

# Creative (Mis)understandings: A Methodology of Inspiration

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This paper aims to provide an overview of the project *creative (mis)understandings*, supported by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF, PEEK, AR 463-G24), which began in September 2018 and spans three years.

Today, many traditional musical practices face the threat of imminent discontinuation. *Contemporary academic composition* also figures among endangered traditions,<sup>1</sup> along with many other non-mainstream practices. In this sense, our project is an effort to join the forces of creativity, to support the solidarity between (artistic) minorities in the broadest sense, ranging from traditional music to composition in academia, to gain importance in a world of strongly commercialised cultural life, and to redefine aesthetic and social categories.

The project anchors notions of ‘music composition’ or ‘sound creation’ and composition within contemporary philosophical and anthropological theories. These theories highlight the diversity of reality constructions, including artistic representation and practice (including music). The project aims to develop transcultural approaches of inspiration (which we regard as *mutually appreciated intentional and reciprocal artistic influence based on solidarity*) by combining approaches from contemporary music composition and improvisation with ethnomusicological and sociological research. We encourage creative (mis)understandings emerging from the interaction between research and artistic practice, and between European art music, folk and non-Western styles, in particular from indigenous minorities in Taiwan. Comprehension and incomprehension both yield serendipity and

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1 See <http://www.musicendangerment.com/portfolio/new-music-neue-musik/>

inspiration for new research questions, innovative artistic creation and applied follow-ups among non-Western communities.

## Philosophical foundations

Ontologies – that is, forms of knowledge about what exists and in which ways the existing interrelates – are diverse among human societies (Descola 2013). In such diverse societies, the meaning and function of sound and music (and other arts) are understood in quite different ways. As the contemporary ‘globalising world’ tends to overemphasise the ontology of naturalism, other forms of knowledge should be fostered and promoted in order to maintain balance. On the other hand, the idea that knowledge about the world and about arts is consistent within a certain geographical or cultural space is being challenged. Bruno Latour (2013) shows that ‘the moderns’ (human beings localising themselves in a naturalistic world) do not live in one reality, but make use of a multitude of ‘modes of existence’. Therefore, if one were to attempt to understand what music is – and what music can be – one should develop the ability to switch perspectives: it is the perspective that determines the body that perceives the world (Viveiros de Castro 2012).

In the Western world, that is, in naturalist collectives (Descola 2013), the fundamental epistemological paradigm is the scientific method: a claim to knowledge has to be verified by inter-subjectively applicable means (experiments, theoretical validity, reliance on previously proven sources). The methods for doing so are wide-ranging and differ between academic disciplines, or more precisely, between epistemic cultures (Knorr-Cetina 2007); but still, most of the accepted methods are variants of visualisation and writing. However, knowledge production can follow different paths (Feyerabend 1975, 1994)<sup>2</sup> and, as the new field of sound studies asserts, it is also present and representable in the sonic domain (Brabec de Mori & Winter 2018).

In both scientific and artistic knowledge production approaches it is crucial to reflect on the differentiation between explicit and tacit/implicit knowledge (Polanyi 1967, Collins 2012). Whereas explicit knowledge embraces what is uttered, written and communicated, the implicit/tacit

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2 Feyerabend highlights the validity of artistic methods of knowledge production in his article “Art as Nature as a Work of Art” (1994).

dimension often takes on the quality of the pre-supposed, is embodied through practices (Reckwitz 2002), or – most relevant for our project – uses other sensory domains than the visual; it may become manifest as auditory knowledge, i.e. as knowledge tacitly comprehended in sound (Zembylas & Niederauer 2018). Beyond the analytical grasp, auditory knowledge can only be expressed through the non-verbal variability of sonic expression, through what we include in the term ‘music’. Both musicians and researchers can offer valuable contributions to reality constructions, that is, how we perceive and understand our world, and how we relate and interact with other humans and with our environment (Brabec de Mori 2016).

The methods applied in this project depart from ethnographic evidence that people living in non-Western or traditional societies often use methods of knowledge production within the sonic domain which are commonly unaddressed or unknown among contemporary music composers (aside from exoticist appropriations). To understand such traditional knowledge productions – conceived as changeable reality constructions – we propose the creation of a framework to develop sonic creations as knowledge production. Therefore, at the core of our undertaking lies a dialogue of sonic reality constructions accompanied by verbal reflection.

## Aims of the project

The project aims to extend the fundamental concepts and methods of contemporary composition and music creation to various transcultural contexts, and to develop methods of connecting academic artistic work to the musical world with its great variety of traditions, practices and genres.

The following artistic research questions are central:

- How can dialogical knowledge production mutually influence the creative minds of both academic composers/music makers and musicians in non-academic music traditions?

Countering habitual notions that see inspiration as a rather unidirectional phenomenon (from the source of inspiration to the composer using the material), we use a multi-directional perspective of inspiration including indigenous concepts of creation (cf. Brabec de Mori 2016, 48-50). Instead

of taking inspiration for artistic use, we want to contribute to a model of mutual inspiration exchange and mutual understanding, and to establish a layer of intentional *creative (mis)understanding*. By extending field research to active and egalitarian *interaction in the field*, participants mutually acquire knowledge about music and its context. They can then create a common base for meaningful expressive vocabularies and grammars.

- How can we adapt or transform research methods into methods of creativity?

Being aware of the differences in methodology between research and creative production, we aim to develop a model of interdisciplinary transcultural arts-based research which not only envisions the ‘material’ (musical content, instruments, recordings, etc.) but also includes the surrounding context and different layers of meaning that the material embodies. Primarily, this is sought from within the tradition of its original history, use and meanings (emic/insider perspective), but also, of course, for the academic composers of the team, initially ‘outsiders’ (etic perspective). This does not mean that such ‘material’ can only be used in its original style or context. The dialogue between research and artistic work includes transformations of meaning, creative translations and (mis-)interpretations. Nevertheless, an awareness of the context of the sources allows for a respectful and conscious handling of the ‘material’. Furthermore, the interaction with members of the source communities improves mutual understanding and can serve as a basis for conscious distortions and *creative (mis)understandings*. Several transdisciplinary methods are being developed: *artistic field research* combines elements and methods from ethnomusicological field research with artistic exploration and protocolling/documentation. Equally, the methods of transcription (ethnomusicology) and notation (composition) require a process of merging as well as the respective methods for the analysis of musical content.

- How can we deal with discrepancies between research ethics and artistic freedom? Which issues might arise? How can the method of *creative (mis) understanding* solve them?

While drawing from a long-term collaboration between some team members and the Tao people, the project contributes to new methodologies for composition, develops paradigmatic ways of relating music to society, and aims to increase the interest of a general audience for contemporary music and for the related research by connecting it to social contexts throughout the whole process of creation and dissemination. Sensitivity for the particular contexts of musical/cultural phenomena in the artistic process and allowing these contexts to confuse the composer's inspiration also increases the potential impact of new compositions. *Creative (mis)understandings* might lead to works that in turn offer additional or even reverse perspectives on the communities involved and, therefore, have a chance of facilitating new understandings.<sup>3</sup>

- In what sense will the artistic outcome of our methodology differ from that of other initiatives?

The artistic outcome of the project includes several musical forms (individual and collective compositions, improvisations, installations, new performance practices). Most importantly, we aim to achieve different versions and forms based on the 'same' artistic content, which we call *scalable compositions*. The characteristics of those versions will depend on the sociocultural context of the genesis of a piece as well as on their public performance situation in various contexts. Therefore, we will encourage the participating composers/artists to develop at least two different realisations of the same musical ideas (inspired by the team's joint transcultural/inter-traditional research), reflecting different contexts of presentation.

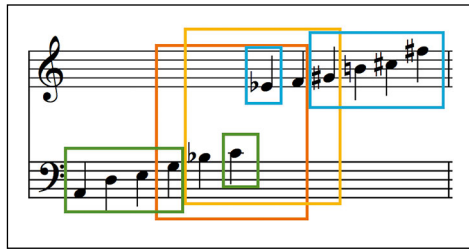
The same content (e.g., some kind of 'distorted indigenous music') could be perceived as relatively unmodified 'traditional music' in the context of a European new music festival, but as a 'quite extreme experiment' in the context of 'indigenous music'. Therefore, it will be very interesting to adapt the musical content – developed from common field research – to different presentation situations, including audience participation. The challenge of calibrating the outcome of artistic processes in dependence on their partic-

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3 Compare mockumentaries such as *Das Fest des Huhnes* by W. Wippersberg (ORF 1992), presenting 'indigenous people' of Upper Austria from the perspective of a fictitious African anthropologist; or *Borat* by S. B. Cohen (20th Century Fox 2006).

ipients and recipients while still keeping the essence of the artistic idea will lead to new insights in the artistic process and to new concepts and methods of composition.

As an example from previous work, compare the (apparently European) twelve-tone chord (fig. 1) constructed from overlapping pentatonic scales (alluding to being Asian), providing the potential for smooth transitions between otherwise contrasting aesthetics.



*Fig. 1: Pitch structure from ponso no tao for piano and electronics (Kretz 2016)*

The exchange with researchers should add further insights into artistic processes and provide an ‘intellectual mirror’ for creative activities. Since artistic works strongly relate to various social groups and their perspectives on the relationship between music and life, we expect the artistic results to raise interest in various kinds of audiences. At the same time, we expect to raise further awareness for the indigenous communities in Taiwan and their social and political concerns among ‘outsiders’ in Taiwan and beyond.

Previous projects of some of the team members with Taiwanese indigenous communities (Kretz 2007a, 2007b, Kretz & Lin 2015) and in particular with the Tao community of Lanyu Island (Lin 2011a, 2011b, 2013a, 2013b, 2015a, 2015b, 2016), have already connected scholarly research with artistic practice both in Taiwan and Austria. Specific artistic, scholarly and social/political topics were already addressed, and this project finally allows us to generalise methodologies for an extended range of participants, topics and communities, and to provide tools of communication, sound articulation, notation and documentation, which will also be useful for the development and strengthening of the source communities’ own artistic practices and development.

## Methodology

While the arts on the one hand, and ethnomusicology and art theory on the other, have developed their own coherent and rigorous methodologies, they are not easily compatible and have proven to be quite resilient towards attempts to transfer them – partly because of obvious differences in the roles of knowledge production, of peer audiences, of originality/non-conformity and of pragmatic problem solving.

The lack of a profound integration of ethnomusicological research methods, of audiences and of collaborators from other musical traditions seems to be a main flaw within many transcultural artistic projects. We therefore designed an interdisciplinary methodological framework (see fig. 3), extending team member Bhagwati's AGNI<sup>4</sup> methodology (fig. 2, Bhagwati 2013a, 2013b), which connects and intertwines artistic practice with arts-based research and ethnomusicology.

## Overview of AGNI

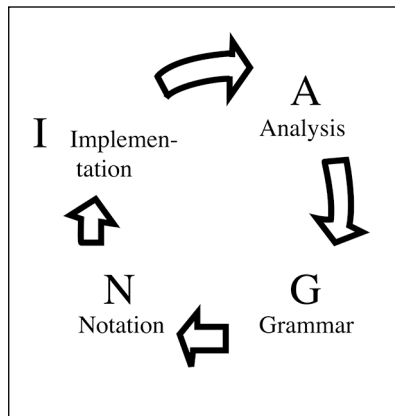


Fig. 2: AGNI (Bhagwati 2005)

4 Successfully used by Bhagwati: *atish-e-zaban* (2005/6), *PerSonAlia* (2006/7), *Racines Ephémères* (2008-11), *Alien Lands, monochrom* (2010), *Native Alien* (2009-12), by Leroux: *Dialogues fantasques* (2008/09), *Resonant Responses to Joanna Baillie's Witchcraft* (2009-12), by Neumark: *Home Beautiful* (2008-12), and by Laplante: *hyper-écoute* (2011).

The AGNI methodology uses the terms of its acronym in a wide sense. In the *Analysis* phase, researchers observe practitioners of an existing or emerging art practice. Practitioners are invited to demonstrate their work and discuss concepts, techniques and aesthetic ideas, and respond to researchers' questions. Their comments, integrated into the documentation, provide salient insights into the practitioners' (inside) view of their own work. In the *Grammar* phase, insights from *Analysis*, together with material about this art practice obtained otherwise, are analysed for 'unspoken rules'. Possible focuses are aesthetics and ethics: are they oriented towards ideals of perfection, social relevance, marketability or the recognition of peers? Which implicit aesthetic and disciplinary hierarchies, or even taboos, are at work? The goal of this phase is to understand which, and to what extent, cultural traditions and constraints or discipline-based axioms are central or peripheral to the particular art practice. In the *Notation* phase, descriptions of the art practice from *Analysis* and *Grammar* are both formalised to create various methods of representation suited to the art form. These can employ any format and medium. Suitable notations are important for the analysis and creative evolution of non-conventional performance practices. Moreover, notations enable us to structurally create new relationships between different modes of expression. In this context, 'scores' are seen in the broadest sense, as symbolisations of processes which extend over time (Halprin 1970).

The usefulness of various notation systems<sup>5</sup> and tools will be explored. Working from the assumption that the experimental 'acid test' for any notation is its practicability, artist researchers will implement several versions of the same 'piece' based on different notations. This process could include grafting a model derived from one practice onto the material of another. Such *implementations* will require practical modifications (e.g., due to limitations of performers/technology, adaptation to new context). We also strongly encourage different implementations for the different presentation contexts. The AGNI method, adapted to the specific needs of this project, is of key importance for allowing both the researchers and the artists to switch perspectives and integrate the different points of view.

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5 Memory supportive, parametric, result or action-oriented, sequential, atemporal, situational, mimetic, multi-modal, oral.



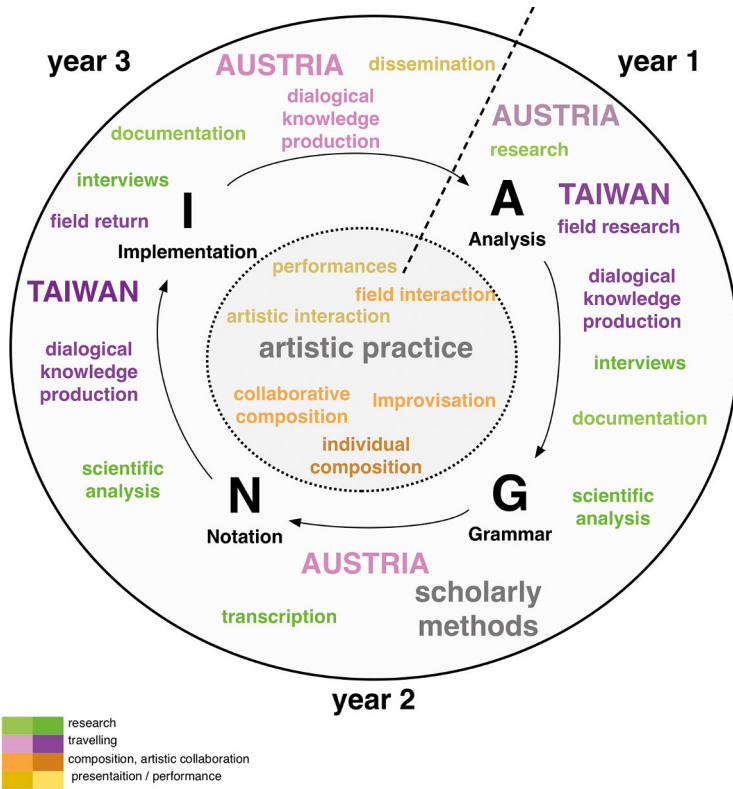


Fig. 3: Methods used in the project *Creative (Mis)understandings: a Methodology of Inspiration* (Kretz 2017)

### Field research and interaction, Analysis (A from AGNI)

Our plan is to arrange visits to indigenous communities in Taiwan and to collaborate with their artistic practitioners. The Taiwanese government currently recognises sixteen indigenous groups in Taiwan, all of which have strong, independent cultural identities and astoundingly different music styles, varying from the triphonic homophony of the Bunun people to the microtonal clusters of the Tao on Lanyu Island. Based on the prior work of some team members with the Tao community (Hurworth 1995, Lin 2015b)

and extending the previous scope, we will integrate methods from various academic disciplines:

- Artistic field research parallel to and in interaction with ethnomusico-logical field research

From the outset, the question of grounding and relating artistic impulses in questions relevant for society will be explored. Active participation in the field – joint performance and improvisation – helps to grasp knowledge which cannot be easily captured verbally, and can serve as a mutual exchange of content, analysis of knowledge, and understanding. Finding situations where such musical encounters on a par are possible requires unconventional behaviour – on all sides. According to our experiences, it can mean setting up an interactive workshop in a public space (in front of a supermarket, in an abandoned house or in a school), or it might occur by integrating ourselves into gatherings after spontaneous invitations. Different strategies need to be combined: involving young people in common public creative activities – even involving simple forms of live electronics – may open doors, but often, as a first step, approaching the older generation rather formally and participating in social and religious events and rituals rather passively may be more appropriate. This requires respect, understanding and flexibility towards the temporal, geographical and social constraints and taboos of the community, and constant readiness for mutual teaching/coaching and common improvisatory practice.

- Qualitative interviews, narrative inquiries and dialogical approaches, ethnography and ethnographic-biographic writing

Qualitative interviews, narrative inquiries and a dialogical approaches are common in music-related arts-based research and will be used throughout the entire project. Ethnography deals with background information, composers' and music makers' actions and presentations, attendees, location and time of each context of their music practice. Ethnographic-biographic writing is employed by the coordinator of research and artistic work and the scientific team, is introduced to music makers and composers and integrated into their creative process. Hybrid methods, such as *artistic field research*, need to be predefined and evaluated during and after the joint fieldwork.

- Analysis of practice-based knowledge

Led by the assumption that the practitioner does more than s/he knows (Bourdieu 1977), all participants demonstrate their work and discuss concepts, techniques and ideas. Common environments of ‘knowledge exchange’ are established both formally in an academic context and informally in the field, so that knowledge which cannot be easily expressed through words can spread through common practice.

### **Grammar, Notation (G&N from AGNI) and ethnomusicological transcription**

The *Grammar* and *Notation* steps of AGNI (see previous section) will be enriched by complementary approaches from ethnomusicological methods of transcription. A broad variety of notation and transcription systems – ranging from definitions of concepts to the transcription of performances – will be explored. Ethnomusicologists often develop specific notation styles, even for different genres within the same musical tradition (fig. 4). The development of notation styles dependent on aesthetic aims and musical language has become a key topic in the twentieth century (Karkoschka 1966), and even more so in the twenty-first century.<sup>6</sup> Electronic real-time notation (Clay und Freeman 2010, Kretz 2010) and *sound painting* (Thompson 2006) for real-time composition and audience interaction provide further approaches. From this rich pallet of communication systems, we need to tailor specific tools suitable to musical styles and musics in the scope of the project, which are essential for analysis, for the creation of new content (Kretz 2011, 2014) and for audience participation. These tools will vary for different team members (Vienna/Montreal/Taiwan) depending on their backgrounds and contextual requirements.

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6 <https://www.gold.ac.uk/cmru/symposium/>

1. HT: c' 248 Hz

$\text{♩} = 114$

Solo

I

248

+11 +14 +12 +4 -7 +3 -14 -5 +4

E<sub>6</sub>  
D  
C<sub>5</sub>  
C  
H  
B  
A  
G<sub>5</sub>  
G  
F<sub>5</sub>

...na - kem ye, mi-na po - a - no - a ka ni-mi-na - li - san.

Fig. 4: Example of a transcription method (Anood melody type) of the Tao people, Taiwan. (Lin 2015b, 259)

## Collaborative arts-based research workshops

In addition to traditional artistic processes, a *platform for collaborative arts-based research workshops* supports interaction within the team. These are also complemented by a non-public Wiki platform where all team members can interact, share knowledge, ideas, content, etc. and document their artistic research processes with the team. To which extent the results of these workshops and the entire project will be collaborative or individual compositions, sound installations, pieces of concept music, performance with audience participation – or any combination of those – will be clarified during the collaborative process. The collected material from the above-mentioned methods – already characterised by a certain collective nature as a result of the previous steps – will be further examined and developed jointly through methods of research close to ethnomusicology as well as via an artistic laboratory of common improvisation and rehearsing. Rehearsing is not meant here as (too) early preparation for a public performance, but rather as an experimental situation where participants can fathom the potential of musical elements and their (individual/collective) works in progress and submit them to a common ‘stress test’. Furthermore, the idea of *scalable compositions* (see the section Aims of the Project) relating to different contexts of dissemination requires joint reflection and interaction on various levels. Which aesthetic axioms are relevant for which performance situations and which audiences? Which source content can be developed in which direction to open up potential for modification, allowing the outcome to be ‘scalable’ dependent

on the presentation context? The involvement of experts from source communities will be essential in this phase.

The fieldwork/participant approach and dialogical knowledge production are also applied in different situations during the collaborative processes by the coordinator of research and artistic work and the members of the scientific team, such as through discussions, preparations, presentations, concerts and performances. Musical practices, conversations and oral transmissions are the most common form of research data, allowing an effective approximation and providing a clearer view of the peculiarities of the ideas, concepts and methods applied during the creative process, and later of the behaviour (action, interaction, presentation and representation) in real-time practice. To establish and verify this data, fieldwork is the most essential and efficient research method for collecting and documenting primary sources in written, audio and visual forms. The collected data will be helpful for defining the contexts in which the composers and music makers socialise, act and work.

This research method is also introduced to the invited artists themselves. We will discuss whether this method might be useful for their personal creative processes as well as artistic development and, crucially, music-related arts-based research. Every workshop meeting is also documented (audio and video).

## Dissemination

An online weblog<sup>7</sup> was established at the beginning of this project. We plan to explore the use of various digital platforms, such as Research Catalogue<sup>8</sup> and Nuxeo<sup>9</sup> during the progress of the work for internal communication, archiving and for providing an online platform for audience participation. Later, various formats of publications, performances and exhibitions are planned.

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7 <https://www.mdw.ac.at/creativemisunderstandings/>

8 <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/>

9 <https://www.nuxeo.com/de/>

## Implementation (I from AGNI) and audience participation

The artist researchers will realise works – in various context-dependent instantiations – based on the developed notations and collected knowledge. These works will require constant adjustments (limits of performers/technology, adaptations to the contexts). With respect to the circular structure of the project and to establish a strong connection back to society, we will link the dissemination of the results of the project back to the cultural minorities involved in the field research. This model has already shown promising results in our own experiences and other projects.<sup>10</sup> *Feeding back to the field* serves the ethical aspect of ‘giving back the borrowed content’ (even in modified form), the collection of feedback from informants as evaluation of the applied methods, and as a basis for the development of a future common arts practice. To which extent was our endeavour to make contents scalable successful? To what extent can the informants perceive the relationship between source content and project results? Can the project contribute to increasing awareness of the visited community? Can we integrate the informants’ community members into joint performances? To what extent will the result be different when compared to the first field trip two years earlier?

Among other tools, *sound painting* (Thompson 2006) will be employed for community and audience participation in order to include a wide range of people. Since the Tao community does not practically distinguish between performers and audience in many of their traditional practices, we expect a continuum between *co-creation*, *co-curation* and *active spectatorship*. The feedback of the musicians originally involved in the field research will be implemented in the public artistic work, documented and reflected upon by the scholars. We will present the artistic outcome in Taiwan on Lanyu Island in the villages of Ivalino, Iraralay, Imorod, etc., as well as at the festivals in Europe and Taiwan.

During all the stages of the project, exchange and coordination between composers, music makers, scholars and source community experts will be essential in order to reflect not only on the creative process, but also to analyse and support strong interaction between creation and society. Repeated interactions with source communities, as well as audience participation in the broadest sense, will aid the increased social relevance of the artistic results.

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10 A. Heidweiller: *Opera in de bus*: [http://www.yo-opera.nl/archief\\_projects\\_templateo.php?item=1491](http://www.yo-opera.nl/archief_projects_templateo.php?item=1491)

## Team

### Project leaders

Johannes Kretz, project leader

Wei-Ya Lin, project co-leader, senior researcher

### Composers

Samu Gryllus, composer

Wolfgang Liebhart, composer

Ming Wang, composer

Hui Ye, composer

### Participants from Tao community

Siaman Vongayan (Han name: Chien-Ping Kuo), translator and coordinator

Si Pehbowen (Han name: Zheng Kuo), Tao dancer/singer,

Sinan Sakayan, Tao teacher

Chien-Hsiang Lin, video artist

Hsin-Chi Lin, Tao singer and singing coach

Ching-Yu Shih, Tao singer and singing coach

### Advisory board

Sandeep Bhagwati, Montreal, composer

Iris ter Schiphorst, mdw, composer

Bernd Brabec de Mori, Kunstuniversität Graz, ethnomusicology, auditive ontologies, sound stories

Marc Antoine Camp, Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts, ethnomusicology

Cheng-Hsien Yang, National Dong Hwa University, Taiwan, anthropology

Tasos Zembylas, mdw, tacit knowing of composers

Fang-Yi Lin, Studio Acht, Taipei, Taiwan, composer

## **Support/Cooperation**

Chiao-Hua Chang, ethnomusicologist, erhu player

Tao Foundation

Lan-En Foundation

## **Organisation**

Daliah Hindler, assistant & weblog editor

## **Current state of the project**

In January 2019 we invited Tao representatives to attend workshops in Vienna. The aim was to exchange and present every team member's thoughts and their prior artistic work. This two-week exchange gave rise to even more questions. One of the main subjects discussed during the two weeks of the workshop was the preservation of the Tao's traditional music and transformation of their tradition, society and music, or sounds.

- Should the process of change in traditions/music/language be repelled or promoted, and how?
- How and why do transformations occur?
- Who may/should/must be included in the transformative process?
- How do social changes affect the aesthetic, meanings and functions of music or sounds?
- How can those (musical) traditions which are losing their contexts and established functions be transformed in order to be adapted to the changes occurring in their respective contexts?
- Who profits from the outcomes of a transformative process? How can we deal, for instance, with issues of copyright?

New methodologies for composition and developing paradigmatic ways of relating music to society could increase the interest of a general audience for contemporary music.

Creative (mis)understandings might lead to works that, in turn, offer additional, or even reverse perspectives on the communities involved, and therefore, have a chance of providing new understandings and inspiring sustainable developments.



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