

Slow Special Effects (A Van, a Mouse, some drifting Clouds)...

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By Jeff Luckey

Over the past 20 years, in the standard course of the contemporary film, whether found in the cinema or on TV, special effects have found a solid home in relation to the flow of the action/scenario/plot of most every storyline. The drive of these effects is, in most cases, to exaggerate the action and to speed along the story. The good old days of Storm Troopers¹ played by men in oversized helmets are over, replaced now with digital technology creating armies of animatrons, and thus in a variety of fashions designing more exciting fields of vision and spectacular tableaux vivants.

In the recent installation and video work of Karina Nimmerfall the artist has taken up (along with concerns over perception and filmic space) this matter of the role of a special effect. The emptied rooms and troubled spaces pulled from crime scene investigations and millionaire's mansions have been busied with scurrying mice and slamming doors; and if the viewer arrives at the right time they might even happen upon a distant explosion.

This use of both distance and temporality ("what explosion... where's the mouse?" might be heard from fellow viewers) quietly proposes the use and necessity of lags in effectiveness, and the slowing down of image intake. Within the work of Nimmerfall and other (film/video/installation) artists of her generation this slowing down of the viewing process, when accomplished successfully, can work to affect in the audience a questioning as to what they are actually ingesting. From the elder statesman Stan Douglas and his pursuit of other possible outcomes (*Inconsolable Memories*, 2005) and the politics of editing and erasure (*Hors Champs*, 1992) to the recent projects of Pierre Huyghe and his search for what might be found between a jump cut (*L'Ellipse*, 1998), Nimmerfall as well investigates new ways to deconstruct a story/mechanism, in order to realize its own invention, artifice and capacity.

In Nimmerfall's large scale installation works, ranging from *Video Home* (1999) to *Vertical Villa* (2008), a range of possibilities was put on view as to how media space is constructed: from the mechanics of luxury interiors found in design/lifestyle/home improvement magazines to the recent marketing campaigns of high-rise condos. With the exception of the lifestyle magazine (whose banal yet "oh so perfect" existence is already inherent), all other genres found in Nimmerfall's projects usually offer the viewer a rapid-fire desiring effect: the high-speed chase scenes and seedy (yet intriguing) hallways and interiors of *C.S.I.* Miami/NY/Las Vegas, the flash editing of real estate websites and the chatty witticisms and polished spaces of the oil moguls' estates (from the hit TV series *Dallas*).

Nimmerfall's installations main drive then would seem to be the desire to design an active physical and sculptural space in order to reevaluate one's relation to these mediated images/conventions. As a result, their (the installations) pacing is languid. One or two slight scenes (pulled from background information found in a cinematic frame) operate now as sleepy cuts: both as an image cut from another and cut into physical/sculptural others (the installations, with the use of multiple projectors and screens, plus a large array of walls, divide the image into a multiplicity of views). And now these fresh cuts can amount to a new (both virtual and physical) reality for a once trivial moment in time: the hallway, the staircase, or the corner office. What better way then, in order to wryly spice up these banalities than to add the clichéd of the clichéd as new digital effects: the flashing blue lights of a nearby police action, the ashtray of a forgotten cigarette, rainy window panes and the passing of a winter snowstorm; and then in the distance, with not a sound to be heard, an almost cute little explosion can be seen. At that point one could then almost imagine the Hollywood executives scratching their heads, both in amazement and indignation.

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¹ Storm Troopers are characters from George Lucas' 1977 film *Star Wars*. In the film, when two robotic characters played by human actors (C-3PO and R2-D2) proceed to hide from the enemy, two pursuing Storm Troopers (enemy militia also played by human actors) enter the room in search of the robots. One of the actors playing a trooper then in the process mistakenly hits his head on the top of the doorframe. This shot later became a cult comedy moment for fans of the film. In the later following sequels to *Star Wars*, CGI (computer graphics) replaced many of the previously used human actors with virtual representations and no more heads were bumped.