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THE NICKELODEON



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coproduced by:

TNT (Bordeaux)

Workspace Brussels

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supported by:

Nadine (Brussels)

Vooruit (Gent)

Courtisane Festival (Gent)

nickelodeon

The Nickelodeon derives its title from the early type of motion picture theater carrying the same name. Nickelodeons emerged in the U.S.A. at the turn of the 20th century, with the arrival of the narrative-style films, as a cheap alternative to live theaters. For a fixed price of 5 cents (a "nickel") short feature films were shown. Later, the name also became a term for a coin-operated musical jukebox.

Unlike its historical counterpart, C&H's Nickelodeon does not offer its customers (or audience) film screenings, but a selection of short live performances to choose from.

The performances inside of The Nickelodeon are re-enactments on stage, of the movements executed by cameras in movies. The very shots, travellings, panning, zoom-ins, close-ups, etc. making out the original footage are reproduced in an empty space, by performers moving aluminum frames of different sizes and formats to the original soundtrack. Each one of these microperformances exactly reproduces the camera movements and editing cuts of a specific excerpt taken from a broad selection of feature films, television series, documentaries, talk shows, video clips or live broadcasts.

The audience interacts with The Nickelodeon as with a juke-box: from a list of about 36 filmic productions, the visitors can freely select what they wish to see. Once an item is chosen, lights and sound automatically turn on, and the selected title is performed live, right in front of the spectator. At the end of each excerpt, light and sound turn off again, until another selection is made.

camera movements

Seen from a technical point of view, the many short performances making out The Nickelodeon function as 3D model representations of, on the one side, the camera placement and movements involved in the shooting of the film, and, on the other side, of the cutting of these shots into the edited film sequence.

After having studied the movements operated by the cameramen across a series of film excerpts, a second take of the exact same shots is performed. The film scenes are reproduced exactly, yet without any actor, grip, costume, electrician, boom operator, script, gaffer, assistants, decor, or prop. The action —the one of the cameramen— is reproduced, yet in another setting and with other tools.

The only thing remaining from the film set is the inscription moving in the space of what was being held in focus by the cameras. In other words, the spatial limits of what is being filmed, the framing operated by the cameras, is as such made visible.



stage performance

The action on stage ranges from a meticulous reproduction of the exact movements which the camera has been doing while filming, to a re-invention of a choreographic movement that suggests the filmic effect of the associated camera movement.

In order to perform the camera movements, the performers carry different aluminium frames through the space while the corresponding movie soundtrack is being played through loudspeakers. The frames are carried in such a way, that the very variations specific to each type of camera movement are reproduced accurately.

For instance, the different frame sizes are chosen according to distance between camera and subject. The spinning of a frame occurs around a virtual central axis positioned behind the frame's surface, which corresponds to the perceptible shift between the camera lens and its rotation point. The frames are moved differently if the camera is hand-held or mounted on a crane. A dolly shot moves in perfect horizontality while a steadycam shot would be reproduced with a more floating character, etc.

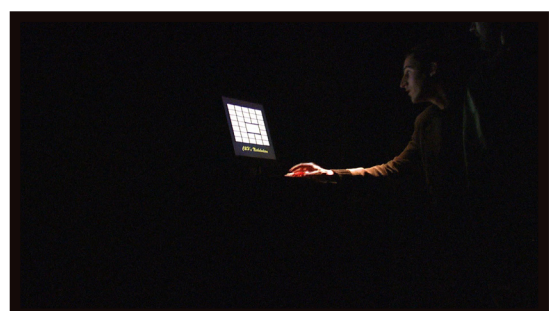
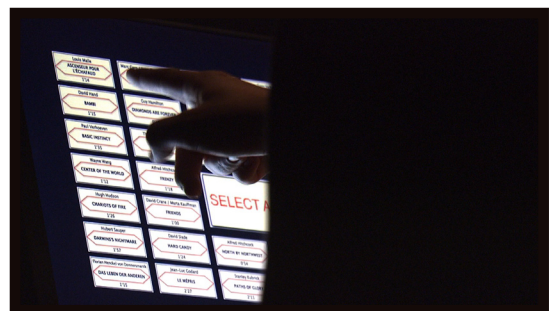
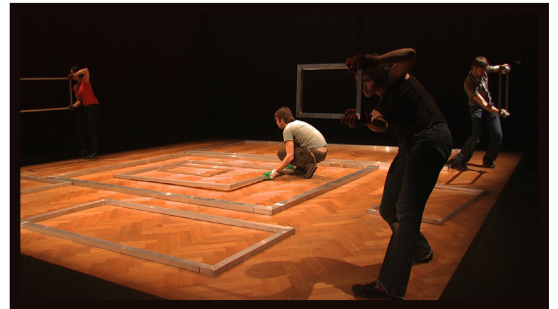
While certain filmic excerpts feature single shots and can be performed by only one performer, other excerpts engage more complex combinations. Alternatively, the movements of the frames correspond to a one-to-one real size reproduction of the camera's framing, or it implies variable amounts of interpretative distortion, either due to the obvious spatial constraints of the stage space (for instance in the case of a helicopter shot over a lake with many islands) or to more artistic choices (for instance when the overwhelming amount of cuts and effects in a holywood blockbuster trailer leads to a choreography which in effect is not anymore the exact reproduction of what happens on the footage, but rather matches the complexity of the film with another complexity more proper to the stage work.)

frames of aluminum

In The Nickelodeon, the performer handle frames made of aluminium. These frames make up an array of a dozen empty frames of varied sizes and proportions, all corresponding to well known existing imaging formats, such as the most common TV, video, or portrait 4:3 formats, or wide screen cinema formats such as the 1,88:1 cinemascope format, the 16:9 anamorphic format, etc.

The frame size ranges from a normal slide-projection frame size (5x5 cm), over the size of a medium-size TV screen (50 x 37,5 cm), both of which can easily be handled by a single person, to frames of the size of a small cinema screen (4,5 x 2 m), which require two persons to be carried.

The performers are the operators of the performances. Their role is comparable to the role of a cameraman in relation to the images he is shooting, except from the fact, of course, that in the Nickelodeon, the "cameramen" remain part of the picture...



filmic excerpts

The choice of the film excerpts has been made so as to offer a catalogue of different types of camera movements and cutting fashions, as well as of different types of footage and film genres. The Nickelodeon thus shows randomly, re-enactments of crane shots, close ups, action movies, split screens, steady cams, television shows, dolly shots, zoom ins, spaghetti westerns, hand held cameras, video clips, french nouvelle vague, sit-coms, etc.

Main criteria for the choice of the film excerpts was to find interesting relationships between the soundtrack of the excerpt and its camera settings, movements, and edit cuts, so as to allow for an rich and suggestive triangular interplay between title of the film, soundtrack and staged action.

The length of the excerpts ranges from single isolated camera movement to longer complex sequences involving dozens of cuts and various different camera settings.



technical description

The space is divided in two parts, a square stage zone of about 7 x 7 meters, and an audience zone situated right at the entrance of the space. Both zones are at the same level. The stage zone is covered with black carpet. In the center of the audience space a computer screen and a mouse are placed on a black pedestal, facing the entrance of the space. There is no sitting facilities for the audience. A set of theatre lights is hung above the stage zone. In the audience zone, only the pedestal is lit by a small spot. The whole room is completely darkened.

When the spectators enter, only the jukebox screen is to be seen. The rest of the space is completely dark. The performers are dissimulated on the sides of the stage.

The screen invites the audience to select one film title out of the list of about 36 titles. The selected title appears on a hidden monitor which informs the performers about what has been chosen. While the performers silently get set, the juke-box screen tells the audience that the chosen title is being loaded.

Once the performers are ready, they hit a switch which simultaneously launches the light and the soundtrack of the chosen title which they then perform. At the end of the performed title, lights and sound switch off automatically and the juke-box screen turns back to the initial list of titles out of which the spectators can make a new selection.



**The following list of excerpts is
presently in use in The Nickelodeon:**

presentation formats

The Nickelodeon can be either presented in an “installative” format, or in a “performative” format. If presented as an installation, spectators can freely enter and exit the space, which is open during set hours.

If presented as a performance, all spectators enter the space at the same time and stay inside for a fixed amount of time (approx 40 min.), until the screen indicates the end of the piece.

credits

The Nickelodeon was developed by C&H with the support of Kunst/Werk vzw / Antwerp, TNT / Bordeaux, Vooruit & Courtisane Festival / Gent, Nadine and Workspace Brussels.

Premiere performances of the Nickelodeon were held in April 2008 during the Courtisane Festival at the Vooruit, Gent.

contact & infos

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Animal World John Ross
Ascenseur pour L'échafaud Louis Malle
Bambi David Hand
Basic Instinct Paul Verhoeven
Blow out Brian de Palma
Chariots of Fire Hugh Hudson
Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon Ang Lee
Darwin's Nightmare Hubert Sauper
Das Boot Wolfgang Petersen
Delicatessen Jean-Pierre Jeunet
Die Liebe ist kälter als der Tod Rainer Werner Fassbinder
Eurovision 2008 European Broadcasting Union
Festen Thomas Vinterberg
For a Few Dollars More Sergio Leone
Friends David Crane / Marta Kauffman
God Gave Me Everything I Want Mark Romanek / Mick Jagger
Hard Candy David Slade
Intimacy Patrice Chéreau
Jackie Brown Quentin Tarantino
Le Mépris Jean-Luc Godard
Liverpool vs. Arsenal BBC-SPORT
Manhattan Woody Allen
Miele, immer besser Miele
Minority Report Steven Spielberg
North by Northwest Alfred Hitchcock
Paths of Glory Stanley Kubrick
Pirates of the Caribbean 3 Gore Verbinski
Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back George Lucas
The Bourne Supremacy Paul Greengrass
The Falls Peter Greenaway
The Godfather Francis Ford Coppola
The Player Robert Altman
The Shining Stanley Kubrick
The Texas Chain Saw Massacre Tobe Hooper
Twentieth Century Fox 20th Century Fox