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Installation view of **HUGO YEUNG MING-HIM**'s exhibition "What Death Tells Me; Cinema as Computation, Aurality, Vision" at Floating Projects Collective, Hong Kong, 2016. Courtesy the artist.

WHAT DEATH TELLS ME; CINEMA AS COMPUTATION, AURALITY, VISION
HUGO YEUNG MING-HIM

VALENCIA TONG
FLOATING PROJECTS

HONG KONG

Cinema is a complex amalgamation of art, entertainment, science and mathematics. Those who regard film as a form of high culture associate the medium with art, music, literature and opera. On the other side of the spectrum, the audio-visual component of cinematography can be dissected into frames per second or wavelengths in a matter-of-fact manner, indicating that the motion picture has gone a long way since the early days of Eadweard Muybridge's photographic experimentations and scientific studies.

In the solo exhibition "What Death Tells Me; Cinema as Computation, Aurality, Vision" at Floating Projects, Hong Kong artist Hugo Yeung Ming-him, applied the mathematical framework of Discrete Fourier Transform (DFT) to transform cinema from its representational space-time domain to the frequency-time domain. In his work, he seeks to subvert the hierarchy of cinematic narrative by undermining the domineering storytelling element, and instead elevates the physical properties of the audio and visual spectra from their subordinate roles. Through this process, Yeung aims to explore notions of death—of Faustian culture, Eurocentric tonality, analogue cinema and the narrative.

Upon entering the exhibition space, viewers were greeted with a wall full of sheet music, accompanied by lyrical orchestral melodies playing in the background—the sweet yet melancholic *Adagietto* from Symphony No. 5 by Austrian Romantic composer Gustav Mahler. The individual pieces of music scores of *Adagietto*, the fourth movement of the Symphony composed in 1901–02, were tacked neatly side-by-side, with round-headed pins of various colors—white, black, red, orange, yellow, green and blue. The German musical term *Sehr langsam* was marked above the time signature of 4/4, indicating that the piece be played very slowly.

HUGO YEUNG MING-HIM, *What Death Tells Me*, 2015, video and sound installation. Courtesy the artist.

Mahler's *Adagietto* is one of his most popular works, and is part of the soundtrack of acclaimed Italian director Luchino Visconti's film *Death in Venice* (1971). Visconti's film is based on the novella of the same name written by German author Thomas Mann, starring Dirk Bogarde as Gustav von Aschenbach, which is said to be loosely based on Gustav Mahler. The protagonist, Aschenbach, is a middle-aged man who travels to Venice and becomes attracted to a Polish young boy named Tadzio. The story ends tragically when Aschenbach dies from cholera.

Alongside the printouts of Mahler's music compositions, Yeung juxtaposed mathematical symbols, equations and diagrams against the musical notes. They illustrated Yeung's logic and methodology in reconstructing the film based on the DFT theory, demonstrating how the magnitude of the soundtrack can interfere with the image, which consists of red, green and blue channels.
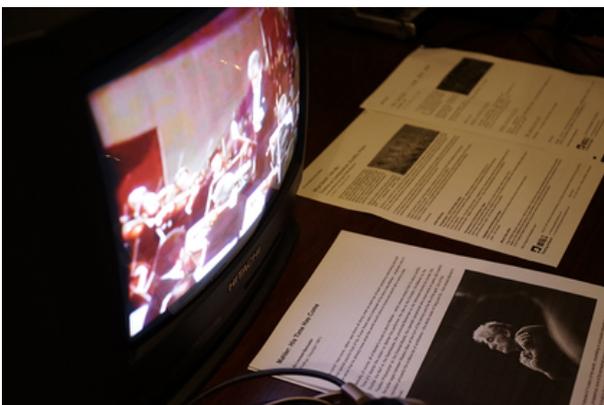
Installation view of **HUGO YEUNG MING-HIM**'s exhibition "What Death Tells Me; Cinema as Computation, Aurality, Vision" at Floating Projects Collective, Hong Kong, 2016. Courtesy the artist.

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In the main area of the gallery, the final result of Yeung's work, *What Death Tells Me* (2015), was projected onto a white wall. One black rectangular speaker on each side of the projection played Mahler's *Adagietto*, contributing to the ominous and somber atmosphere of the dimly lit viewing area. The area was arranged in the configuration of a cinema, and viewers were invited to sit on the rows of chairs in front. After deconstructing Visconti's *Death in Venice* as merely a synthesis of audio and visual signals in a computative manner, Yeung presented a new version of the film. The video opened with the credits in white text against a black background. The text, although legible, was blurry and hazy, foreshadowing the oscillating distortions throughout the film. The visual aesthetics of Yeung's interpretation recall that of

director Wong Kar-Wai's highly-stylized cinematographic style, only Yeung's is depicted in low resolution, and is completely divorced from Visconti's original vision and artistic vocabulary of elegance and decadence.

Nearby, at the gallery, an upright piano with its interior exposed separated the space behind it. On a table in that section were two small televisions attached to individual headphones. The television on the left played a speech by American composer and conductor Leonard Bernstein, supplemented by a physical copy of Bernstein's essay *Mahler: His Time Has Come* (1981). It offered a deep analysis of Mahler's tragic life and the prophetic nature of his music. Simultaneously, the television on the right played the original version of Visconti's *Death in Venice*, with the DVD box of the movie placed in front.

Hugo Yeung Ming-him's "What Death Tells Me; Cinema as Computation, Aurality, Vision" showcased the physical and technical aspects of cinema, proposing that the medium is a de-romanticized mathematical combination of sounds and visuals. In doing so, a nail is driven into the coffin of analogue cinema.

"What Death Tells Me; Cinema as Computation, Aurality, Vision" was on view at Floating Projects, Hong Kong, from July 22 to August 7, 2016.

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ArtAsiaPacific

GPO Box 10084

Hong Kong

info@aapmag.com