

Misdirect Movies

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'Cinema', dematerialised and magnified in the 21st century, fulfilling all the medium's foundational dreams of spectacular transcendence while cleaving to the foundational myth of guaranteeing presence, has with increasing openness become an instrument of late-capitalism's consumptive hegemony. (Liberty through consumption, equality through consumption, fraternity through consumption, to borrow Raoul Vaneigem's now ageing quip.) Faced with this, one turns with relief to those practices, however marginal, that emphasise the material, that practise 'cinema' by means that resist reification or commoditisation, whether through sheer inaccessibility – by which I mean they are too cognitively difficult, rather than hard to track down, but yes, that too – or transience. With the exhibition 'Misdirect Movies' we are in the domain, mostly, of the para-cinematic and the extra-cinematic. And to provide some differentiation: by 'para-cinematic' I refer to cinema realised by means other than projection of a continuous stream of images, indeed sometimes by means that may not be conventionally cinematic at all. The 'extra-cinematic', by contrast, is that which adds meaning to a cinematic work, a film, by reference to it in another medium. The fan magazines of the 1920s and 1930s would be good examples of this, so too promotional photographs for films. (And this demonstrates the fact that the extra-cinematic is routinely used, even today, by mainstream cinema as promotional mode, just mostly on the internet.) Both these modes of being outside the cinema have long histories, perhaps because Dada artists in particular were more sensitive to the inherent capacity for subjective annihilation of the still maturing medium. (What else does Laura Mulvey describe in that foundational essay for film studies than regression into the primordial when confronted by big mum and dad on the screen, in the dark? Subjectivity goes where, exactly?) So, for example, Francis Picabia created both extra-cinematic materials, the 'Instantaneiste' issue of 391 that yoked his performance *Relâche* to his polemical writing and poetry, and para-cinematic events and works, the ballet *Relâche*, including the film *Entr'acte*, the drama *Ciné-*

Sketch, and the text *L'Accommodation chez les borgnes: sursum corda*, 'for projection', as the author put it, 'on the inside of the skull'. The solitary issue of Céline Arnauld's Dada journal *Projecteur* from May 1920 presents its texts as a series of frames with cumulative effect, and printed in landscape format to mime the visual form of the cinema screen. (I'm indebted to my colleague Ruth Hemus for that last example.) A number of surrealists, notably Benjamin Fondane, created 'unfilmable' film scripts as purely literary works. One might happily describe the literary endeavours of any number of modernist writers, from John Dos Passos through to 'HD' and Stephen Spender, as creating para-cinematic texts.

So in 'Misdirect Movies' we have contemporary artists building on and reprising modernist activity, but doing so not as pastiche for the benefit of the market, but as distancing devices from cinema. The acknowledged principle for the show may be collage and the rearrangement of cinema's infinite supply of imagery – it is infinite because it grows faster than our capacity to appraise or rearrange it – but the outcome is something beyond cinema. I was especially taken by Dave Griffith's presentation of tiny, almost unintelligible images on glass slides, to be viewed through a microscope. The slides themselves, and the demand that one put them in the apparatus and focus it, recalled the materiality of proto-cinematic devices in the 19th century – not the precursors of cinema, but rather evolutionary paths that weren't pursued. So too the creation of a flow of images, one slide after another, required a body rather than dematerialising it. The microscope also brought the viewer back to the history of optics, the idea of fixing the object in sight, and the need for the precision lens with which to do it. Cathy Lomax's juxtapositions of images seem to replicate the flow of the storyboard, until you realise that the flow is both artificial, since each painting comes from a different film, and points to the sameness of cinematic imagery and narrative formation as moments from anywhere become almost interchangeable with each other. Rosa Barba's issues of *Printed Cinema* are at once extra-cinematic, in that they can accompany her film works, which weren't on show in Shoreditch, and para-cinematic, since separated from those films they can be understood as cinematic in their own right, even though they consist of text and photographs. Their lineage includes works like Blaise Cendrars and Fernand Léger's *La Fin du monde*, 1919, Raoul Hausmann's *Dada Cino*, 1920, and László Moholy-Nagy's *Dynamic of the Metropolis*, 1921-22.

Liz McAlpine's *The Fly*, 2003, creates a material object out of the near-immateriality of cinema, indeed the extra-cinema, while retaining the notion of projection. A minute's worth of frames from the trailer for the David Cronenberg movie of 1986 are stacked vertically into sculpture, with a light source beneath them. By contrast to this compression, *Light Readings: 1,500 Cinematic Explosions*, 2008, does what it says on the film canister, or in this case the DVD case: assembling the brightest frames from myriad cinematic explosions to create something approaching Nam June Paik's *Zen for Film*, 1962, in its transcendence. One thinks, as one does, of Robert Grosseteste's formulation of which Hollis Frampton was so fond: *Formam primam corporealem, quam quidam corporeitatem vocant, lucem esse arbitror* (The first corporeal form which some call corporeity is in my opinion light), from 1229 (or thereabouts). At the most immaterial moment of cinema, McAlpine brings us back to the haptic. David Reed's painterly animation of a few seconds from that saga of miscegenation paranoia, *The Searchers*, in its looped repetition has an echo of Jack Goldstein's *Metro Goldwyn Mayer*, 1975, but that is perhaps because the John Ford movie is overly familiar to me from screening it to first-year students for a decade. Maybe that endless repetition in

the process of transformation of the movie from industrial product to taught 'classic' was something that Reed wanted to highlight. As forms of cinema, any single one of these works in 'Misdirect Movies' is worth rather more than the factory-engineered industrial product gracing a monster screen somewhere near you, accompanied by a bucket of caffeinated, sugary water and a matching tub of lard (the only haptic condition of contemporary cinema is the ingesting of superfluous calories). Taken together, these works are priceless for their commitment to difference from mass culture and their continuity with art's tradition. ■

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Elizabeth McAlpine
The Fly 2003