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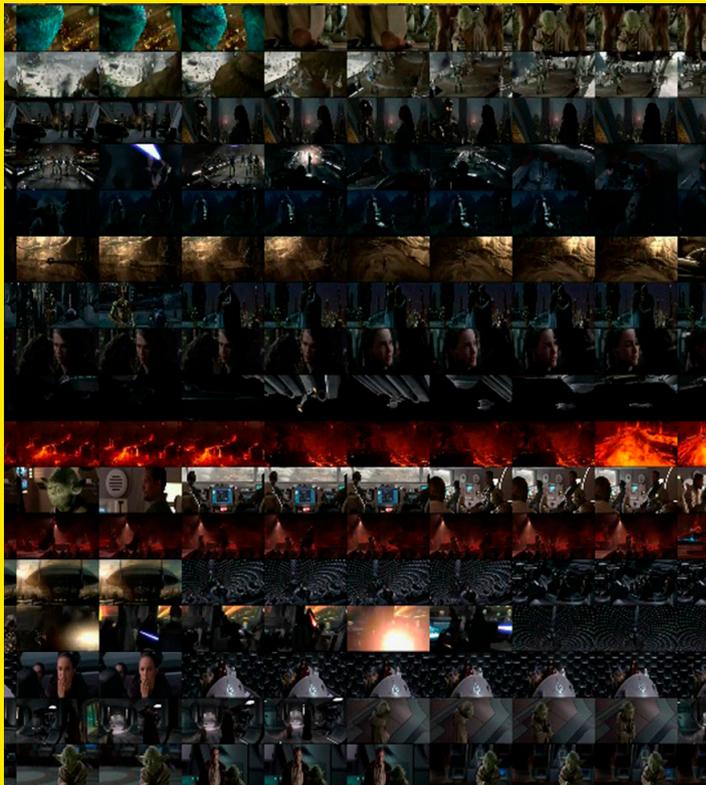
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**GABRIELA
MONROY**

CINEMACITY
**CASPAR
STRACKE**



CINEMACITY

UNITED KINGDOM

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Cinematicity is a collaborative project by Caspar Stracke and Gabriela Monroy, and takes place at Foundation for Art and Creative Technology (FACT) in Liverpool, UK. Caspar and Gabriela are two artist/filmmakers from Germany and Mexico living between New York and Helsinki. Their work covers a whole range of disciplines — experimental film, documentary film, video installation, and live video performance. As curators, they have been the directors of an annual festival/exhibition of international contemporary moving image art in New York- video_dumbo -since 2005. This year they also have been selected as the programmers of the renowned Robert Flaherty Documentary Film Seminar in NY.

Their work is concerned with architecture, urbanism and the social aspects of cinema, explored through both curation and filmmaking; all of which are fully contained within their project for the EMARE residency at FACT, Cinemacity. This collaborative, interactive film seeks to open out the audience experience of cinema-going and grant the viewer control and immersion not only in the cinema space, but also during the filmmaking process itself. The story of Cinemacity is created by participants from the city of Liverpool, who submit short stories based on personal experiences which felt so unreal that they "could have been in a movie". These cinematic vignettes will then be transformed into a collage film, allowing the storytellers to be as involved in the action as they wish to be, and screened in an interactive, real-time cinematic experiment.

This project focuses on what it is to tell a story, and also what it is to be told one. Identity, memory and experience all push together to generate a crowd-sourced dynamic view of the city, of the people who inhabit it, and of the ways in which everyday life interacts with the cinematic.

Cinemacity is totally dependent upon audience participation and the willingness of people to share stories. Why did you decide to open the project up in this way? What are the concerns you felt this direct collaboration with the public would address?

If we would declare this decade as the wake of socially engaged interactive art

we have to consider that it came a really long way - technology-wise it all started in the late nineties - where it was almost destined to fail due to limited processing speed, clunky buttons, latency and poor interfaces. Smart phones weren't even available yet. Socially engaged participatory art on the other hand was by far more advanced. But it only fully expanded with the advancements in mobile technology, and the wake of social media.

So with participation and audience input on any possible level, one-way entertainment and spoon-fed spectacle has become more and more an old-fashion medium. In the face of this, commercial cinema reacted with two different strategies. Immersive media, gadgetry like 3D goggles and motion controlled cinema seats that physically shake the audience in action movies ("D-Box technology"). The other strategy involving audience participation is "Transmedia storytelling" - The development of the latter is still in its infancy stage as it has so far mostly been just a clever PR side product to promote the actual film. We have an ambivalent relationship to both mentioned developments.

What do you feel the project says about contemporary filmmaking? And also the ways in which audiences expect to experience film? How does Cinemacity work as a critique on the film industry and where do you think the industry is going?

What remains relevant is the social aspect of cinema culture - watching film as a public event, and the fact that this practice is vanishing (once again) due to the web access and development of video streaming capabilities. On the other hand the entire cultural landscape of performing arts and show business is

starting to open up and allowing participation and/or instant communication with representatives from the production end. We can't predict the future of commercial cinema, but at least we know that any form of community-based cinema culture has a given potential: to build upon this very act of social experience, a group in the same physical space, which automatically opens up to more interaction and participation.

As for the development of our theme, with this project we are obviously tapping into the relationship between cinema and society: cinema could be called a larger-than-life collective memory bank in which individual personal life experiences have been gathered and then transformed into film stories. We have to be reminded that every cinematic story, every event and every location are rooted in reality (including fantasy and SciFi, which are reality projections and metaphors).

The question is why does one refer to the most unusual, serendipitous situations automatically as "cinematic", or something "pulled straight out of a movie"? We are not only interested in that connection between society and cinema, and the mutual profound influences and infinite entanglements which this produces. But we are also questioning the filtering system of cinema - how real life is translated into screenplays and how it ultimately appears on the screen. Here we have arrived at the main problem of mainstream. It's a McDonaldization culture, operating on too many standardized codes and protocols, so that everything in the end sounds and looks the same. This is the reason why we would like to present a possible form of raw story material. The plurality of story contributors then brings not only a multi-perspective but also locality. The character of the city inscribes itself into these Liverpool-based

scenarios. We are not interested to start this project on a global level, since the location, Liverpool is the overarching, connecting bond, ultimately creating a collective X-ray of a city made by members of its different communities, and Liverpool happens to have lot of them.

You both seem to have a deep interest in the idea of the cinema as an architectural space and the impact this might have on it as a social arena. Can you talk a bit about how Cinemacity plays with this idea and the reasons behind it?

In contemporary cinema architecture, there are some remnants of the classic cinema experience. At the very beginning, the architectural space was identical to that of Theatre, with the pompous architectural facades; ornaments; luxurious lobbies; balcony seating; a stage and large velvet curtains, opening to reveal the action. All of these visual elements made the entire viewing experience an event. The architecture then changed, reduced its elements to art deco and more drastically with the arrival of modernism. Yet a tiny bit of that is left even in today's multiplexes - as in the heavy plush carpets on floors and walls - but ultimately it has remained a comfortable dark cave, the perfect place where you remove from your own reality for a few hours.

The most oppositional counterpart to all this carefully constructed event experience is YouTube, where one is constantly distracted as animated advertising is plastered all over the screen and all sides of the web browser window. Every day one has to update one's own visual spam-filter in an effort to not be distracted by these surroundings.

Theater architecture does the opposite. Its curtains and ornaments form a giant frame around the moving picture, an extension of the image, designed in harmony. Our project is also very concerned with this perceptual event itself, of imagining the cinema space as to be seeing through somebody else's vision, from inside a giant eye. This is the reason why we introduced scenes of people watching a cinema screen in which people are watching a cinema screen, ad infinitum.

Storytelling is a perfect way to explore a foreign city; do you feel that you received an authentic urban narrative for Liverpool? Are your gathered cinematic snatches -which people idealise and purposefully retell as aesthetically perfect, or dramatic events- a more truthful idea of the people which make up the city than stories they felt were more prosaic?

Stories of locals make you see the city in a different way: the historic dimension becomes so strong and evident, when several stories are attached to a specific location but from different time periods. Cinemacity makes these historic layers of memories visible and it's fascinating to see something, which Norman Klein calls "bleeding through", taking place through these layers.

As for Liverpool, after having gathered these stories, we can never see Bold Street, or the Cathedral Gardens or London Road where the Odeon cinema is the same way. For us as visitors our experience of gathering these stories will remain evident in the city's geography, since we don't have any other memory of these places to either add or "neutralize" the opinion formed by this storytelling. We are building our own view of Liverpool from a tiny extract of a

collective consciousness: these stories tell us a lot about the size of the city, the humor of their inhabitants, or how safe a place is.

Where would you position this project in the history of participatory cinema / live cinema?

The big promise of new media to blur institutional boundaries, and the democratization of cultural production, hasn't fully happen yet. There have been several instances of participatory cinema, from crowdsourcing that encourages people to re-enact well known films, to filmmakers who put all their material online for anyone to re-mix it and upload it back, or tweets layered on top a film during a screening. But in all these examples the starting point is always somebody else's work; a well-known story, a finished film. In our project we want the collaboration to start earlier, in fact to be the point of departure for the work.

We keep the degree of participation totally open: respondents can just submit a story anonymously, or they can choose to act or appear in it, or they can also record it in their own voice if they prefer. We'll select the stories and try to find the right genre to present them, in collaboration with the participant. As for the live participatory part -inside the cinema space- we want the audiences' presence to actually affect what they are watching through an immediate reflection of their input, not as an afterthought but an instantaneous collaborative moment visible in real time.

Now what is the outcome of all this? It is a hybrid form in any way you see it. It

has a strong participatory element, but it's not exclusively a collectively produced project, there are other aspects and methodologies involved. For instance, the project also has an 'exquisite corpse' aspect, in which one participant unconsciously continues where another one has left off. Then there is us who structure it, build transitions and decide to group certain stories together, which will then create a collectively assembled set of characters for a particular cluster of scenes.

Ultimately on the second part, in the actual cinema space, the entire project turns into a live video performance. The project is only completed when screened live in front of an audience, since the last part consists of a live video improvisation which responds to the audiences real time digital feedback, with a mix of pre-recorded and live camera images. At this point, the audience has the possibility to potentially spin the stories further and influence the live edit of the larger story, completing the ethos of the piece as a truly collaborative work.

