

Samson Young

the mind blanks
at the glare

Apr 08 – May
28, 2022

Galerie Gisela
Capitain

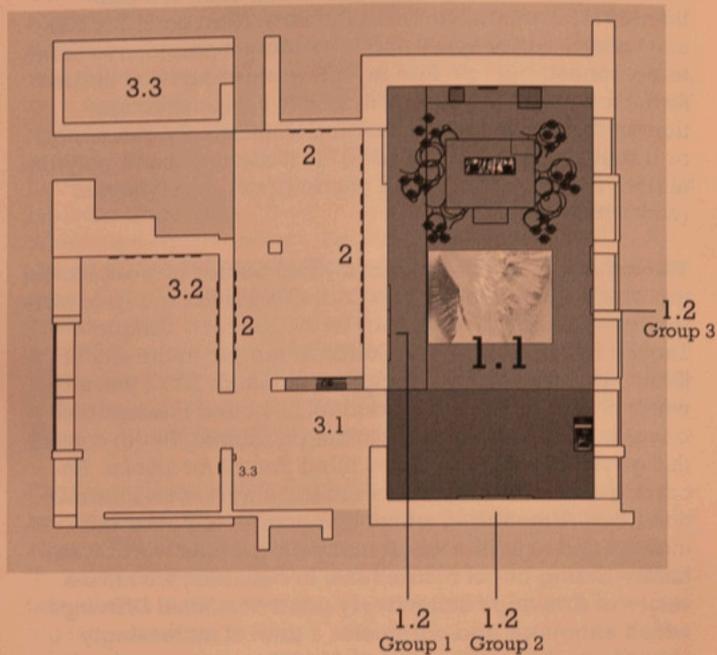
A sense of anxiety and disorientation may arise when one's beliefs are put to test. I am thinking about a particular sort of anxiety, which manifests itself as a dynamic between competing internal voices, and if I were to describe this dynamic musically, I would characterize it as: a heterophony, or a 'stacking' of parts that is more parallel motion than it is contrapuntal, where voices - different as they are - end up reinforcing each other to the effect of weighing-down, of fore-closing, and of locking-into-place; or, a sonic time-space of multiple tempi, each with a life of its own, each stretching its own interior outward like an amoeba in-perpetual-flight, but is nonetheless always hovering around at least a *presto*; or, layers-upon-layers of melodic ornamentation as mind-stuff-surplus that overwhelm the senses, which don't register as shocks, but as waves of barely perceptible yet relentlessly insistent murmurs. Could a generalized anxiety and disorientation be mistaken for - or operates with the logic of - a system of belief? If so, what are its rituals, music, and liturgies? A less palatable but no less probable proposition, of course, is the causation reversed: a void, a mind that blanks at the glare. And just how does one tell the two apart?

I've been dealing with 'anxiety issues' (my prescriptions have such beautiful names: *Lyrical*, *Abilify*, and *Rexulti*). I've always been a bit of a paranoid mess really, but let's say things had gotten a little out of hand of late. My psychiatrist takes pains to impress upon me the importance of separating facts out from feelings, which, I do not doubt is sound advice, it's just not particularly useful advice for an artist. On a related side note: I've always thought that data-sonification is a *very strange science indeed*, because, unlike data-visualization, sonification is not a fact-clarifying act, but rather, a *fact-modulating* act that flirts with the idea of facts-as-feelings. Ain't that just wild?

I read that scientists are now finally understanding that information-deficit is not the cause of irrational beliefs in people. Exposure to more information, under some circumstances, may actually have an opposite effect. Instead, the scientists argue, we could appeal to people's feelings when communicating information. The idea of a public-service announcement in the form of an emo-infomercial sounds super scary and incredibly manipulative to me to be honest, but I do find myself wondering what *mis-information* might *feel* like, which is to say, misinformation-as-form: does it swirl around indecisively, randomly, or travel along a line-(to-take)? Is it dissonant and polytonal (i.e., multiple competing centers), or entirely atonal (without a center)?

The exhibition is bookended by two bodies of work almost two years apart. On the one end, there is the group of work produced during a residency at the Kenninji Temple Tacchu Ryosoku-in, a zen Buddhist temple in the city of Kyoto. This residency concluded in March 2020, just a week before Japan suspended all in-bound international travel into the country due to the pandemic. At the core of this group of work is a video titled *Sonata for smoke*. Another group of work centers around a new sound installation titled *Altar Music*, which was completed in recent months and at a time when many parts of the world were finally easing out of restrictions. In between, we have a series of drawings collectively titled *Relational Drawings*, which annotates and chronicles a time of increasingly absurd political environments back home.

- S.Y., Cologne, 2022



1.1.

Altar music (liturgy for an indecisive believer) (2022)

Sound installation (generative audio, pastel on 3d-printed PLA, LED matrix, repurposed mic stand, speaker, cables, computer with custom-software, dimensions and duration variable, set of 28); video (generative animation, duration variable; computer with custom-software); three-channels video (duration 6:41, 7:43 and 9:44); digital print on carpet (3.6 x 2.7 m); digital print on vinyl on windows (dimensions variable); 3d-printed PLA (1.45 x 0.48 x 0.89 m; 0.21 x 0.18 x 0.26 m, set of 2); repurposed printed material (Chad Hansen, Tao Te Ching: the Art of Harmony, 5.88 x 3.18 x 24.77 cm); repurposed silk flowers (dimensions variable).

1.2.

Interpassive music (2021)

Ink, pastel and gel on paper, dimensions 1.05 x 0.72 m each.

Group 1

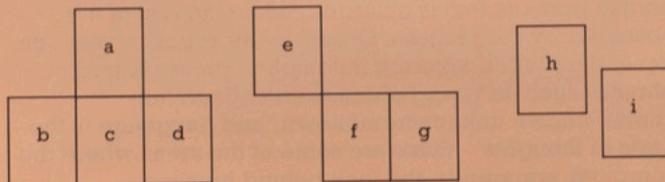
- 29-11-2021, 16 hr 24 (No change, no problem) [a]
- 24-11-2021, 17 hr 42 (Storm of oppression) [b]
- 29-11-2021, 16 hr 42 (The sun is setting) [c]
- 18-11-2021, 12 hr 30 (It's a new form of bullying) [d]

Group 2

- 23-11-2021, 10 hr 58 (Unequal civil war) [e]
- 29-11-2021, 18 hr 2 (World imperialism) [f]
- 22-11-2021, 10 hr 30 (A young girl is hit by a car and takes six months to heal. Then a boy is hit by a car and taken home to recover) [g]

Group 3

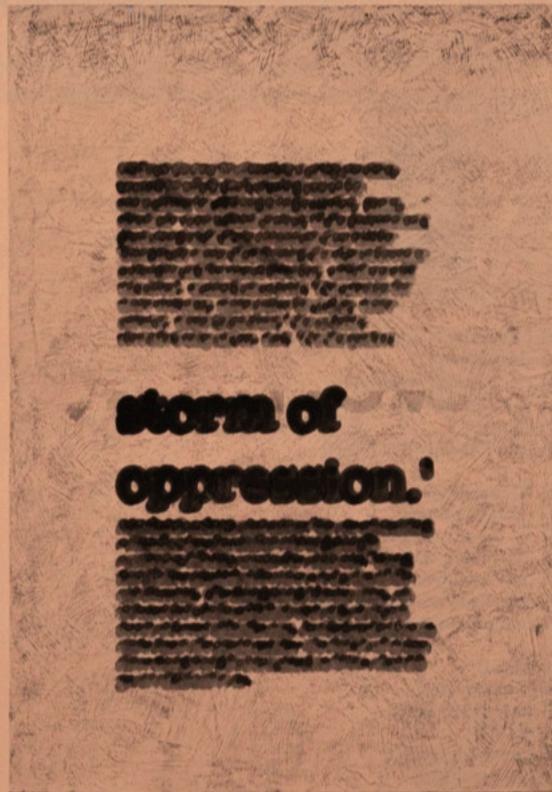
- 25-11-2021, 13 hr 19 (Bad moment) [h]
- 26-11-2021, 18 hr 50 (That's not who we are) [i]



In *Altar music (liturgy for an indecisive believer)*, the system begins by downloading a news headline of the day from the reputable independent media *Hong Kong Free Press*. An artificial intelligence algorithm (known as GPT-neo, which is an open-source version of Open AI project's GPT-3 engine) then takes the headline as a 'prompt,' to generate a continuous stream of counter-factual news stories. The texts of these counter-factual news in turn become the basis for the sound output, which breaks the texts down by word-type, and with each word-type a different generative sound pattern is triggered. Elsewhere, a generative animation highlights discrete words from the news story as they come in, while dissolving the whole.

Other elements that complete the installation include 'interpassive' rituals (the prayer wheel that 'prays in our place', the machine that 'chants in our place', and the photocopier that 'reads in our place'), and the recurring visual motif of three interlocking eyeballs, all facing inward: the iris that looks at itself looking.

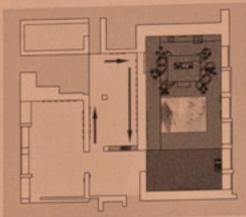
In *Interpassive music*, again we have these generated news stories, which used headlines (from the date stated in the title of each drawing) as lead-ins for the AI. But here, each headline is preceded by an additional line: 'all I can do now is chronicle our injury time.' The texts were then rendered out onto paper using an ink-soaked sponge-brush that is attached to a pen plotter machine. A selected phrase from the text is enlarged, while the rest of it is obscured by the process. Occasionally superimposed on top of the plotted texts are incomplete presentations of phrases such as 'grasp of cause and effect', 'unknown-known unknown-unknown,' and 'language is the basis of thoughts' - these are some of the areas where the computer apparently still lags behind humans.



2.
Relational Drawings (2021)

Ink, pastel, colour pencil and stamps on paper; dimensions 29.5 x 21 cm each.

(Displayed chronologically:)



06-09-21 (which side are you on)
07-09-21 (screening)
20-09-21 (all the right colors)
23-09-21 (a moon fell into the sea)
25-09-21 (light)
27-09-21 (the freedom of refusal)

01-10-21 (October steps)
02-10-21 (horses refusal)
07-10-21 (at the edge of empire)
08-10-21 (shrinking emblem)
09-10-21 (sky has eyes)
12-10-21 (students raising a flag)
13-10-21 (melon storm)

14-10-21 (grief)
18-10-21 (a show trial)
20-10-21 (the green light)
12-11-21 (CCTV)
13-11-21 (nervous states)
14-11-21 (six for three)
16-11-21 (the doomsday fantasist)
17-11-21 (how parallel consciousness works)
19-11-21 (vetting)
23-11-21 (time, grid, fist)
24-11-21 (but I will outlive this)

In *Relational Drawings*, I chronicled my relationship with and reactions towards significant events on each day. Many of these 'events' are current affairs in the context of the absurd political situation in Hong Kong, while others are memorable moments of personal interaction that I shared with people. These events are recounted through notations, mark-making, written word and stamped symbols.

3.1

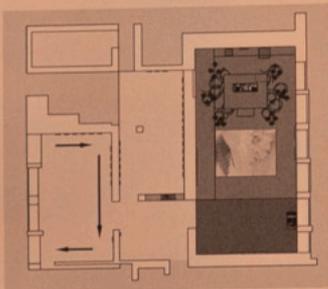
Tonight (2020)

Colour pixels from the music video of Smashing Pumpkin's Tonight Tonight, computer-controlled LED light, pastel and colour pencil on arcylic, pastel and colour pencil on plywood, 3d-printed PLA, interactive touch-screen with custom-software, repurposed found objects (trumpet mouthpiece, found photograph, mini-golfball, 3d model of an anti-tear-gas eye-washing device, silk flowers, NME035 'world music' cassette tape); dimensions 24 x 18 x 9 cm.

3.2.

Landschaft (Ryosoku-In) (2020)

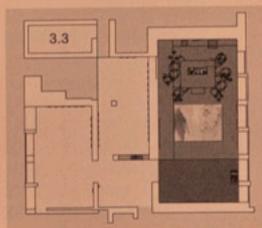
Ink, pastel, colour pencil, water colour and stamps on paper; dimensions 29.5 x 21 cm each.



3.3.

Sonata for smoke (2020 - 2021)

HD video with stereo sound, pastel on light clay, repurposed printed materials, video duration 15:48



On the left side of the space is a group of work I created in 2020, in response to a residency at the Kenninji Temple Tacchu Ryosoku-in. At the center of this group of work is **Sonata for smoke**, a choreographed sequence of actions and sounds. The original 'score' for the sequence (structured around the last line of the heart sutra: *gate gate paragate parasamgate bodhi svaha*), is included below.

A new final scene was added in 2021.

Gate - gate
(A Camera wide, distance 1)
Brick sculpture
(delay 8 seconds)
(B Camera close up @ brick, mic B @ brick)
Light match > light smoke cake > place smoke cake on brick sculpture
(delay 20 seconds)
(Mic @ Kabuki 1)
Kabuki drop

Para - gate
(A Camera wide, distance 2)
Move camera
(delay 8 seconds)
Spotlight, circle, blue, upper LHS corner, slow fade in
(delay 10 seconds)
(B Camera closeup at woodfish, mic B @ Kabuki 2)
Woodfish + Kabuki drop
Spotlight fade
(delay 18 seconds)

Para - sam - gate
(B Camera closeup at bookbox, mic B @ bookbox)
Move fingers & light tapping on bookbox
(3 rounds of gestures)
Hit bookbox + Conetti cannon gold x 4
(delay 10 seconds)
Open door

Bodhi
(A Camera wide, distance 3)
Move camera
(delay 8 seconds)
SGL View of car, headlight on & straight into the camera
(delay 10 seconds)
(B Camera closeup inside piano, mic B @ inside piano)
Car radio sound of rain fade in
(delay 20 seconds)
Car inside smoke start, see smoke leaks
(delay 10 seconds)
Sammon approaches car
Open car door, flings car door close (6 up, down to bang on 7)
Piano chord held
(delay 23 seconds)

Svaha
(A Camera wide, distance 3)
(B Camera inside of car looking out, mic B @ inside car)
Inside of car, just looking
Rain still playing
(delay 8 seconds)
Camera plays Beethoven Sonata no. 15 mv 1
Sammon hums with it
(delay 8 seconds)
Radio fades over 12 seconds to nothing
(delay 12 seconds)
Hear some more Beethoven from inside car
(delay 20 seconds)
Car drives to rain spot, stops
(@ arrival point, delay 3 seconds)
Rain
(delay 5 seconds)
Engine stops
Headspot off
Rain some more
Continue humming till rain stops
(delay 56 seconds)
Rain stops
(delay 20 seconds)

“Alongside the rational limit there also emerged the question of practical limit. Ask cryptographers about the ‘uncomputable’ and they will respond: How much computing power do you have at your disposal? *Can you afford to crunch the numbers until the sun burns out?*”

Galloway, Alexander.
Uncomputable (p. 2).
Verso.

SAMSON YOUNG

the mind blanks at the glare

April 8 – May 28, 2022

Galerie Gisela Capitain is pleased to announce its second solo exhibition with Hong Kong based artist Samson Young. With the exhibition *the mind blanks at the glare* Young expands on his thinking about systems of beliefs and disbelief which act as volatile gatekeepers to fragile concepts of the truth or the *real*.

“In the past, seeing was believing; yet, today we can’t be so sure. (...) In this vacuum, information that is mobilised through feeling first is rendered more reliable than the images - scientific, or otherwise - we see.” (Orianna Cacchione, in: Reasonable Music for Nervous Times, Dubai 2021)

The new multi-media installation *Altar music (liturgy for an indecisive believer)* was specially conceived by Samson Young for the gallery’s main space and transfers the room into a site of spiritual references. The environment - consisting of four videos, printed carpets, digital prints on the windows, speaker sculptures and other objects - encompasses an autonomous system to generate and distribute information - from text as image, to text as sound. Young utilizes an open source version of the AI algorithm GPT-3 (known as GPT-NEO), a deep-learning software, to generate seemingly coherent text. GPT-3 was released with a fair warning by its creator of its risks and potentials as a tool for misinformation. The program is fed with daily updated headlines of the Hong Kong Free Press - one of Hong Kong’s last independent news outlets - creating a continuous set of fictitious news. These stories are visualized twofold, whereby the loss of information has been deliberately factored in. A second software programmed for data-sonification filters these texts for nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs and translates them into various musical and non-musical sounds, emitted through an array of 24 3D-printed speaker-sculptures, as well as a TV screen that also displays generative visuals. The speakers are arranged around an altar-like table, chiming constantly at the beholder. Ultimately however, the once written information dissolves into a diluted visual and acoustic noise, developing its very own poetic qualities.

Included are two videos showing each a computer-generated image of a moving prayer drum from a different angle. A third looping animation mimics the top view onto an opened photo-copier, almost blinding the viewer with its ongoing scanner light. Along the site-specific installation new works on paper titled *Interpassive music* are on view in the main space. Again, GPT-3 generated texts appear but are rendered almost unreadable as the text was drawn using an ink-soaked sponge brush that is attached to a pen plotter.

Two bodies of work created in 2020 and 2021 are further exploring the topic of subjective perception. His *Relational Drawings* are diaries of significant events that have taken place in Hong Kong from September to November in 2021, annotating the political situation, while others share personal moments. A second group of drawings, a sculpture and the video *Sonata for smoke* are also included in *the mind blanks at the glare*. Young realized these works during his residency at the Ryosoku-In Temple in Kyoto for the exhibition *Close Reading* in 2020. In contrast to his *Sound Drawings*, Young not only creates notations of experienced sounds, but also captures visual impressions of the landscape and gardens around the temple.

G A L E R I E G I S E L A C A P I T A I N

Samson Young (b. 1979 in Hong Kong) is a composer, sound and media artist based in Hong Kong, holding a PhD in Music Composition from Princeton University. With a formal cross-cultural training in music composition, he draws from multicultural paradigms to weave a symphony of image and sound, touching upon the recurring topics of identity, history and literature.

Young has had recent solo exhibitions at Dartmouth College, New Hampshire (2022), Jameel Arts Centre, Ordet Milan (both 2021), Mori-Art Museum, Tokyo, Ryosoku-in Temple, Kyoto (both 2020), Smart Museum of Art, Chicago, The University of Edinburgh, Vancouver International Centre for Contemporary Art Asian Art, Vancouver, (all 2019), M+ Pavillon, Hong Kong (2018), and Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, Dusseldorf (2016) among others. In 2017, he represented Hong Kong at the 57th Venice Biennial. He has been the recipient of several prizes, including the 2013 Artist of the Year (Hong Kong Arts Development Council), 2015 BMW Art Journey Award, the 2018 Hong Kong Art Centre Honorary Fellowship, as well as the 2020 Sigg Prize, among others.