

Samu Gryllus: Two methods to create (mis)understandings.

I would like to briefly introduce two methods of artistic research I am using in our program, developed throughout the field research phase on the Orchid Island (Lanyu) in summer 2019.

One of them is a slight modification of working with a multidisciplinary sign language called the *Soundpainting*, the other one is a complex creative process between two individually working artists called *Dialogue Research*.

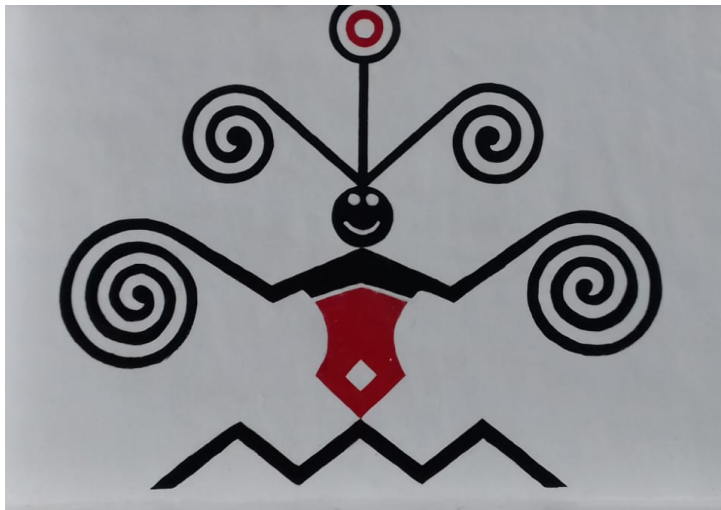
*Soundpainting* is a multidisciplinary sign-language created in the 1970s by the American composer, multi-instrumentalist Walter Thompson, and developed since then by many creative artists with very diverse artistic background of different domains like dance, music, theater or visual arts with all possible genres of these. It is a unique method of communication within a community through a continuously developing set of hand signs. Nowadays language comprises 1500 different gestures can be used in an endless number of combinations in sentences of a given syntax. The most unique in the language is that, that the responses to the hand-signs are different sounds, movements or any other creative actions, so the language opens up a dialogue between defined structure and intuition can be fine-tuned to any situation in real-time. I am using the language for communicating with any community. I am regularly practicing the language at three different universities with students of theater, classical or popular music, but I also often asked to conduct pre-concert workshops of new music with a diverse audience in order to introduce the compositional ideas of certain works. Thus more, we use the language together with many of the creative (mis)understanding researchers at our international creative summer camp with a group of participants between age of 6 and 18. It was our colleague, Si Pehbowen who organized the workshop days, and were able to find kids who had time and interest in the summer on the island. Soundpainting is an ideal tool for interpersonal research as well, since it forces in a very gentle way participants to share their ideas and thoughts, and because of its practice it automatically makes certain behavioral habits and personalities visible.

At our field research in August on Lanyu we wanted to offer interesting and useful workshops to the younger community of Tao. The aim of this method was first of all to bring our expertise and knowledge in certain topics for those who requires it, but also to create new connections to the community. My choice was to offer *Soundpainting* mainly for vocal praxis also as a sort of community building, meanwhile I was hoping to get an overview about their

daily musical praxis, with special focus on how the disappearing traditional Tao vocal technique and music influences their partly improvisatory actions.

I conducted two 60 minutes long workshops at the Lantau Highschool on August 21 and 22. We planed a third day as well, but we had to cancel that because of the approaching typhoon. On the first day I introduced a set of basic gestures using more or less controlled archetypal actions for both sounds and movements (selection, between { and } the capitalized name of the gesture):

- {LongTone} – sustained sounds or movements
- {Hits} – short actions of sound or movements
- multilingual {Speech}
- {Minimalism} - loop-like actions
- {Laugh}ing or {Cry}ing
- changing intensity, speed or other quality of actions through different {Faders}
- game-types (modes) like {PointToPoint} or {ComeAndGo}, where within the given framework and rules there is more focus on individual, open improvisations.



We had an intense and great time. I was a bit surprised though, that I was barely able to find any trace of the above mentioned culture and vocal tradition in the actions of the participating children. Their responses were not significantly different from other Asian and European participants I met earlier in my praxis. After the workshop I

started to think how could I force to get responses related to traditional life and practice of the Tao. I decided to create a new sign for this, and combining with the sign {Feel}, so I could use the phrase {With,Tao,Feel} as a modification in the sentence, and asking the participants to de-color their actions to relate to the tradition. The sign is based on a traditional symbol of "human" in the Tao paintings. I discussed the physical attributes of the

new sign with Si Pehbowen, because she know the connotation of the original drawing of the Tao. I used the new sign for example in the sentence {WholeGroup;Sing;With,Tao,Feel,With,Sync} to create an improvisatory scene, where they try to copy some elements of the traditional vocal praxis in a way that they go together (intention to be synchronized) among their improvised lines. Or another example could be {WholeGroup,Ladder,With,Tao,Feel} where one could show a approximative vocal line, with higher or lower pitches, and they follow it with sort of the traditional vocal technique. The participants were astonishingly responsive. I felt that we were able to break through their mutual expectations on how they should act in the modernized community in order to explore together their unique knowledge of the tradition of the island that were hidden in their actions earlier.

This activity is truly very far from the nature of the tradition, where there are strong rules and hierarchy in order to decide who, what and how allowed to sing at certain situations. But since our activity in the group could be considered much more as a game of a group of kids led by a strange foreigner, it is acceptable by the community and it helped our research as well.

I met the participants later on at the bar *DoWanVa*, which is an important gathering place for the young Tao community, since the bar offers regularly concerts with bands working with indigenous music culture form the island and the mainland as well.

Throughout our field research I realized that for me as a creative artist it is hard to find any autonomous position for my research, where I am not standing in front of the problems of the island, mainly facing the powerlessness of learning, restoring or even saving the partly demolished thousand years old closed tradition of the Tao. I felt the necessity to somehow create a living partnership within the group, where we are able to work on what we have and not researching things that already disappeared or wanted to help to restore something in the future. I felt the necessity to start acting as an autonomous artists, and through this activity creating reflective relationships within creative processes.

On August 27th, I accidentally encountered a painting on the porch of the new hotel of Chien Ping, our main collaborator on the island. As I later on came to know, it was made by the previously mentioned Si Pehbowen, daughter of Chien Ping. I knew about her dancing activity, but not that she paints so well. I decided to start the *Dialogue Research* with her work. We discussed the framework of the process a few days later (Aug. 30).

- Dialogue research is a project between the two of us.
- We act as two autonomous artists, with the aim, to create mutual understanding of each-others' creative output.
- The method consciously implements chances of creative misunderstandings.
- The process is an undecided long series of works reflecting on each-other.
- Works can be created within any artistic domain, but has to be documented and should be able to be send over internet.



First step of the process is creating a work of art, made by me, reflecting on what I understood from the artistic idea of Pehbowen's painting. Parallel to this creative process, or right afterwards I also create a detailed documentation or auto-analysis on the created work. This should focus on the nature of the reflection to the previous work of art, In my case to how I understand Pehbowen's painting and even its cultural connotation. Of course I see it also as a work influenced by the Tao tradition, since I know that its creator has strong connection with it. I send over (via internet) the work I created, but keep the documentation in secret until the third step.

Second step of the process is that Pehbowen reflects on my work as she understands it, and sends me her reply, meanwhile she also creates a documentation and an auto-analysis on how she understood my work and how she reflected on this, but keeps this documentation again in secret.

The third step is that I am sending her my documentation created in step one on the work sent, so she can compare her way of understanding to, and my intention with my work.

Following this, in about one month, I reflect again with any work of art, and as soon as I sent it to her, I receive her previously written documentation of her work in step two.

Through this open process of creative activity we are able to conduct a free discussion that is strongly influenced by all the impressions and inspirations we gain throughout our artistic research project. With the help of the precisely formulated analytical documentation, we will

understand the methods of our inspiration, finely retune our artistic understanding of each other.