
Highways Connect and Divide

Foxy Production, New York
8 February – 12 March

The recent falls in the housing market momentarily concretised the magnitude of contemporary information flow, but apart from this, and the occasional accident of technology, many of the bodies of distribution and exchange that govern contemporary life remain relatively abstract to the general public, either because they exist intangibly or on a scale that is incongruous with that of the body.

That incongruity is what makes information systems so difficult to articulate visually, though Foxy Production's *Highways Connect and Divide* takes a stab at it. Its curatorial aim – to 'map the systems that impact upon us' – is wise in its vagueness, given the challenges in addressing such a broad topic. Inevitably the exhibition tells rather than shows, relying on associative thrill to coax a content bleed across pieces that are sometimes tied to the subject matter by only a loose structural thread (Tauba Auerbach's painting comes to mind). There are, however, a few excellent works.

The best pieces are the oldest and the most lo-tech, mostly because they leave the greatest room for human affect. Nam June Paik and Jud Yalkut's *Beatles Electroniques* (1966–72) overlays pulsating light play on footage of live broadcasts of Beatles concerts; the accompanying rhythms – looped alterations of the band's music – are alternately staccato and halting. The resulting audiovisual abstraction is a warped, electrifying melange that seems appropriately evocative of the excitement that must have been in the air in the late 1960s, when international air travel and household TV sets had just become widespread enough to make the world and its events seem suddenly smaller and closer.

Kerry Tribe made *North Is West / South Is East* (2001) by trolling Los Angeles International Airport for arriving flights and asking disembarking passengers to draw spontaneous and freehand maps of the city. The sketches, framed and mounted alongside each other on the wall, range from rudimentary orientations one could feasibly use to navigate a small portion of a suburb to generalised depictions of the city inflected with sarcasm and humour. In one, roughly drawn mountains labelled 'The Valley' are sprinkled with a smattering of dollar signs. The collected one-offs are direct and fresh, and express what truly matters in a city – the frank experience of its inhabitants.

Other pieces feel less connected to the viewer. The European art collective JODI uses rudimentary graphics in a video whose lacy and rapid proliferation of symbols, such as MapQuest place-markers, brims with the fleeting glee of stepping into an elevator and pressing all the buttons, but it feels a bit like a decorative one-liner, particularly given the source and the lack of interactivity. There is excitement and a sense of the forbidden in a Bureau of Inverse Technology (BIT) spy-plane video, *BIT Plane* (1999), compiled from footage and statistics gathered guerrilla-fashion over a Silicon Valley no-fly zone, though the data could use more interpretation. The exhibition's most relevant message seems to be that technology is only as expressive as the humans behind it, and often the latter are more so without it. *T.J. Carlin*



Cory Arcangel, *Timeless Standards/Real Taste*, 2011 (installation view).
Photo: Mark Woods. Courtesy the artist and Foxy Production, New York