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Towards the Post-Digital Era

Association of experimental electronics was founded on September 2002. Since then we have been gathering old consumer electronics and other electronic waste turning it into different kinds of audiovisual instruments, installations and other things.

When we started we had both aesthetic and environmental reasons for choosing our medium. Perfectness and unlimited possibilities of digital media seemed very boring for us, since we all loved the roughness of the D.I.Y analog experiments. We also were very concerned about the environmental effects of digital mass-culture.

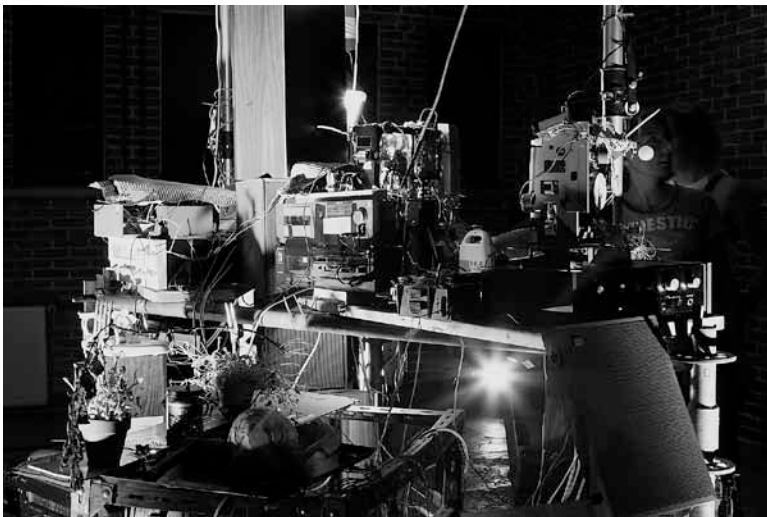


Fig. 1: Workshop exhibition, Gallerie Spanien 19, Århus Denmark 2006 Photo: Antti Ahonen



Fig. 2: Koelse live at ihme-club, Vanha, Helsinki 2009 Photo: Antti Ahonen

The problem of digital culture is the shortening product cycle. Moores law states that the number of transistors that can be placed inexpensively on an integrated circuit doubles every two years. This enables the exponential growth of computing power, but also leads to the exponential amount of electronic waste.

During the last 8 years, we have taken apart or modified hundreds if not thousands of different devices mostly from 1950s to 1990s. Judging by the waste, there are three distinctive trends you can see in all consumer electronics: reducing size, increasing complexity and decreasing quality.

It is commonly believed that exponential growth of computing-power can continue forever. Theoretically it might be so, but the lifespan of the devices cannot exponentially shorten forever. For some reason the shortening cycle does not seem to reflect on the materials being used. Consumer electronics are still made from oil-products and metals. Even the only organic material, wood, has been replaced by plastic to make things smaller.

Lately there has been lot's of talk about issues like peak oil, ecological sustainability and fundamental problems of western financial model. Still there have been quite little discussion about sustainability of digital culture.

Digital culture is not static, it is dynamic. All digital devices need to be upgraded for newer products in an ever-shortening cycle. Production of new products require new oil to be pumped, metals to be mined, energy to do this and also a working market where these products can be bought and sold.

Digital culture as we know is very fragile and not ecologically sustainable. It will not last forever. In Koelse one of our aims is to think what kind of technology could we have after the digital era. As a consumer-society waste



Fig. 3: Koelse studio Photo: Antti Ahonen

is the legacy we leave for future generations. The least we can do is to give some kind of instructions on what you can do with it.

We have been working hard to figure out what you can do with a pile of electronic waste, soldering iron and a couple of screwdrivers and pliers. We do not only want to reproduce the old analog technology, we are trying to build a model to sustain electronic art.

Electronic music has come a long way from an avantgarde art-form to an essential part of many genres of popular music. Our aim is to educate the future generations so they can build their electronic instruments and produce the electricity they need so when neither of those are not commercially available it is not the end of electronic music, just the beginning of its postdigital era.

Koelse:

Association of experimental electronics is a group of experimental electronics enthusiasts. They gather old consumer-electronics and transform it into sound producing devices. With these experimental devices they play concerts, build installations out of them and teach how to build similar things. Their mission is to show that you can turn your own electronic waste into interesting audiovisual experiments. Koelse's projects have been seen and heard around Europe on festivals, museums, galleries and alternative art spaces since 2002.

<http://www.koelse.org>

<http://www.myspace.com/koelseorg>