

Misdirect Movies

Standpoint London 5 July to 3 August

'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 Arnaud'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 Haussmann'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 corporalem, 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



Elizabeth McAlpine
The Fly 2003

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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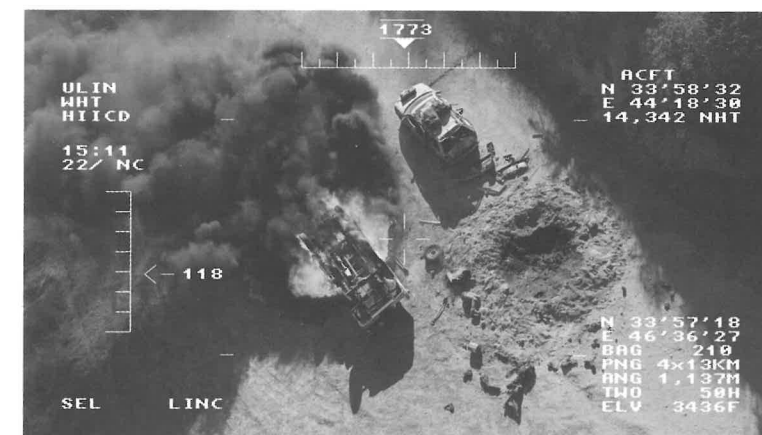
Omer Fast: 5,000 Feet is the Best

Imperial War Museum London 29 July

to 29 September

On 4 April 2010, a video uploaded to the WikiLeaks website gripped the hearts and minds of millions across the world. The video, familiarly titled *Collateral Murder*, captured the shooting and killing of eleven individuals in a public square in Baghdad. Two of those killed were Reuters' employees, renowned photojournalist Nimir Noor-Eldeen and driver/camera assistant Saeed Chmagh; the others were civilians. An unarmed group of adults and children, arriving at the scene in a minivan, attempted to transport the wounded to safety; they too were fired upon. Recorded by the in-built video camera of the Apache attack helicopter, the video includes an audio recording of the internal discussion between the US soldiers before, during and after the shooting. Having been crudely compared by many to a video-game commentary, the video is nevertheless a ruthless awakening to the reality of the relationship between what we see on screen and *bare life*. Both the film and reactions to it have caused outrage, and Bradley Manning's recent sentencing for releasing this video and other such confidential information has divided public opinion. However, hard facts and documentary footage alone are not enough for most of us to reconcile our emotive response to such urgent contemporary issues. It seems apt that the Imperial War Museum's new IWM Contemporary space should be launched on the same week as Manning's sentencing, and even more apt that the inaugural exhibition is of Omer Fast's *5,000 Feet is the Best*, 2011.

Taking its title from the optimum operational flight altitude of a



Omer Fast
5,000 Feet is the Best
2011 video

US Air Force MQ-1 Predator drone, the film centres around a series of interviews Fast conducted with a former flight operator suffering post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Located in a dingy Las Vegas hotel room, the saturated and tinny clips of the original interviews – the officer's face blurred out – are cut between multiple cinematic re-enactments of the conversation. The drone operator enters the cramped room and positions himself on the bed. 'Everything OK?' the interviewer asks. 'Yeah, I'm OK,' the pilot replies, awkwardly shifting on the bed, 'I didn't realise you'd be filming.' 'We can stop,' says the interviewer, 'if you are uncomfortable.' 'Yeah, right,' the pilot replies. He reaches for some pills, swallowing dry; the interviewer begins: 'What's the difference between you and a real pilot?' The pilot continually leaves the hotel room, where we watch him stalling for time in the corridor, returning again and again to repeat the same conversation; each time recounting a slightly different version and with different, seemingly unrelated, anecdotes. Meshed together with documentary footage of war zones from the air – reminiscent of those frantically circulating the internet since Manning's controversial leaks – picturesque Afghani and Pakistani vistas, suburban Nevada and glimmering Las Vegas lights, it is easy to sit through the 30-minute looped film several times, unaware where it begins or ends, each time spotting new differences, recognising subtle nuances.

Exploring how the use of drones is rapidly altering the politics, principles and personal experience of conflict, the film exposes the complexities of the frontline-at-a-distance that the pilot operates within; every day actively working within the heart of the war zone, impacting on the lives and futures of numerous Afghans. Yet having spent months watching his targets, being physically situated thousands of miles away safely on home soil has not sheltered

Gallery

Mel Brimfield:
Death and Dumb

7 September – 2 November 2013

Off-site Performance

Mel Brimfield:
An Audience with Willy Little

13, 14 & 15 September 2013
SS Shieldhall, Southampton

To book: www.hansardgallery.org.uk

Off-site Exhibition

Jeremy Millar:
The Oblate

7 September – 23 December 2013
Southampton City Art Gallery

John Hansard Gallery

University of Southampton
www.hansardgallery.org.uk



An Audience with Willy Little and *The Oblate* were commissioned as part of **artSOUTH: collaborations** | www.artsouth.org.uk