

PERFORMING ARTISTIC RESEARCH - DECOLONIZING ACADEMIA

Weiya Lin & Johannes Kreetz

Abstract (following a Creative Demonstration)

This contribution aims to present and perform – with e-violin, electronics and video – our own approach based on the synthesis of applied ethnomusicology and new approaches to composition and improvisation.

Since 2002 *Artistic Research (AR)* has been in focus through the Bologna-process of artistic higher education in Europe and has been institutionally established as discipline in many art universities/academies/conservatories as well as in funding programs. Nevertheless – especially in the field of music – the development of *AR* is still in its beginnings compared to other art disciplines and philosophy. Also, internationally the definition of *AR* is still open or in a process of clarification.

AR – as bridge between research and art – offers a chance to overcome limitations, debates, paradoxes and conflicts originating from too rigorous disciplinary demarcation and / or reduction of research to only one form of academic (declarative) knowledge. Although *AR* is a relatively young discipline, previous experiences already suggest clearly that its methods and criteria should not be defined on a meta-level, but rather develop immanently out of the research questions of any given project. Inter-/Transdisciplinarity as well as collaborative and integrative (non elitist) approaches are characteristic for most projects.

Since *AR* implies the gain of knowledge in and through (artistic) practices, the emancipation of different – mostly non verbal – form of knowledge (tacit, procedural, implicit, bodily, sensual, felt knowledge) can be fruitful for research, art practice and its social implications, and therefore play an important role for broadening and decolonizing academia.

Keywords

Artistic Research, Decolonization, Composition, Applied Ethnomusicology, Knowledge Forms.

Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.

Wittgenstein 1922

Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must sing, badly.¹

M.A. Numminen 2007

¹ Source: <https://evolvingthoughts.net/2009/12/12/whereof-one-cannot-speak-thereof-one-must-sing-badly> (last accessed on 10 November, 2018)

Research is – according to the UNESCO definition – “any creative systematic activity undertaken in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of man, culture and society, and the use of this knowledge to devise new applications”² (OECD Glossary of Statistical Terms 2008). Research therefore means not-knowing, or rather: not-yet-knowing and: the desire for knowledge (Rheinberger 1992, Dombois 2006). Additionally, Julian Klein emphasizes: Research also seems to be no unique selling point of scientists, but to include many activities that have been made by artists, for example (see Klein 2011:1). Both, in science as well as in the arts we are searching not only for declarative, verbalized knowledge, but in particular also for tacit, procedural, implicit, embodied, sensual, felt knowledge.

The idiosyncrasies of this “paper” connected to our creative demonstration/performance lecture at the 1st International Research Symposium at the University of the Visual and Performing Arts, Colombo, Sri Lanka (5-7 December 2018), which is dedicated to the theme “Changing World, Challenging Boundaries: New Frontiers in Creative Arts and Humanities”. To reflect on the relationship and permeation of “traditional” scholarly research and artistic research in order to suggest innovative methods for decolonizing academia is the main goal of this paper. There exists a certain overlap of methodologies formats of representation and dissemination. The following “paper” tries to follow established conventions of academic publications, at the same time to include or point at other forms and formats of knowledge (re)presentation. It offers as well complementary background information and research findings connected to our staged demonstration at the symposium.

Act I: Research & Orchid Island

*The freshwater spring is like our mothers' milk,
so precious that you cannot compare it with
money. The spring is nourishing our family.*

Lin, Hsin-Chi 2008

Since 2005 the two authors Johannes and Weiya have conducted “research” with the Tao, one of sixteen acknowledged indigenous groups in Taiwan on *Orchid Island* (in Chinese: Lanyu 蘭嶼). The Tao call the island *ponso no tao* – Island of Human Beings.

What do we mean here by “research”?

Wei-Ya: While we have been cooperating practically identical research partners from the Tao, my activity is called ethnomusicological research, but his is called artistic research.

Johannes: Since the definition of artistic research/arts-based research is – internationally seen – still open or in the middle of a process of clarification, we have a potential for shaping paradigms, for opening the academic space and for extending and modifying its possibilities. In contrast to the well-established disciplines of science – even when they are combined in transdisciplinary manner – artistic research further more includes, for example:

- Gain of knowledge through artistic practice.
- A strong focus on collaboration.
- Generation of methods out of the specific project contents.

² Source: <https://stats.oecd.org/glossary/detail.asp?ID=2312> (last accessed on 10 November, 2018).

- Use and emancipation of nonverbal forms of knowledge.

In some sense we obviously have been doing “artistic research” for many years without labeling it with this term.



Figure 1: View of Orchid Island from the ocean, photo taken by the authors in July, 2008.

At that time, I was at the second grade in the primary school class under Japanese government, and once the Americans bombed the school. Thank God it was a Sunday, nobody was at school. The whole year was always warships and planes there. We hide in the caves; at night we walk to our fields to dig sweet potatoes and taros. During the days it was too dangerous, three women from Hongtuo Village died from the bombs.

Lin, Hsin-Chi 2008

In 1877, Orchid Island was taken into the territory of China during the Qing Dynasty (清朝). After Japan took over Taiwan in March 1897, the island was also governed by the Japanese. The Japanese government controlled the access to Orchid Island as a research area and military base. After the liberation of Taiwan from Japan in 1945, Chang Kai-Shek, the leader of the KMT (Kuo Ming Tang Party, 國民黨, Chinese Nationalist Party), took over Taiwan in 1949 as a military base against the Chinese Communists Party in Mainland China. The KMT ruled the island then after the conquest of Taiwan.

In 1967 the island started using the economic and monetary system of Taiwan (Guan, 2007:168), and in 1971 was opened for tourism.

The Tao have experienced several discriminatory policies undertaken by the Taiwanese government since the 1950s. For example, due to the “poor living conditions of the Tao”, between 1966 and 1978, the government built modern concrete houses ignoring the geographic and climatic conditions on Orchid Island like earthquakes or typhoons, and many traditional houses were demolished. The most disastrous decision was made in the 1980s – the establishment of a nuclear waste storage on Orchid Island. A lie by the Taiwanese government and TaiPower Company sealed the fate of the Tao: for thirty years, they have been struggling in constant protests against the nuclear waste storage on their home island, dealing with poor harvests and facing an increase of cancer occurrences.

*We are catching fish,
but we are not allowed to catch all fish,
just those, which we really need and want.*

Lin, Hsin-Chi 2008

Interlude: Is Academia a Colonial Sphere?

For researchers, Orchid Island features an unique ecosystem and the “exotic culture” of the Tao people. For decades, this island has therefore been the surface most studied by academic researchers in the Taiwanese territory.

Wei-Ya: Since my first fieldwork in 2005, I have repeatedly heard from young and middle-aged Tao friends, how useful academic research results are for them. They can learn so much about their lost traditional knowledge by reading “our” academic articles. But years later I found that many parts of ethnographic content and conclusions of these academic papers seem self-determined and sometimes over-interpreted by the authors themselves.

According to Carole Boyce Davies academia is the most colonialized space, „it is a site for the production and re-production of a variety of discourses which keep in placed certain colonial structures which have as their intent the maintenance of Euro-American hegemonies at the level of thinking and therefore in a larger material world” (Davies 2003:ix). Also, Leanne Simpsons confirms this observation: “Our knowledge becomes assimilated and it is of very little use to those who are trying to advance their interests. When our knowledge becomes a commodity, it can be used at will by the power structures of the dominant society to support existing doctrines and the status quo. It can be appropriated, marginalized and even used against us” (Simpsons 2004:140).

Alan Willams, an ethnomusicologist reflects on how knowledge is shared as followed:

“The primary goal of any academic research is to produce ‘knowledge’ of some form or another. Data is knowledge; history is knowledge; ideas are knowledge. But what to do with all this acquired knowledge? For some, knowledge was produced for the benefit of the elitist cult of the academy, where encounters with knowledge produces still more knowledge. But for many, a good idea needs to be shared, and shared beyond the ivy-coated walls of the university. For almost any trained academician, publishing text is the natural outcome of knowledge production” (Willams 2015:774).

Johannes: The same is true regarding artists and the presentation of their works in respective institutions.

There are no universal solutions for decolonizing academia, since every institution and every research unit follow its existing ideologies and paradigms, which are determined and predefined for maximum efficiency in each given historical, political, economic, ecological and religious context.

Which image appears, when both, ethnomusicology and artistic research step out of the traditional constructs of academia? How can academic/scholarly/artistic research be useful as mean of decolonialization? If the classical academic appropriation of knowledge and contents – according to the usual power differences – is possible, couldn’t we establish this also on the basis of a reciprocal relationship? Indigenous individuals and groups are using indigenous knowledge and results of indigenous knowledge production. Shouldn’t academia integrate the methods of communities outside of academia (those of the Tao or other indigenous methods)

in processes of a common, extended and reciprocal knowledge production and its application and manifestation? In particular, when they differ from the Euro-American canon of methods?

Act II: Motivation for the Fight against Social Inequalities

*We have our freedom and peace
No need for modern houses
In town there are conflicts and diseases,
No need for city life.*
From *Palaliama's Song* (2018)³



Figure 2: View of the nuclear waste storage facility on Orchid Island, photo taken by Wei-Ya Lin, August 2008.

Johannes: Actually, the intention for our first visit on Orchid Island was to collect musical materials for our own compositions. There we met a Tao activist –Chien-Ping Kuo, who was one of the leaders in the Taiwanese aboriginal movement in the 1980s. He speaks Tao-language perfectly and has knowledge about the Tao people’s traditional songs and taboo system (*Makaniaw*). Furthermore, he reads Edward Said, for example, and Frantz Fanon.

Wei-Ya: Kuo explained to us the acrimony and consequences imposed by the establishment of the nuclear waste storage. This was the main cause to motivate me to decide to writing a PhD thesis in ethnomusicology, although as a viola player and composer I didn’t have any academic training then. However, at this point Kuo Chien-Ping refused to collaborate in my research. For him, I was too naive and too uninformed about the Tao society. He even sent me away from his own village, in order to conduct my inquiries in the village Ivalino (of course, I realized this years later...).

Five years later, in 2012, I was able to explain the functions of the taboo system and its relation to songs. I invited him to join my panel *Music, Taboos and Values: musical creativities as a tool for shaping new identities among the Tao*, presented during the 42nd ICTM World Conference in Shanghai. My idea was to introduce to him the discipline ethnomusicology and

³ Excerpt of BASE Performance 2018, Johannes Kretz, electronics, voice Wei-Ya Lin, viola, voice Anuradha Upadhyaya, voice, video. Lyrics based on the results of the fieldwork with the family of Palaliama, Kodaikanal, Tamil Nadu, India. Full video available here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQN3dzNYNY4

the approaches of applied ethnomusicology, as well as to offer both of us a space for exchange. One of the results of this exchange was, that I realized that he doesn't have any respect for researchers of any disciplines. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, a Maori, wrote in *Decolonizing Methodologies* in 1999: "The term, 'research' is inextricable linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, 'research', is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary. [...] It is so powerful that indigenous people even write poetry about research." (Smith 2012:1). This statement echoes Kuo Chien-Ping's attitude; so do I experience in the field.

How can we involve research partners in our daily academic practice? Is writing a paper the best way to transmit and disseminate auditory or visual information and knowledge?

„For ethnomusicologists and other field-centered, humanities-based researchers, it is often the people encountered in the course of research that should be 'shared' with the world" (Alan Willams 2015:774). This intention of Willams and others, have already been part of the fundamental tools in the area of applied ethnomusicology since a long time. Participatory and collaborative approaches, bottom up strategies, structures of inter-/transdisciplinarity or epistemological communities as well as the reflection on one's own position and power are employed consciously and different constructive methods have been developed and used.

Since 2013 I have been trying to apply results from my PhD thesis about music in the life of the Tao for artistic research projects. One of these projects – *Soundscape – Island of the Human Beings* (2014) aims at generating further scholarly insights, formulating constructive suggestions, and developing strategies for empowering communities and providing feedback to policy-makers. Another one aims for translating and transmitting the Tao people's ecological problems and corresponding political issues, such as uncontrolled tourism, assimilation strategies, or the nuclear waste storage on Orchid Island, to a general audience not through writing but by the means of a prominent dance theatre production *Maataw – the Floating Island* (2016).

Although it is difficult for me that by conducting such projects I am constantly being pushed out of my comfort-zone, I realized that this is a necessary process. It sharpens the perception and understanding of the fact that every action we conduct as scholars is a political act in this world filled with inequalities and conflicts. Decolonization is not a product, "it is a process" (Smith 1999:4), "it is everyone's business" (Mackinlay 2015:394).

Johannes: From the perspective of a composer the collaboration with indigenous people – in particular with the Tao – has at least two aspects: on one hand it is important, that members of minorities – and I regard both, the Tao and the composers of new music as minorities – can unite their forces and make a statement in opposition to mainstream society as well as to mainstream aesthetics. On the other hand I am convinced that it is essential for contemporary composers to question the social relevance of their work, the connection and relationship between artistic work and society. There might not be easy answers for this question, but from my perspective the "new" in new music might lie not so much in the material, the sounds, the aesthetic choices, but rather in the relationship to existential aspects of life.



Figure 3: The last scene from the dance theatre production *Maataw – the Floating Island* (2016), at the Taipei National Theater, performed by Formosa Indigenous Dance and Song Troupe. Director: Faidaw Fagod, Music director: Wei-Ya Lin, electronic composition: Johannes Kretz. Photo taken by Huang, Yu-Shun.

Tsai vows to tackle Lanyu nuke waste issue

By Stephanie Chao, The China Post Tuesday, August 16, 2016, 12:30 am TWN



Taiwan utility told to remove nuclear waste from island within 9 years

Orchid Island houses 100,000 barrels of low radioactive waste

By Matthew Strong, Taiwan News, Staff Writer
2017/02/15 17:46



MOST

- 1 Taiwan's first nuclear power plant
- 2 First nuclear power plant in Taiwan

Nuclear waste. (By Central News Agency)

Figure 4: Excerpts from the news on the web about the Taiwanese government's state on the issue of nuclear waste on Orchid Island after the performance of the dance theater production *Maataw – the Floating Island* (the left one occurred in August 2016; the right one from February 2017).

Interlude: Social Engagement in *Artistic Research*

*...jeeps and bikes passing by
day after day after day after day....*

Who knows, what they think, what they think about us?

Does anybody hear our voice?

From Palaliama's Song (2018)

Johannes: The attitude of social responsibility should also be self-evident in trans-cultural respectively artistic research projects. The requirement of a dialogical and participatory structure similar to the concept of the “social sculpture” (Joseph Beuys) and many tendencies of concept art (Fluxus, Happening etc.) aims against the separation of artists, authors and artistic work on one hand and audience on the other hand. These separations are relativized and participation, social relevance and political but also environmental awareness are emphasized.



Figure 5: Social Sculpture: Joseph Beuys talking to Richard Hamilton at Tate 1972. © Tate 2005⁴. Available at: http://www.tate.org.uk/sites/default/files/styles/grid-normal-12-cols/public/images/joseph_beuys_talking_to_richard_hamilton_at_tate.jpg?itok=rMf6eDS9, <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/legacy-myth-maker> (last accessed on 10.11.2018).

⁴ Source: <https://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/legacy-myth-maker> (last accessed on 10 November, 2018)

Act III: Performing... Decolonizing...

Does anybody hear our voice?

We follow our voice. We follow our voice.

From *Palaliama's Song* (2018)

Our current project is called “creative (mis)understandings” and is funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) in the frame of the PEEK funding program for arts-based research. It aims to develop transcultural methods 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.

Wei-Ya: From the viewpoint of ethnomusicology the project is located in the area of Applied Ethnomusicology. 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.

Johannes: Both comprehension and incomprehension yield serendipity and inspiration for new research questions, innovative artistic creation, and applied follow-ups among non-western communities.

During all project stages, 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 analyze and support strong interaction between creation and society. Re-interaction with source communities as well as audience participation in the widest sense will help to increase the social relevance of the artistic results.

The following 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 will use a **multi-directional perspective** of inspiration including indigenous concepts of creation (cf. Brabec de Mori 2016: 48-50). We want to contribute to a model of mutual inspiration exchange and mutual understanding and to establish a layer of intentional *creative (mis)understandings*.

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. 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 source context allows for a respectful and conscious handling of the ‘material’.

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

The project will contribute towards new methodologies for composition, develop paradigmatic ways of relating music to society, and finally 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. *The project* might lead to works that in return offer additional, or even reverse perspectives on the communities involved and therefore have a chance of inspiring new understandings⁵.

- 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 social context of the genesis of a piece as well as on their public performance situation in various contexts.

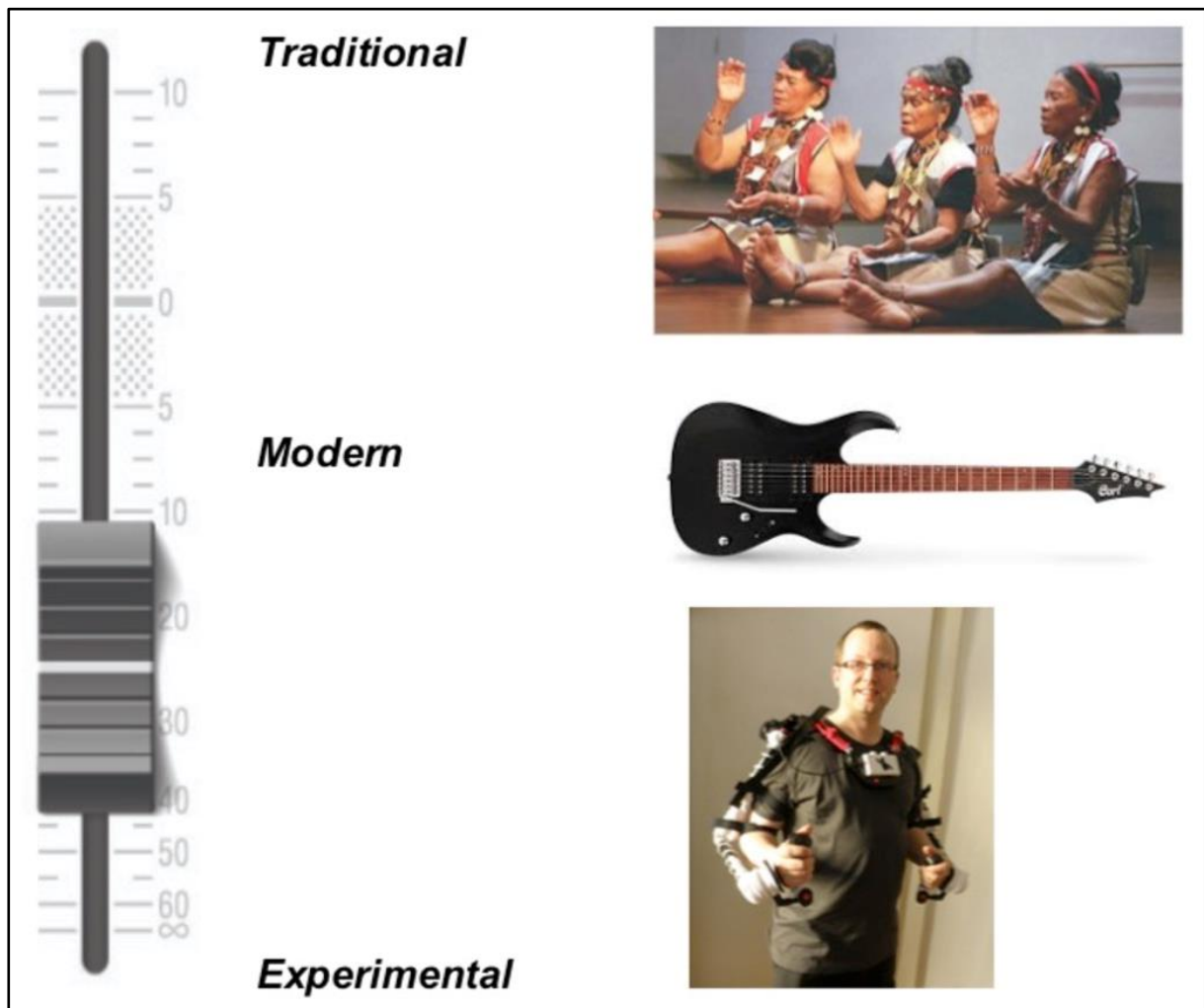


Figure 6: Graphical metaphor of a scalable composition, graphic designed by Johannes Kretz.

The same content (some kind of “distorted indigenous music” e.g.) 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”. The challenge of calibrating the outcome of artistic processes in dependence on their participants and recipients

⁵ 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).

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.

Johannes: Since the project is funded from an arts-based research program, the conditions allow a certain playground for bottom-up processes and creative actions in applied research, which would not be financed in funding schemes of fundamental research in honest rationales. The potential of the project does not only offer possible answers to the questions above, it also allows us to transform some of the answers into deeds.

Wei-Ya: Artistic Research can act as bridge between research and art. It offers a chance to overcome those limitations, debates, paradoxes and conflicts, which result from too rigorous separation of disciplines and from reduction of knowledge forms to a single academic declarative one. In this sense, artistic research can play an important role in decolonizing academia.

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