

“We have to fight against the hegemony of the visual in order to gain time” An interview with Chiu Longina by Pedro Jiménez

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Chiu Longina is his pseudonym - many people don't know his real name and it doesn't matter now because he doesn't bother to hide it. But symbolically, this nickname implies a full acceptance of the Fluxus ideology, that art = life, full stop. Chiu Longina is a friend, a colleague and a "partner", and this e-mail interview is an excuse to continue to get to know him.

He studied Musicology at the Universidad de La Rioja, and more recently Anthropology at the Universidad Complutense, Madrid. As a sound artist, he has participated in festivals and published audio pieces, most of which can be downloaded from the Internet. He is part of the working group at the Centro de Creación Experimental (CDCE) of the Fine Arts Faculty in Cuenca, directed by José Antonio Sarmiento and Javier Ariza. He was also one of the coordinators involved in selecting pieces for the Sound Art Festival IFI in Pontevedra, and forms part of the SINSALaudio collective in Vigo.

But above all, Chiu Longina is a tireless sound worker and activist, who works with enthusiasm and integrity to broaden the collective perception of sound using free culture resources.

Chiu Longina has participated in ZEMOS98 since its 5th edition, and we have exchanged all kinds of information with him. He performed in the collective's earliest sound experiences and has written texts, published reports and developed audio.actions.

Pedro Jiménez: In the 8th edition of ZEMOS98 you presented some of the latest projects you've been working on - What is artesonoro.org? And mediateletipos.net?

Chiu Longina: [Artesonoro.org](http://artesonoro.org) and mediateletipos.net are open network communities that have freedom (rather than maximum profit) as their basic premise. [Mediateletipos.net](http://mediateletipos.net) is a free news agency for sound-related news that I work on with 5 others (Juan Gil, José Antonio Sarmiento, Pablo Sanz, Julio Gómez, and yourself, Pedro Jiménez). One of its aims (among many others that you can read about on the web site) is to provide information relating to the world of sound. In both communities, we're convinced that innovation gains strength through sharing (all that is not given is lost). This is the value at the centre of these community projects, which have an important ethical dimension based on commitment and the value of co-operation. For example, in [Mediateletipos](http://mediateletipos.net) we reflect on the extent to which the spirit of open source is starting to reach the essential components of power. The extent to which the mobilisation of resources, outside of government institutions, contributes to diluting the power of corporations and questions the economic theory of power. These projects have joined other social dynamisation initiatives, supporting the strength and reliability that already exist in other networked communities. Guerrilla war. Taking a stance against neutrality and, at the same time, reflecting on the dangers of technological fundamentalism, putting forward the opinions of all social fronts without judging them. Culture is a dynamic social construction, and one of the aims of these projects is to narrate/record its real time.

We use our own (or commons) production tools, we submit them to public opinion and discussion and, all in all, we create culture. These projects are a collective investigation that

has nothing to do with the major production centres and so involves double the effort (periphery versus centre). It also acts as an information platform, a digital media library that provides tools for a critical use of the web. They also generate a data base of social practices and actions related to audiovisual culture and make them available to society in general, openly and freely. Public and open field work.

PJ: Take a deep breath and answer quickly – Do you own TVs? What do you watch on your TVs?

ChL: Yes. One in each room, two portable sets and two TV tuner cards on the computers. 9 TVs in total. I see in it a whole new generation that has been educated through its screen. I think it's OK.

I also watch the series *Weeds*, a small miracle in America (I downloaded it from Torrent and I connect the TVs to the computer).

And then I watch a lot of junk, muzak-tv style, for company when I'm home alone (3).

PJ: Do you go to the movies?

ChL: I watch a lot of films, but mostly at home, seated 40 cm from the laptop with a good pair of headphones. With an adaptor for two headphones, the experience of watching with another person improves no end. The proportions of a giant movie screen and a 15.4 inch LCD screen 40cms away are exactly the same. Cinema has to go one step further, get closer to the pure multimedia spectacle. A good option is 3D cinema (like imax) I remember going to the image theme park in Poitiers, France, a few years ago and seeing a whole lot of 3D movies by Jean Jacques Annaud. This changed my idea of what a cinematographic spectacle is (in reality this began with *Jaws 3*, where you had to put the cardboard glasses on). The other thing is P2P, an invention that allows you to tune into the world cinematographic scene, in real time. South Korean film is unrivalled (if they did it in 3D, that would really be the business).

PJ: OK, you're a sound artist, but you've captured many of your sound actions as photographs. Are you interested in photography? And the other "plastic arts"?

ChL: A photograph is no more than one twenty-fifth of a second of video, but I'm not belittling it, I'm just making an observation. I've never been attracted to working with photographs, although I recognise that if they're done well they transmit messages clearly. I've used it on some occasions, but always as a "witness" to an action that I've been interested in representing, never as a work in itself; I use it to document actions. I've spent years trying to find a way to photograph sound and I haven't found it. Instead, I've found out that sound doesn't allow itself to be photographed. It has a very interesting subversive component, a "soul" that can't be the "object" of an "objective" and any attempt to make it so is nothing more than French-style poetry.

If we understand "plastic" as a way of "moulding" or "giving form" to an idea, then yes, I use these types of techniques. The problem (for the mercantilist system that tangible objects require), is that I produce ideas and not materials, and these intangibles are the objects of my work. As an example I'll talk about sound, its use, consumption and distribution, which is what I'm into: Ava Edison's late 19th century invention of the phonograph, a technology that allowed sound to be recorded or "captured", opened a new door to incipient capitalism, which saw in this technology the possibility for creating a new product for the market. An opportunity to create a new need in society. The industry then managed to "capture", "package" and "own" sound, transforming it into a new tangible product subject to market laws. It gave physical form to an element that is essentially intangible, and through this manipulation, it created a product that has contributed to the cultural construction of human values. From this moment on, the shared imaginary of western so-

ciety associates music with its physical media (a record automatically implies sound). Since then, music has been associated culturally with “an object that sounds”. That invention implied a major conflict within the field of music professionals, who thought that an invention of this type would take audiences away from live events and thus decrease business.

But the industry has generated has also more recently generated a technology that questions its own business model.

A technology that allows sound to flow and be distributed without the needing to associate it to material media (this is the case with computers and more recently mp3 audio players, portable hard drives and small personal computers).

Now, the industry is finding that it needs to consider adapting to these new ways of consuming and come up with a new business strategy driven by a new kind of demand. A new conflict has been generated, with new economic overtones. I'd say that my plastic arts work is to analyse and “model” this phenomenon.

PJ: You say that photography is part of video, ha! that's postmodernity. This is a really obvious question then, are you more interested in video than photography?

ChL: Yes, I like it more. I use it to document the actions I do, and I take a lot of care with the aesthetic (not technical) aspects. I like to compose situations that are artificial or unnatural, that appear to be lies. Then I film them and there is almost no post-production. It's something like Michel Chion's Audio-Vision, if you want an example. The last video I made (with Berio Molina, a sound artist who often works with me), is a piss-take criticism of virtuosity in post-digital work. Although these kinds of post-digital music already intrinsically contain a critique of the perfection of technology when

they take advantage of and highlight its technical faults and errors, they haven't been able to avoid falling into the same trap that ensnared the music historically called “serious” or “cultured” (Classical Music) a few years back. Perfect-Pitch has been a “value” in classical music, and the programmer who masters a programming language (Perfect-Byte) is also a “value” in new kinds of music. But neither of these two values guarantees a high-quality sound discourse. Concealed behind this veil of values, there have been fakes, bluffs, and other sub-organisms that have the power to effectively seduce and swindle.

Luciano Berio already criticised them in the 60s with his series *Sequenza*, Paul McCarthy did it in the 70s, in a slightly more acid way and in painting, like Elmyr d'Hory or the lo-fi in sound art. In any case, this video is a critique of this value (also from a position of virtuosity), done as emphatically as possible by holding a funeral for the most widespread programming languages used in digital sound art (although the video, in this case, complements a series of photographs that depict this funeral). The video is the most lucid part of the critique, it's called Inter(L)Corporation and it's a search for a byte in a laptop, that perfect byte. Meanwhile, Berio washes a bagpipe to rid it of the burden placed on it by recent History – the controversial right-wing politician Fraga Iribarne brought bagpipe players along with him every time he took possession of his post as president of Galicia. It wasn't the bagpipe's fault, was it? I've recently put up a new web site that includes part of my work on video, all very accessible, here: www.longina.com/web

PJ: Rest in peace, software programs everywhere. How important is humour in your artistic activity?

ChL: Much less than I would like. Perhaps my work is a bit too “transcendent”, serious and systematic, cold and superficial, but that's only a surface appearance or, if you like, an initiation

rite. Sometimes I remember *zaj* feeding the pianos (he'd give them *alpacas*) or that orchestra conductor who would come out on stage, and, when he bowed, take advantage of his position to tie his shoe laces. When I remember those actions I crack up laughing, but at the same time I understand the profound political commitment of those performances. Humour is the most complex way of transmitting messages, but it's not easy. Examples of humour in Sound Art would be Nilo Gallego or Ladrillio in Valladolid. These artists have crossed the line, and they reach audiences in this way. I remember one of Nilo's actions with a flock of sheep, a kind of Symphony for sound artist and sheep that he did with Felipe Quintana and later repeated in Nodar (Portugal). The action consisted in going back home with the sheep (and their bells). You can imagine the symphony. Paul McCarthy also went for humour when he dressed up and criticised the art world and (black) humour was what I was doing when I held a funeral for all the programming environments. I'd like to turn the tables now and paint this humour yellow.

PJ: What about politics, how is it present in your work?

ChL: Your question in itself is already a kind of exam, in terms of Foucault's Discipline and Punish. The examination, as Foucault said, "turns each individual into a 'case': a case which at one and the same time constitutes an object for a branch of knowledge and a hold for a branch of power". Maybe the comparison is a little unfortunate and unfair, specially because your question isn't meant to exert power, but it forces me to explain that my work has an important political component, and fill in the exam paper that allows others to label and classify my work. I think of politics as the "exercise of power", as an agreement and a collective decision that includes coercive measures or the threat to use them, it's a game in the end. It's a game I don't want to be part of, at least not with these rules, but I do enter into the idea of resistance, resistance to allowing myself to be dominated.

I resist being a ventriloquist of power and, for example, I use noise because it opposes silence (noise can generate disorder). I renounced a public service position that I'd applied for and been awarded, and I aspire to being a fish in the ocean and not a shark in a pond. Everything I do in my work includes these elements.

PJ: Sorry for the exam, but this question is worth 4.33 points towards your final mark. Is there a war between sound and image? Which is oppressed and which is the oppressor?

ChL: More than a war, what there is now is a blood pact. One feeds off the other, they complement each other and produce synergy. The visual image has recently become aware of the power of sound, but continues to use it to strengthen its own power, so sound is still the oppressed. If we look from a historical perspective and do a memory exercise, its easy to see that the invention of the printing press (which history attributes to Gutenberg, but which was actually invented three centuries earlier in 12th century China - think of Chinese Ink) is chronologically a long way away from the invention of the phonograph or the gramophone (virtually in the 20th century). That's almost eight centuries of the hegemony of the visual over sound. With the printing press, written thought and images could be conserved, and with the same technology it could be diffused. Many current studies and investigations by communication theorists, anthropologists and other social scientists place their work within the framework of a paradigm that could be described as "influence of technology on socio-cultural change", that is, they try to understand and explain how technology can change ways of perceiving the world - cognitive aspects -, and therefore social practices, acts, everyday life, thought. They throw in together processes of perception, cognition and communication on one hand, and media, artefacts and technologies on the other.

Let me go deeper into this, because your question hit the spot.

McLuhan (to quote the most quoted) and the anthropologist Edward T. Hall mentioned the influence of electronic media in the changing cultural perception of space. But this interest in space, how it is perceived and transformed, isn't the only thing they share. They both also understand that all technology is an extension of the bodies or minds of human beings and that any study of human communication must take into account the fact that technological media, understood as environments in themselves, tend to transform human perception and, in consequence, culture. This technology that I'm talking about, created by human beings, isn't just an extension of the human body - at the same time, it becomes amputations of this same body. Every time human beings are subjected to a change, especially one that requires adaptation, as a consequence of the creation of a new technology or type of media, the human body goes through a painful experience. What I want to say with all this is that the invention of the printing press changed (traumatically) our way of seeing the world (seeing it through our eyes), and a similar change didn't occur in relation to the way we hear the world until the invention of the phonograph. It took eight centuries to make it happen.

Now to peel another layer off the onion (continuing along with these two authors)...

Vision is synthesis, while hearing is holistic. Through sight, human beings synthesize experience, we learn by seeing and then what we learn influences what we see. The separation between the field of vision and the visual world responds to this interrelationship, which implies a differentiation between what is seen and what is perceived (or internalised). Vision synthesises, selects, and this selection is mediated by perception, which in turn is mediated by culture. Studies of the printing press as a new technology led theorists to discover the impact

that the transition from an oral culture to the mechanisation of writing had on society. The printing press transformed a sound environment into a visual environment, and by doing it also transformed the way the world was perceived in Western society. Because it can generate various copies of a written text, the printing press encouraged a sense of private identity and began a process of overturning the spoken word - the acoustic space that brings people together around a speaker and promotes verbal communication among them.

Fortunately, now, new technologies applied to the media built a new acoustic space which, because it is virtual, entails another series of socio-cultural implications. However, this acoustic space is characterized by the amputation of borders of space and time (I'm talking about the Internet). When visual synthesis is amputated, the sense of hearing is extended, and its essential physical and cultural characteristics have not been fully studied in this context. I'd better quote an anthropologist of the UNAM, Rossana Quiroz Ennis, who has worked with these two authors:

"While Hall tries to explain acoustic and visual space on the basis of their physiological characteristics, McLuhan does it from their historical and cultural characteristics. He describes acoustic space as the mind-set of Western civilisation, as it has evolved over the last 4,000 years to sculpt a monolithic and linear image of itself, an image that emphasises the working of the left side of the brain and, in the process, glorifies quantitative reasoning. Acoustic space, on the other hand, is a projection of the right side of the human brain - a mental attitude that abhors setting priorities and labels and emphasises the norm-type qualities of qualitative thought. Acoustic space is based on holism, the idea that rather than a single cardinal centre, there are various centres floating in a cosmic system that only extols diversity".

Sound is now at the forefront of the battle front. With this quote, I'm also answering the

next questions that you ask me: Why is it necessary to fight the hegemony of the visual? Where is the subversive? It's clear. We have to fight against the hegemony of the visual in order to gain time, to promote the qualitative over the quantitative, to develop the right side of the brain, to be satisfied with loving and being loved, to accept the diversity that bothers the new Pope so much, to really screw the political right, to let chaos and non-determination (as per John Cage) appropriate the everyday, to break the symbolic domination of power, to alert those who are dominated to the fact that they are accomplices to their own domination, to create resistance and compensate the balance. I started this list with "gain time" – I was referring to the eight centuries head start, to the hegemony of one sense over another, image over sound. So if we promote and diffuse sound we will be working in this line, we will be fighting on this front.

PJ: How do we do it? What are you working on to make this sound front more visible?

ChL: I'm going to start working on the project www.escoitar.org, with Horacio González, Berio Molina (the team I worked with on the Sound Art festival IFI) and Juan Gil (one of the editors of mediateletipos.net). This project is a social software that allows any user to upload sounds and associate them with google map (it's a google map hack). It's a bit like Murray Schaffer's World Soundscape Project, but with a strong social component (as well as ambient sounds, it will be possible to upload conversations, the opinions of collectives, manifestos, wishes, etc.)

We think that there should not only be a positive attitude to sound from anywhere, but it should also be studied in order to identify the components that are worth conserving or even restoring. To approach a city through its sounds, for example, is to get closer to its heritage, which can be collected for strictly

documentary purposes or, in this case, as raw material for subsequent sociological work and also to encourage discussion and cooperation on the net. Sounds are non-renewable materials, and the act of capturing and exhibiting them implies lengthening their useful life, generating new living and changing spaces. It is healthy and natural to perceive, understand and imagine our sound identity, that of our places, their coherence and idiosyncrasy. Sound as heritage, sound as a historical document. All of this using the possibilities offered by the net as a horizontal and democratic system. We're going to present the project in Galicia in September, then in Cordoba and then in Madrid.

I'll also work on a nice project that we're doing from SINSALaudio, in Vigo. It's called Escola SINSAL, based on Julio Gómez's idea of taking a project to primary schools that includes an initiation to listening, sound production and a whole lot of aspects related to sound (the history of sound recording, scratch for kids, glitch and digital errors with CDs, DVDs, etc.) We've already been to two schools and submitted a proposal to take it all over Galicia. The SINSAL website (sinsalaudio.com) includes a section on this Escola SINSAL with photos and comments on the first experiences, which have been really amazing. As you can see, we're still talking about promoting and diffusing sound through small political acts.

And a final project I'm thinking about is to get out of this virtuous wheel I've become involved in, this intellectual thing, which is starting to tire me. I need action.

PJ: On we go...