

Kyle Whitehead – Circles of Confusion

Since 2007, Kyle Whitehead has been actively engaged in an investigation of process based experimentation, considering intersections of low-tech electronics and tactile manipulations of film based materials. The exhibition of his latest piece, *Circles of Confusion*, can be seen as the culmination of these two approaches. The crux of this research centers on the use of obsolete technology in art and the potentials that arise from the modification of these arcane devices of the past. This work highlights the potentialities that surface when these objects are re-contextualized as components of generative process in systems based art.

In examining this work, the following questions emerge: How might these components become tools of translation between past and present histories? How do the physical modifications of these devices work to create a dialogue between visual and audible sensory experiences? How do these devices carefully negotiate the territories of function and non-function? What exists in the area between these thresholds?

In the simplest of terms, the piece is comprised of two Technicolor Magi-Cart Projectors and some custom designed circuitry. As a marginalized projection format, the Magi-Cart was short lived in its use, primarily finding application in the 1970s with travelling salespersons that required the convenience and portability of a film projection cartridge system for presentations. For Whitehead, the discovery of such a system became a point of potential in which he could replace the stock footage in each cart, with that of his own. Whitehead employs a number of different film carts depending on the application, replacing them as needed when they become damaged or unplayable. The design of the cart is intuitive, utilizing a similar format to that of an 8-track tape wherein the film forms a Möbius loop, repeating itself once the end of each film is reached.

The circuitry in *Circles of Confusion* consists of two hand assembled sine-wave oscillators, each paired with a respective projector. These oscillators emit tones that can be controlled through the amount of available light reflected into an attached sensor. The projector serves as a light source to the oscillators, modulating the sounds of the tones through a reflection of the projected film on screen. Fluctuations in brightness and contrast on physical film processes in turn create a live and dynamic audible environment that is constantly changing; slow and deep drones with the darker projections, and high-pitched vibrations as they brighten.

As spectators, Whitehead directs our attention to a symbiotic relationship that is established between sight and sound. As images are projected, the audio is simultaneously generated and manipulated. The connection between sensory experiences forms something of a dialogue within this semi-autonomous system. Though the artist defines many of these parameters, much is left to chance in the process of exhibition. The result is an attempt to blur boundaries between two complimentary modes of sensory perception; Sound and Image as Whitehead describes 'become complementary and transmutable'.

Circles of Confusion is the embodiment of a hands-on, tactile based experience for the artist. All of the footage used in the installation was filmed and hand processed by Whitehead. There are no duplicates of the films, each operating as artifact, subject to its own inevitable deterioration within the projector. As the film repeats indefinitely, physical deterioration occurs over time. Guiding sprockets break. Individual frames burn out through momentary jamming of the film. In photography, the circle of confusion is system of measurement that is used to determine image clarity. Adjustments to the lens directly impact the size of a light point on a projected focal plane. The corresponding result is an image that is more or less in focus, but never quite meets a finite balance between these thresholds. In many respects this provides the perfect description for Whitehead's work. It exists within a temporal and transient state, navigating a path between a functional form and the disintegration of its essential components. The flux that exists between function and non- function is perhaps the most compelling element of this work. It is a zone that is unpredictable at times, but has the potential to yield unreplicable results.

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