

AS A GOOD REAL-ON-WHERE YOU WANT TO GET TO, I DON'T MUCH CARE WHERE I BELIEVE THEN IT'S  
NORTHWEST, BUT I BELIEVE BECAUSE I WAS A DIFFERENT PERSON THEN, AFTER ALL I CAN'T BELIEVE  
RE: 'THEN IT DOESN'T MATTER WHICH WAY YOU GO' AND THE MORAL OF THAT IS THE MORAL  
ACE. AND IF YOU WISH TO GO ANYWHERE YOU MUST RUN TWICE AS FAST AS THAT. ALICE:  
GOING TO BE FROM ONE MINUTE TO ANOTHER, IT'S NO USE GOING BACK TO YESTERDAY, BE  
DID LONG WINDS, AND WHEN I DON'T GO TO RAGLIT AT ALL, AND IT'S SOME OF MY NOT 'MA  
YOU GO' AND THE MORAL OF THAT IS THE MORE THERE IS OF MINE THE LESS THERE IS.  
WHEN I GOT UP THIS MORNING? I ALMOST THINK I CAN REMEMBER FEELING A LITTLE DIFFER  
WASN'T SIGNIFY LETA PART OF GERMANY IN LONDON IS A PART OF PARIS, AND PARIS IS  
IG? I ALMOST THINK I CAN REMEMBER FEELING A LITTLE DIFFERENT ABOUT LONDON ALTHOUGH  
E. THIS IS IMPOSSIBLE: MAD MATTER: ONLY IF YOU BELIEVE IT IS.

MYSELF, SIR. BECAUSE I AM NOT MYSELF, YOU SEE?  
CAPITAL OF PARIS, AND PARIS IS THE CAPITAL OF ROME, AND ROME-NO, THAT'S AMOYBOMB  
AND THEN THE VOIC  
TAYN HADN'T TO OTHER, GIVEN THE TIME WAS THE SAME, THE SAME, THE SAME, THE SAME, THE SAME, THE SAME  
I'M CERTAIN! I MUST HAVE BEEN CHANGED FOR MABEL 'BUT I DON'T WANT TO GO AMONG

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Barbara Lüneburg

TransCoding – From ‘Highbrow Art’ to Participatory Culture

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BARBARA LÜNEBURG

# **TransCoding – From ‘Highbrow Art’ to Participatory Culture**

**Social Media – Art – Research**

**[transcript]**

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Der Wissenschaftsfonds.



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Annotated website:

[www.transcoding.info](http://www.transcoding.info) (not included in this printed book)

## PREFACE

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This monograph documents the artistic research project *TransCoding – From ‘Highbrow Art’ to Participatory Culture* (PEEK AR 259-G21), funded by the Austrian Science Fund. *TransCoding* engages with the topic of participatory culture, using social media in the context of artistic practice to involve an online audience in the making of a multimedia artwork.

In this study, I examine the social media strategies and artistic practices employed, introduce the voice of the project’s community, and present and discuss both the artworks that came into being and their genesis, while reflecting on scholarly and methodological considerations. I investigate the notion of authorship, authority and aesthetics in participatory art and digital culture in the context of the project, and the motivation to contribute via web 2.0. My team colleague sociologist Kai Ginkel and I debate discourses on qualitative methodologies in artistic research and ethnographic sociology, in an attempt to compare the construction of knowledge produced by the respective fields, and we investigate methodological inferences.

Artistic research, and with it the process of doing art and the artwork itself, are at the heart of this investigation. For that reason, I offer an augmented way of reading by providing a complementary website. Designed in a way that reflects the structure of this book, it presents annotated audio and video excerpts of *TransCoding*’s artworks, interview passages and community contributions. In addition, the website documents the connected artwork *Slices of Life* for violin, video and soundtrack and a playlist of different versions of the audiovisual installation *Read me* personalised for single community members of *TransCoding* ([transcoding.info/english/book.html](http://transcoding.info/english/book.html)). Both have been created as part of the project and with the participation of community members. The book could be read as text alone, but in my opinion the reader will derive more and gain a more holistic experience from listening in parallel to the additional audio and visual media made available.

Parts of chapters 1 (‘Introduction’), 2 (‘The Research Field’), 4 (‘Theory of Participatory Culture’), 9 (‘A Potential for Change’) and 13 (‘Conclusion’) draw on my paper *From ‘Highbrow Art’ to Participatory Culture – A Potential*



*for Change* (2017) at RUUKKU, Studies for Artistic Research, with the kind permission of the publisher.

The artwork and this monograph would not exist without *TransCoding*'s community. I would like to thank all our active and passive supporters; by name, I am grateful to Louis Aguirre, Victor Barceló, Julien Charest, Tamara Friebe, Gloria Guns, Anthony Green, Camilla Hoitenga, Olivia Kieffer, LIA, Feliz Anne Reyes Macahis, Katarina Michelitsch, Anahit Mughnetsyan, Alina Murzakhanova, Paul Norman, Heghine Ohanyan, Mikolaj Pocięcha, Alexandra Radoulova, Hali Rey, Damian Stewart, Felix Christian Thiessen, Ricardo Mateus Tovar, Sabina Ulubeanu, Isabelle Vigier, Michael Wolters, Susanne Wosnitzka, and my students in the seminar 'Undoing Gender' from the University of Music and Performing Arts Graz and Karl Franzens University of Graz, who all contributed with voice, sound, image or word to the artworks *Read me* or *Slices of Life*.

👁 Link to the video documentation of *Slices of Life*:

<http://transcoding.info/english/book.html> – PREFACE

# I. TRANSCODING — FROM ‘HIGHBROW ART’ TO PARTICIPATORY CULTURE

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

K-Pop artist PSY and gender theorist Judith Butler, contemporary art music and pop culture – how can these possibly be considered together? The artistic research project *TransCoding – From ‘Highbrow Art’ to Participatory Culture* has attempted to find an answer. *TransCoding* engaged with the topic of participatory culture by using social media in the context of artistic practice. My team and I encouraged participation and shared discourse in the new arts by actively involving an online audience in the making of a multimedia artwork. We hoped thus to make ‘highbrow’ art, that is, contemporary classical music and multimedia art, more accessible to a broader public.

Our main target group was an internet-literate young audience, mostly drawn from popular culture, who might not necessarily be considered the typical audience for classical contemporary multimedia performances. The blog at <https://what-ifblog.net> served as the central social media and content base, and also as a contact point for our community. Community members were directly involved in the genesis of *TransCoding*'s artworks via their creative contributions. *TransCoding* facilitated interactions between the participating members and the professional artist(s) through calls for entries channelled via the project's social media hub.

In *TransCoding*, artistic research went beyond the investigation of the artistic process, and expanded into new contexts. By offering participatory culture via web 2.0 as part of our arts project, my team and I invited contributors to speak out, and to share a discourse about and exert influence on two major arts projects. We employed principles of participatory culture in the communication and creative process, thus redefining the (commonly hierarchic) relationship between artist and community as one of permeability and mutual influence. We applied findings and theories from media sociology and cultural science to

an artistic process; we investigated their applicability and meaning in the arts, and their impact on the resulting artworks itself, on the community we had gathered, and on the role of the artist.

## The Context

From February 2014 to February 2017, my team and I built and maintained a network of various social media channels around a main hub, the WordPress site *what-ifblog.net*. Here we presented our topics – multimedia art and contemporary art music, community participation and the creation of our show – under the categories ‘Art we love,’ ‘You, Us and the Project,’ and ‘Making of,’ respectively. In a fourth category we chose ‘Identity’ as our main topic for the content of the artwork and the blog (Fig. 1.1).



Fig. 1.1: The artistic topic of *TransCoding* was identity. In one of our first calls for entry we asked the community members about their ‘spring identity’. Image © Barbara Lüneburg

*TransCoding* was for women and men, professional artists and home producers. The concept of identity offered a framework for the project that is universally

was our main contact point with our community, and afforded the community to participate in our project. Via calls for entries we encouraged people to contribute images, sounds and texts that I incorporated into the artwork. Through our social media channels we invited them to share their ideas and influence on the creation of the evolving artwork, and a

The blog was our main contact point with our community, and afforded them the opportunity to participate in our project. Via calls for entries we encouraged our visitors to contribute images, sounds and texts that I incorporated in the artworks. Through our social media channels we invited them to interact and exert influence on the creation of the evolving artwork, and additionally

presented situations and material for community members to create their own artwork (whether or not it was closely related to *TransCoding*). We raised interest in participation in art as a way to express one's identity and achieve personal empowerment, and we fostered a sense of community through belonging to a peer group participating in an arts project.

We gave our community members authority to shape our work and offered them a platform to meet and make their interest clear. As we invited contributors to exercise influence over the joint artwork, we looked at change as viewed through the power relationship between artist and community.

## **The Inspiration**

Where did the idea for *TransCoding* come from? At least three major influences inspired the project. Many readers will remember *Gangnam Style*, the viral 2012 YouTube hit by the Korean pop artist PSY (<http://bit.ly/2ud4afx>). Only a few days after the release of *Gangnam Style* on YouTube, fans from all over the world had created covers and parodies, and launched remixes that replaced PSY's Korean theme with their own life and identity. The young digital social media public, it seemed, was obsessed with *Gangnam Style*. Of course, in the background of this huge success, the South Korean label company behind his song, YG entertainment, had invested in it with a well-structured, well-prepared and fastidiously executed campaign. (Drum 2012) They were able to tap into an incredible potential for creativity and for communication among people from different cultures and countries on social media. Although it was clear that as a team working in new (classical) music we would never be able to campaign for our purposes in the same way as a pop label operating on an international scale, the phenomenon of *Gangnam Style* became one of my inspirations for the use of social media in *TransCoding*.

At the same time, I taught seminars on film music, audio branding and media theory at media universities in Germany and Austria. My students were tech-oriented young people whose creative background was popular culture. Their thinking and creative activity was quite different from mine with my artistic practice originating in classical and contemporary art music. In seminars we explored with interest our different worlds and had critical discussions on Luigi Nono and K-Pop, Henry Purcell and social media, or audiovisual installations and electronic avant-garde pop music. I loved the music they made from what I offered them and I realised that I could actually lure people into contemporary art music just by introducing them to it and sharing my knowledge, enthusiasm and passion for it. In their works an intriguing mix of popular music and contemporary art music emerged and my students started to adopt new artistic perspectives. I too began to think in

new ways. The reciprocal interaction between me and my students changed my approach not only to my own domain, but also to the field they came from, popular culture. We mutually influenced each other's artistic practice. Those students were my model when I thought about the target audience for *TransCoding* – From 'Highbrow Art' to Participatory Culture.

Last but not least, I was inspired by philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler. One day in spring 2013, I was doing research for a performance set-up for the artworks of *TransCoding*. When I was randomly sifting through YouTube videos, I found a short interview with Judith Butler in which she talked about the notion of gender performativity. She explained what it means if we say 'gender is performative':

"for something to be performative means that it produces a series of effects. We act and walk and speak and talk in ways that consolidate an impression of being a man or being a woman. ... We act as if that being of a man or that being of a woman is actually an internal reality or something that is simply true about us, a fact about us, but actually it's a phenomenon that is being produced all the time and reproduced all the time, so to say gender is performative is to say that nobody really is a gender from the start. ... It's my view that gender is culturally formed, but it is also a domain of agency or freedom." (Butler, Judith Butler: Your Behavior Creates Your Gender 2011)

If we refused to perform the gender script that is handed to us by society, we could instead perform a different, self-chosen script; ideally, we would decide on our gender (on a daily basis) and pick the life that suits us best.

This notion of free choice sparked the idea of creating a multimedia show with a series of short movements of three to four minutes – similar to the format of a pop show – traversing a whole palette of musical possibilities: from classical music to pop music, from pop music to the new music avant-garde, or perhaps from new music to metal. Each song would feature a different story and a different kind of identity. I had found my topic for *TransCoding* and concomitantly for the future multimedia show *Slices of Life* that became one of the participative artworks developed within the project.

## The Community

'Identity' seemed to me ideal for *TransCoding*, since it was necessary to find a subject that people coming from 130 different countries (according to the 2017 WordPress statistics) would care about enough to start communicating and interacting with us online; we needed something that would touch them emotionally, and that was connected to their individual life, something that triggered their wishes or visions. We didn't treat 'identity' as a scholarly

paradigm to be investigated but rather as a means to spark off the phantasy of our diverse community members and to unite individuals from different cultural backgrounds in art. Each community member, whether male or female, religious or atheistic, from East, West, North or South, young or old, could contribute from their life, culture and social context. Each song, each story, each image and each sound in the context of our project would stand for differently ‘performed’ identities.

**“What if?**

**a participatory arts project about identity**

**a question • a creative endeavour • a research project • a community**

We are an international team of artists, musicians and programmers building an online/offline community through which we are exploring the concept of identity.

We are looking for your input while developing two different artworks, both dealing with our topic:

- An audiovisual installation that features texts, recordings, music and images from the community and from us.
- A multimedia show for violin, electronics and video that merges community contributions with our approach to art.

In the section ‘You, Us and the Project’ you will gain insight into our thoughts and we hope for your comments and inspiration.

**Contribute: How can you participate?**

If you like to make music, if you take pictures wherever you go, if you love to write or design, if you are a camera freak or an all-night creative programmer, or if you are just interested in personal freedom of choice, then **What if?** is for you.

Send us ideas, links, photos, music, films, texts, interviews that pick up on our topic: commercials you love, ads you hate, quotes that inspire you and links to art works you have found or you have maybe made yourself. We would love to hear from you.

These are some of our current questions to get you inspired:

**What if** we could live our lives regardless of the expectations of society, family, friends or colleagues?

**What if** our body, our gender wasn’t our limit?

**What if** we took the freedom to be who we want to be, and how can we express this in our art?

**What if?** is limited. It will exist for three years. We started on 1st of February 2014 and will finish the project in 2017. During that time, we will continuously work on the blog. We will throw ideas at you and wait for your comments and replies.” (Lüneburg, What-ifblog.net | About 2014)

## The TransCoding Team

*TransCoding* was carried out by an international team from Germany, Austria and Canada supported by the Austrian Science Fund FWF (PEEK AR 259-G21) and located at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Graz (Austria). Our research was transdisciplinary and drew on the fields of artistic research, sociology and social media expertise. The project began in February 2014 and lasted three years in total. During the first year we worked in a team of four artists and a social media strategist with shared responsibilities in the creation of the artwork. After a year we continued in a smaller team for reasons particular to the project and based on the topic ‘authority for the community versus sole creative sovereignty for the artist’ (investigated in more detail in chapter 9 ‘A Potential for Change’).

From the second year on, our team consisted of two main operators. I headed up the project in the capacity of conceptual leader, social media content producer and strategic mastermind behind the communication with the community, as well as lead artist, performer and researcher. My co-worker, Clio Montrey, who was in charge of the everyday communication with the community, constantly fed various social medias channels we had installed around our main hub, the WordPress blog *what-ifblog.net*. We were given occasional support by a visual artist, software programmers and a dramaturge. We were later joined by Kai Ginkel, a researcher who reflected on the project from a sociologist’s point of view, whose perspective was primarily shaped by his ongoing work in sociological ethnography. His prior research was concerned with a sociological understanding of sound, using the field of noise music as a case study and reflecting his own artistic involvement in that particular field in the process. Consequently, his work in *TransCoding* is related to artistic research while being rooted in sociological thinking.

## The Research Questions

The name of the artistic research project *TransCoding – From ‘Highbrow Art’ to Participatory Culture* implies that we converted an art form commonly seen as intellectual or at least rarefied in taste into a representation of art that is derived from audience participation and thus accepted and embraced from the start. In order to get people to participate who under normal circumstances would be very unlikely to connect with the kind of contemporary ‘highbrow’ art we represented, we applied a popular communication tool, social media. The overriding research question was: how can we achieve the involvement of an audience not previously available in the creation of a classical contemporary artwork, and what would be the artistic and cultural social result?



Alongside this main question, a series of secondary questions emerged from the specific setting. This will be tackled in different parts of the book: questions dealing with the building of a community via web 2.0, with the assignment of authority in the creative process, and with aesthetics and crossover art based on the exchange between community and artist. We initially asked ourselves which method would allow us, using social media, to establish a community that would pick up on the topic of new media art and crossover culture, and would want to be actively involved in the creation of an artwork.

At the same time, we deliberated whether we would be able to establish a crossover between high art and popular art by offering creative and intellectual incentives to participate in our project, while on the other hand listening back to and channelling the community's own creative voices. We asked about the interchange between the global community and the research team and what it entailed with regard to the project and to the artworks. Would we – through it – be able to create an artwork that made contemporary art more permeable and accessible for the audience? When we subsequently investigated whether the interaction with the community had led to a fruitful interactive exchange between the contributors and the artist, while adding authority to the community, we also asked how in consequence it changed the role and self-concept of the artist.

However, due to the widespread global and virtual setting of the project there was one initial question we did not have the means to answer: whether an initially unavailable audience would be willing to become an available audience in a real concert setting through participation in our artworks via social media.

## **Summary of the Individual Chapters**

Part I of the monograph ('TransCoding – From 'Highbrow Art' to Participatory Culture') consists of a general introduction to *TransCoding* in chapter 1; chapter 2 describes the research field and gives an overview of participatory art in the field of contemporary (classical) music and the project-specific methodology. Part I is rounded off in chapter 3 by an interview of the *TransCoding* team that offers an overview of the project from the perspective of the cultural scientist Torsten Flüh. In his questions, he touches on the (crossover) aesthetics of *TransCoding*, the challenges of a digital society, social media in the arts and the creative process behind the project.

Part II ('From Lonely Genius to Community Participation – Whose Voice Matters?') is concerned with theories and concepts related to participative art and the theoretical framework for our social media and content strategies. In chapter 4, I define participatory culture via web 2.0 in the context of our project. In chapter 5, I look into the social media content strategies that furthered and

unlocked the creativity of the community for mutual benefit. In chapter 6, I recount the production of the artwork and the problems that arose out of the participatory character. Chapter 7 discusses the motivation for participation that let people contribute to the artwork of *TransCoding*. In chapter 8, which is dedicated to the community of *TransCoding*, I document selected community contributions and reflect on them. Chapter 9 ('A Potential for Change') deals with the impact of the community on the role and the self-concept of the artist.

Part III ('Artistic Research – New Insights Through Arts Practice?') offers a comparison of discourses in the fields of ethnographic sociology and artistic research. We deploy here the philosophical paradigm of Foucauldian discourse analysis. I discuss with the sociologist Kai Ginkel, co-author of the chapter, the similarities and differences in the methodologies of artistic research and ethnography. We compare the overall production of knowledge, point out similarities and differences, and search for the values, taboos and power strategies behind methods and approaches (chapter 10). We present and analyse the case study *I am a Priest*, a movement from the artwork *Slices of Life*, from the perspective of each field. Here, we investigated how a method has bearing on the 'truth' that is being sought and how it is accordingly depicted (chapter 11). Finally, we evaluate whether both disciplines might possibly inform each other in terms of methodological innovation and enhancement (chapter 12).

I conclude in chapter 13 ('Conclusion') by discussing the viability for future arts practice of the model of *TransCoding*, i.e. engaging the audience via online participation in a contemporary artwork. In doing this, I take into account the collaborative aspects of the task, their social and psychological connotations and their artistic consequences. I critically assess the practicability of social media for the interaction between artist and community and address the topic of crossover art. I reflect on my personal artistic work in the project, how it influenced my self-concept of being an artist and why artistic research was conducive to achieving the project's research objectives and methodology.

Chapter 14 (accessible via the annotated website: [www.transcoding.info](http://www.transcoding.info)) offers an online documentation of the artworks of *TransCoding*, *Slices of Life* for violin, soundtrack and video and the audiovisual installation *Read me*. I created both these artworks in exchange with and including contributions from the *TransCoding* community. The website also includes interview snippets and additional artworks that came into existence within the framework of the project, all of which are discussed throughout the monograph.

## 2. THE RESEARCH FIELD

*Note: this chapter is adapted from an article submitted to the Finnish online journal on artistic research RUUKKU: Lüneburg, From 'Highbrow Art' to Participatory Culture – A Potential for Change 2017.*

Our methodology was based on qualitative research. We conducted a concurrently artistic and ethnographic research study in which the fieldwork took place primarily but not exclusively in the virtual realm of web 2.0, on our social media platforms, with a focus on our central online hub, *what-ifblog.net*. As the lead artist, I myself especially acted within the field of participatory art. What follows is a short overview of the methodologies of artistic and ethnographic research applied in this project, and of participatory art within the domain of classical contemporary music.

### **Artistic Research – The Central Artworks and the Influence of the Community**

With *TransCoding* I embraced not only the final artworks but also the process of producing art as part of my investigation: the gathering of inspiration, the communication process and artistic exploration. As artistic practices are always embedded in context and not detached from society or time, I put an emphasis on the work with the community and on the situation jointly created on our social media platforms. The outcome of the interrelation between community and artist flowed into the body of the art and the reflection on it. I viewed the arts practice and research as performative, meaning that both the artwork and the creative process modified how I and possibly our participating community understood and reflected the world; thus the shared arts practice did something to us, it 'performed' us and we performed through it coming from a material to an immaterial level in our artistic and perhaps even personal identity.

What are the artworks I am referring to? The entirety of *TransCoding's* social media channels around the main hub *what-ifblog.net* was a composite work produced jointly by our community and the project team. It formed one of the central artworks. Here the interaction between all stakeholders stood in the foreground. Participation was open to everybody, with limited and only very occasional curation by the *TransCoding* team. The different online channels served as the means of access to the project for our worldwide community, as communication platforms and as communal online exhibition spaces for mini artworks by all stakeholders. It served also as an artistic documentary of the interaction between the team and its community. We considered it a common contextual art artefact that revealed the connections between *TransCoding's* art works and the conditions of their production.

A further central artwork was the multimedia show *Slices of Life* for violin, soundtrack and video. It was created by me as the lead artist, and it incorporates community contributions for which we called via calls for entry. (The reader will find a detailed description of the participation mode along with a presentation of selected community contributions in Part II ‘From Lonely Genius to Community Creation – Whose Voice Matters?’).

With the third main artwork, the interactive audiovisual installation *Read me*, I provided a technological setting and a conceptual frame that could be filled with the personalised content of individual community members. Here the development of the artistic content could be entirely authored by a single community member.

Additional satellite artworks were produced in workshops around *TransCoding* in which non-professional participants shaped their own work around the topic of identity. Participants had a say in the development of an overall performance or personal artwork, while I as *TransCoding*’s lead artist offered an optional initial conceptual framework and assisted with professional advice in the realisation of the artwork.

## The Researcher Selves

Our operating mode, based on communication through social media, has required us to engage on an almost daily level with members of our community to establish trust, acceptance and the feeling of authenticity. It was therefore of crucial importance that the social media manager Montrey and I were constantly present on the various social media platforms. So we concurrently immersed ourselves and actively participated in the field that we investigated. As for our position in the field, I follow the definition of sociologist Shula Reinharz (1997, p. 5, cited in Sandiford 2015) who identifies a number of researcher selves for field-workers. My co-worker Montrey and I appear in three roles that are not always separable from each other: the role of the “brought self,” the “situational self” and the “research based self.” Research based selves relate “specifically to the research role (e.g. being an observer)”, brought selves “are more personal and provide a sense of individuality” and situationally created selves “may or not be related to the research project (e.g. being a temporary member of the studied group)”. (Sandiford 2015)

The role of the ‘brought self’ was evident when I, in my capacity as head of project, functioned as conceptualiser of the overall project; when my colleague Montrey and I set topic of the overall artwork, ‘identity,’ fed it, and shaped the way in which art an identity were introduced to our community; when we both formulated the calls for entry that invited the community to contribute to our artwork. (Figs. 1.3 and 1.4).