthand experience of embodied musical performance this research makes legible, audible, the mix of movement, energy, language(s)—bodies, ideas, vibrations—constituting the generative relationship between imagination and intersubjectivity. Ongoing investigations were, over time, structured by three (what I provocatively call) 'Rhythmic Figure' studies, focusing, through embodied performance, on a particular aspect of the research. Through these studies I encountered the complexity of developing choreographies for drum kit play in order to investigate, in detail, the interrelationship of sonic, semantic and physical elements. This required the overall form of the project—thesis and creative practice output—to coalesce, reflect and extend the synthesis of real, imagined, poetic and analytic aspects I had encountered. The 'Rhythmic Figure' studies feature a number of fictional characters, necessitating a the conceptualisation of a space - a 'dramatic environment' called The Garden to host the outcomes. Performing the 'Rhythmic Figure' studies demonstrated interwoven imaginative, material, and theoretical aspects.

The project demonstrates how the body of the performer—engaged in the specific dynamic physical and semiotic play that music performance necessitates—is the site of 'discrepant translations:' an ongoing dynamic mix of tension and generative growth between registers of language and modes of consciousness and communication. This knowingly subjective expression of the musical imagination: makes apparent the capacity of a performing body to critically synthesise and restructure material and

semiotic conditions. The novel use of characterisation and imaginary structures also demonstrates a challenge to the notion of an autonomous, solo subject in musical performance practice, through establishing an ecological ground. This project demonstrates complex ways the formal aspects of music making bear on the musical imagination: the capacity of inscription to variously capture, inscribe, cultivate or block the mix of forces at work in an emerging music.

Interdisciplinary implications. The project reveals the complexity of interrelationships between embodied and biosemiotic aspects of music performance processes, and the musical imagination in particular. This presents both a challenge and a stimulus to cross-disciplinary investigations across the fields of music practice and systematic musicology. In rendering features of this complex ecologically grounded process through creative artistic practice, an ongoing and critical material dialogue is established between (a) perceptual filtering: quantification and inscription; and (b) the complex, non-verbal, aspects of embodied performance most resistant to transcription.

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