

“IT WILL BE LOUD”: ERNEST STRAUHAL AND GORDON FUNG ON FILM, MUSIC, NOISE, AND COLLABORATION

Interview by Katherine Jemima Hamilton

On April 29th, CCA graduating seniors Ernest Strauhal and Gordon Fung will perform an experimental [VJ set in CCA's Timken Hall starting at 6:30 pm](#). In advance of their performance, RRR editor Katherine Jemima Hamilton asked the duo about their interest in sound and video art, how the medium brought them together as collaborators, and what to expect during the performance.



RRR

When did you begin your exploration of sound and video art?

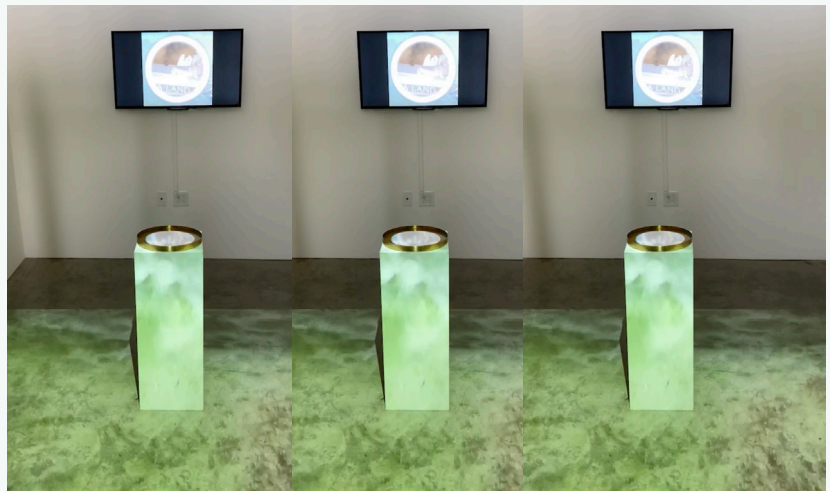
Gordon Fung (GF)

I have always been interested in moving images, as I believe that cameras help expand how viewers perceive and view this world. Cameras can even create visuals that are unobtainable through normal vision. But my first extensive video work would be the installation commissioned by the CCA PLAYSPACE curators and *drinketh water of rain of heaven* (2021).

My interest in sound started back in around 2011. I was deeply amazed by musique concrete and wanted to transform soundscapes into experimental music work. But given that learning resources were lacking (not to mention, being a composer-scholar meant I had a very packed and tight schedule), I did not engage with electronic music. It was not until early 2021 that I decided to give electronic music and programming (i.e., MAX/MSP/Jitter) one more shot.

As for collaboration, I admire Ernest's passion for music and sound, even though he hasn't received extensive training. At the age of 20, he already self-directed his first album in electronic music, as a homage to Joseph Beuys, without any guidance. I also noticed a lack of relevant courses and sound arts/experimental music training at CCA. That's why I want the collaboration to be more like a mentorship. During the shooting process, we talk more about how to capture land and soundscape properly, and, generally, how to make time-based works function in an exhibition space.

Gordon Fung, and drinketh water of rain of heaven, 2021, multimedia installation: part i: single-channel 4K video, 27-minute loop, silent (displayed on monitor) part ii: audio-reactive visual projection, indefinite duration, two-channel audio (programmed with Max/MSP/Jitter) (projected towards the floor) on-site: water, basin, mirrors.



**Ernest
Strauhal
(ES)**

I began individual work in sound and video art when I discovered tools like iMovie and GarageBand in middle school. This was a revelation to me, as I always thought that computers were things for boring adult tasks like spreadsheets and PowerPoint presentations. I learned everything I knew through GarageBand and iMovie and later taught myself tools like Ableton Live, Logic Pro, and Premiere Pro.

RRR

What brought you two together as video art collaborators?

GF

We are both into the Fluxus movement and artists; we believe that collaboration can bring the best out of ourselves. We also think alike in many aspects, so the partnership literally can speed up problem-solving or idea gathering.

Ernest Strauhal, BEUYS 1974 (2021)—46 minutes, stereo sound



Gordon Fung and Ernest Strauhal, beloved, gaze in thine own heart; from joy the holy branches start, 2021, 12-channel video, duration varies, silent, Max/MSP/Jitter programming, multiple-channel audio, 13-minute loop



ES Gordon and I actually met during an online class in Spring 2021. We would talk about all sorts of things on the online class forum like noise musicians, Fluxus, ambient music, and Max/MSP patches.

RRR We often think of video art as a solitary practice: the artists sit alone on their laptops or out in the world filming by themselves. How has collaboration changed both the content and process of your film work?

GF Our friendship and shared experience influence our content and aesthetics. We are both interested in spirituality, Jungian psychology, and psychedelic aesthetics.

And my composition training often makes my work heavily equipped with rigid “rules.” But in order to collaborate, I often make my videos more “flexible” and open-ended, so that the sound/music part can fit easier.

ES Video art is still a solitary practice, and there is still a lot of sitting around staring at laptops and filming the world. But now, having a collaborator not only gives you an extra pair of hands but also an extra mind to bounce ideas off of and check whether those ideas are worth executing. Another lucky thing about working with Gordon is that we have a lot in common when it comes to our aesthetics and methodology in judging artists and their work.

Gordon Fung and Ernest Strauhal, just what is it that makes today's ads so different, so appealing? 2021, four-channel videos, 15-second/30-second/60-second loops (motion-triggered), programming (Max/MSP/Jitter, Ableton), electronics, quadraphonic audio, indefinite duration



RRR When I saw your piece *Just What Makes Today's Ads so Different, so Appealing*, I couldn't help but think of video artist Nam June Paik's [*Sistine Chapel*](#). Do you think younger video artists treat multi-media differently than pioneering artists like Paik?

GF Nam June Paik as a Fluxus artist would have presented and embraced the technology as it is—which certainly has a taste of using found objects (or even a “found culture”) with a whimsical twist. I would say, younger artists should be open and receptive to new development in technologies.

Young artists nowadays face more challenges, as technologies and programs advance so quickly. They are bombarded by endless possibilities. The lack of limit gives us a huge blessing, but at times, it also creates confusion (at least to me) like overstimulation. In general, I think it is crucial to “stay hungry, stay foolish,” and to learn everything possible, choose the right tools, and get the best out of it. We also need to have a child-like quality in our practice to remain open.

RRR What do younger video artists still have to learn from earlier New Media art?

Ernest Strauhal, deal I, 2021, 10"x10", screenprint on paper



ES I think that younger artists take modern technology for granted. I remember squirming in my seat when my professors would complain about “the old days” of only having 256 megabytes of ram and how computer processors would take hours to render images. I think it’s up to younger artists to keep curation in mind in the day and age of everyone owning hard drives that have terabytes and terabytes of storage.

RRR Can you say more about your interest in glitching? When did it start and what makes you return to the theme and reality of glitching again and again?

GF My affinity towards glitch is probably rooted in my love of noise music, which indeed went further back to my interest in black metal and deathcore. As John Cage said, “There is no such thing as silence.” To me, absolute noise cannot exist either. When we push a certain parameter to the polar opposite, it essentially folds right back to its opposite—as if complete chaos turns into nothingness. I somehow find tranquility in very complex noise, and find it meditative, in some sense.

I taught myself most of the tools I am using, and it is through repetitive failure, not success, that I learned how to make things work. Embracing glitch is more like a philosophical view to me: we just have to accept faulty things in our lives to move things forward. I also am interested in distorting how visuals are normally seen, and trying to construct a new lens for my viewers to see the hidden world—especially in relation to a psychedelic experience.

Gordon Fung, (re) visited, 2022, single-channel video, 14', silent

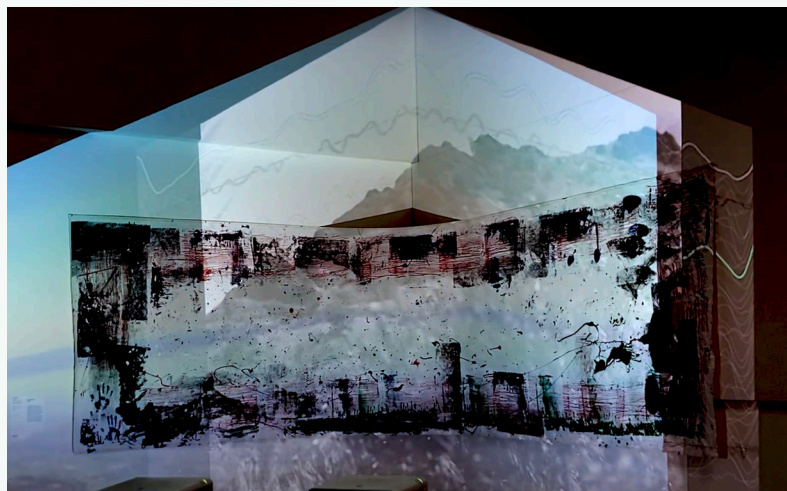


ES As Gordon said earlier, what are the most fitting visuals for noise music? Glitched out visuals of course. The philosophy of glitch visuals goes hand in hand with the philosophy of noise music. Both of these mediums fall outside of the bell curve of conventional art, and it's people who live on the edges of the bell curve that make the most interesting pieces of art today. The interesting thing about Gordon's glitch art is not that the glitches are based on screen recordings of software choking up, he's actually taking footage of nature and warping shots of ocean waves and tree limbs in on themselves.

RRR Both of you clearly have an interest in music and are composers or musicians yourself. How do you frame the involvement of music, as opposed to sound, in your practice?

GF As I am a firm believer in syncretism, I like to do cross-referencing and transferable skills a lot. And naturally, my music training informs my video process in a subtle way. Currently, I am trying to utilize composition techniques to create visual flows in moving images—i.e. using structure, form, motifs, and even “rhythms” to link the visuals together. And since I am knowledgeable about music and video, I strive to let the two parts complement each other—unlike the usual imbalance of power struggles between the two, which happens in many existing works.

Gordon Fung and Ernest Strauhal re-genesis, 2022, 2-channel videos, 18-min (stereo) and 6-min loops (silent), screenprint on canvas, 216' x 72'



ES Forgive me for being pretentious, but all sound has the potential to be music. There is a natural rhythm to birds chirping in the morning just as there is a natural rhythm to an ambulance siren blaring through the city (I have used both of these sounds as musical elements). In terms of my practice, the goal is to create avant-garde works that pull people in without resorting to conventional aesthetics or kitsch.

RRR What can you tell us about your performance on April 29th?

GF seniorShow2.0 is an audiovisual performance that showcases the footage, field recordings, music, and videos we have collected and made during our studies at CCA. The hour-long performance will feature us as electronic musicians and I will be VJing with the Max/MSP/Jitter program. I built an interactive controller with electronics so I can manipulate the visuals while performing by interfacing Max with Arduino. Also, length-wise it is a challenge to push our limits to see how far our improvisation can go; it's like a testing ground for us to see what direction we can explore in the future. The videos will also be exhibited during my senior show from May 4th to 6th at the IPW gallery in Oakland.

ES It will be loud.

Ernest Strauhal (b. 2000, San Francisco) works in sound, print media, and sculpture. Drawing references from the environment, he incorporates sounds such as birds chirping, ambulance sirens, wind sounds, and samples downloaded from random places in his works. He sculpts ambient and abrasive soundscapes to open up new ways of listening.

Gordon Fung is a transdisciplinary artist who works across various fields, including installation, music composition, sound art, video art, multi-/new media, experimental and conceptual arts, etc. With the use of unconventional materials like noises, lo-fi presentations, and glitches, his immersive and synaesthetic works challenge the viewers to expand their experiential horizons.