DJing & Reading the Crowd in an EDM Context from a Second Person Perspective

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Background

DJing is a performance where a DJ plays pre-made electronic dance music's tracks (EDM) for a dancing crowd during a party. DJs claim they *read the crowd* in order to play music (Broughton & Brewster, 2002), making DJ-audience interaction very relevant to DJing. The active participation of the crowd that the party requires makes a difference from other performer-audience situations. We think that this could be a case of Second Person Interaction, whose main features involve face-to-face exchanges, direct perception of mental states in others' body expressions, psychological attributions, changes in both mental states and reciprocal actions (Pérez & Gomila, 2021). Both the musical performance and the one-to-many interaction's features involved in DJing has not yet been fully described from a second-person perspective.

Aims

The research aimed to describe DJ-crowd interaction from the DJ's perspective, identify its second person features, and analyze the impact of this interaction on music

Method

After doing several observations of DJ-crowd interaction during several EDM events, researchers held semi-structured interviews with 3 DJs from La Plata city (Argentina). Participants were asked about their perceptions, actions and musical decisions during DJing, especially those involving audience interaction. Analysis had two stages: first, the interviews were coded using the grounded theory approach, particularly focusing on the description of DJs' experience of their interaction with the audience; second, the obtained categories were analyzed from the Second Person Perspective

Results

Four categories were induced; each one shows different moments of DJing. (1) Dance prediction: DJs imagine the crowd's reactions to music, both when they select the music in their home and when they play it at the party. There are two possible predictions: music can make people be *up* or *down*, in reference to the imagined energy level of their dance movements. (2) Perception and reading the crowd: although they can notice individuals, all people in the dancefloor are perceived as a single unity, mostly based on the shared energy level of movements. This leads DJs to think that the entire crowd is up or down as a consequence of music's energy level. (3) Change of mental state: DJs tend to have an emotive response to audience behavior, especially when the crowd's reaction to music is *lower* than the expected *being up* prediction. (4) Musical action: DJs decide the course of music looking for a general being up state of the crowd, changing or sustaining the perceived state. These four categories describe overlapping moments of DJ's actions, thoughts and states about the crowd's reactions to music that occur constantly throughout a set (although their specific characteristics depend on each DJ interviewed). This description reveals features of Second Person Interactions: DJs attribute *being up* or *down* to the audience based on gestalt, direct perception of dance movements' intensity that change their personal state and determine their musical decisions. Also, DJ's actions require moment-to-moment regulation regarding the audience's movements during the interaction, especially given that performers' attributions don't always work on the dancefloor as expected and they have to regulate their actions to the actual people's behavior.

Conclusions and Implications

DJing is a musical performance highly defined by DJ's interactions with the audience's body engagement with music, revealing an authentic Second Person Interaction in a musical context. These interactions have some unique traits within the general modeling of the Second Person Perspective. In the first place, the audience is perceived as a single and cohesive entity based on energy patterns of dance movements. This leads to the question of whether attributions can be actually applied to the states of each individual. It is probable that the attributed states of *being up* or *down* have different degrees of truth in different individuals. In the second place, as they emotionally engage with the audience's actions, DJs don't act as external observers to the situation (Third Person Interaction), but as participants in a particular kind of reciprocal interaction (Second Person Interaction). However, DJs seem to be more alert to perceive and act in correspondence with the crowd's actions than people to them, defining an asymmetric but reciprocal interaction, at least from the DJs' perspective. The form and level of reciprocity of this interaction will be researched in future works, from the audience's perspective. Despite this, it constitutes an authentic case of the interactions that occur between performers and audiences in the context of musical events.

References

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Pérez, D. & Gomila, A. (2021). *Social cognition and the second person in human interaction*. London: Routledge.
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