Lev Manovich

Soft Cinema

2002

computer generated projection, installation / dimensions variable

Soft Cinema – Database for Simultaneous Cinema

From Moholy-Nagy's perspective, the simultaneous parallel use of different media such as typography, photography and film was experimental pioneering work. It necessitated the development of special intellectual capabilities in order to be able to process the relevant flood of information. Today, this kind of multitasking is an everyday occurrence and omnipresent – as evidenced by CNN's screen design or the way we arrange a multitude of open windows on our computer screens.

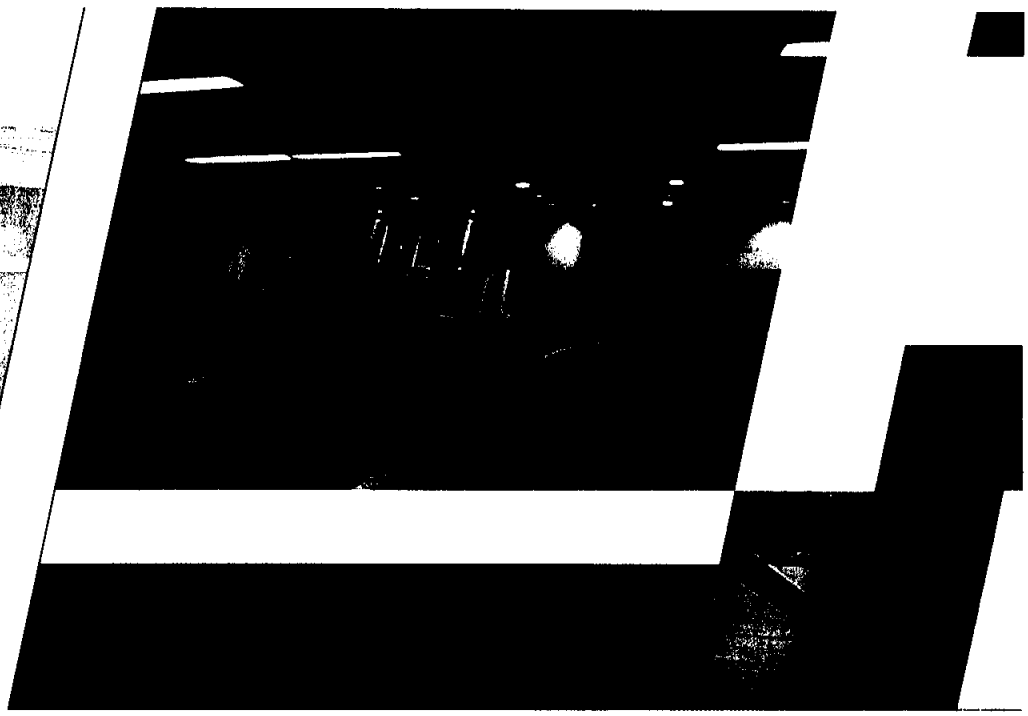
Soft Cinema extends the schemata of information design into an artistic context, combining them to produce a kind of simultaneous cinema. Its approach moves within dimensions somewhere between classical film montage and the indiscriminate equivalence of database entries. It consists of two program sections, the generator and the display. The first section, the generator, has the function of creating a montage out of the individual strands of film. The basis for this process is a database of film sequences and the latter's characteristics such as composition, movement etc. In the first instance, these parameters are the result of an automated analysis of contrast values, movement, activity and so on. Secondly, however, they also indicate the location where the film was shot, its perspectives etc. The composition of these parameters is variable and can be adapted to various different approaches to montage. The adjustable combinations and weightings allow generator users to create films edited according to formal criteria similar to those of classical montage, but without regard for the development of a narrative storyline. In this sense, such works are closer to a relational database than to an edited film.

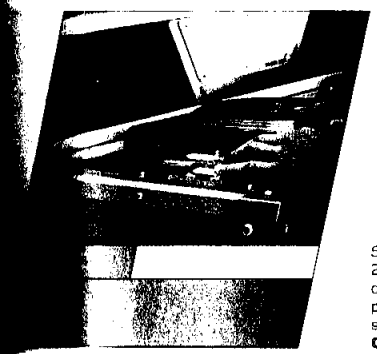
As a second stage, the display joins together the individual strands of film produced using the generator to form a kind of montage of simultaneity. This program divides up the screen into individual segments, in each of which either films or abstract animations are shown. The division process takes place by means of algorithms, which ensure that the screen is divided up harmoniously. Thus, differences in size and positioning on the screen take into account correspondences and relationships between the individual films. The same stage of processing that divides up the screen allocates soundtracks, a looped text and a voice-over channel. This allocation process can be monitored using a script that is processed by the display.

The coherence and the arrangement of all elements on the screen produces a continuum that alternates between rhythmic, visual structures and descriptive symbols. Narrative elements appear, disappear again or make room for other elements that are in competition with them. At times, the equivalence and uninterpreted quality of the database entries gives rise to aesthetic and meaningful structures that repeatedly fall apart and are reformed into other constellations.

Andreas Kratky

Translated from the German by Jeremy Gaines





Soft Cinema
2002
computer-generated
projection
screenshots
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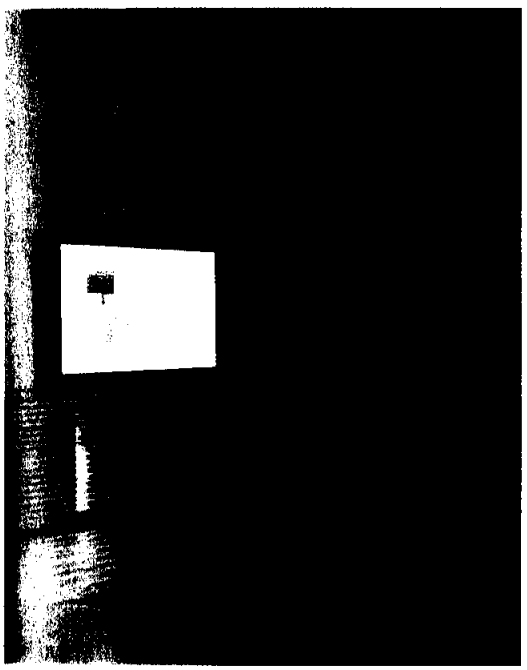

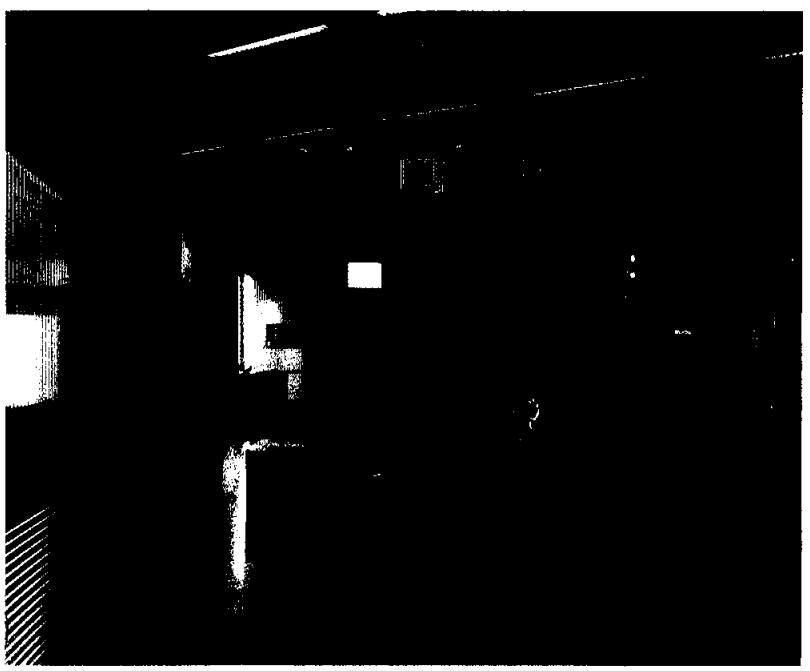

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2002
installation views ZKM |
Center for Art and Media
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details
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