Misdirect Movies explores new possibilities of collage, through artist’s use of imagery gleaned from the cinematic. With access to the internet and the digitalisation of film, artists are now able to appropriate films to create different and innovative approaches to collage. The artists in the exhibition touch on the Quixotic — a slippage of reality and illusion — to re-present and re-employ the content of mainstream feature films. Placed together within the gallery context the artworks create a kind of hybridised ‘cinematic’ experience.

The catalogue is a continuation of the overriding theme of collage incorporating: newly commissioned contextual essays, installation images and reproductions of individual artist’s work; glimpses of artistic process through studio images and reprinted influential texts.

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Misdirect Movies

Curated by Andrew Bracey and John Rimmer

Rosa Barba  
Andrew Bracey  
Dave Griffiths  
Cathy Lomax  
Elizabeth McAlpine  
David Reed  
John Rimmer

The Royal Standard, Liverpool  
16 — 31 March 2013

Standpoint Gallery, London  
5 July — 3 August 2013

Greyfriars, Lincoln  
4 — 26 October 2013

Meter Room, Coventry  
8 November — 1 December 2013
The Six Most Beautiful Minutes in the History of Cinema

Sancho Panza enters a cinema in a provincial city. He is looking for Don Quixote and finds him sitting off to the side, staring at the screen. The theater is almost full; the balcony—which is a sort of giant terrace—is packed with raucous children. After several unsuccessful attempts to reach Don Quixote, Sancho reluctantly sits down in one of the lower seats, next to a little girl (Dalínez?), who offers him a lollipop. The screening has begun; it is a costume film: on the screen, knights in armor are riding along. Suddenly, a woman appears; she is in danger. Don Quixote abruptly rises, unsheaths his sword, rushes toward the screen, and, with several lunge, begins to shred the cloth. The woman and the knights are still visible on the screen, but the black slash opened by Don Quixote’s sword grows ever larger, implacably devouring the images. In the end, nothing is left of the screen, and only the wooden structure supporting it remains visible. The outraged audience leaves the theater, but the children on the balcony continue their fanatical cheers for Don Quixote. Only the little girl down on the floor stares at him in disapproval.

What are we to do with our imaginations? Love them and believe in them to the point of having to destroy and falsify
Orson Welles’ unfinished version of Don Quixote was possibly his most personal project. Over the space of three decades the script was continuously revised, with filming taking place around the globe; as a result the cast aged or were replaced. In this way, Don Quixote could be viewed as a patchwork collage of a film, both in its manufacture and fragmented unfinished form.

Cervantes’ masterpiece is widely credited as being the first modern novel, in turn Welles recognised the postmodern qualities inherent in the text and amplified them in his film. The setting of the film in the present day, whilst retaining the seventeenth century garb of the main characters, most significantly articulates this. In a recently discovered scene (Rosenbaum) a distressed Quixote enters a cinema and leaps onto the stage to chivalrously fight with celluloid soldiers in a misguided attempt to rescue a damsel in distress (fig. 1). The audience reacts in a riotous manner as Quixote destroys the screen as he slashes away at it with his sword. Cinema’s power to suspend disbelief (Harbord) is both perfectly encapsulated and deconstructed in Quixote’s confusion over image replacing reality. This scene, Giorgio Agamben’s related essay The Six Most Beautiful Minutes in the History of Cinema and the imaginary films of Max Castle in Theodore Roszak’s novel, Flicker (both texts reprinted here) reflect and have inspired the somewhat quixotic curatorial tone of Misdirect Movies.

Jonathan Rosenbaum: “It seems to me that as a fragment, it speaks as itself very eloquently and it also seems to capture the essence of Cervantes”.

Janet Harbord: “What the character of Don Quixote has done is to expose the structure that supports the function and experience of cinema: the projector, the screen, the frame, in short what film theorists have for some time called the apparatus.”

Michel Foucault: “Don Quixote must remain faithful to the book that he has now become in reality; he must protect it from errors, from counterfeits, from apocryphal sequels; he must fill in the details that have been left out; he must preserve its truth.”

Dorothea Von Hantlemann: “Compared to the theatre or a concert, or a church mass for that matter, the format of the exhibition introduced a highly flexible format, with flexible forms of usage (which also meant that people can decide for themselves the extent to which they want to become involved).”

Caroline Douglas: “Cinema and film techniques have remained key elements in collage, both for the repository of material they represent and for the, potentially subversive, visual vocabulary of the physical manipulation of film. Splicing, jump-cutting, superimposing — all forms of film editing relate directly to the modes of collage.”

Paul Young: “Yet the very notion of collage is somewhat problematic for cinema since film is by nature a time-based medium that can only present shots in sequence as opposed to all at once... But if collage can be defined as a process of using real, found objects in the...”
In many ways Welles and Quixote could be seen as paralleled - both filmmakers and artists who scour the archive of cinema in order to create works of art.

I interpret Welles’ Don Quixote scene in the cinema of being indicative of his overall relationship to cinema. I suggest he was a film director who wanted to reinvent film and to do this he slashed away at the ‘baggage’ of previous films and the studio system that dominated (American) cinema of the time. It could be argued that canonical artists (Cezañne, Picasso, Schwitters, Duchamp, Warhol) have similarly battled with what existed before in order to progress art, in what could be interpreted as quixotic art practices.

By the end of Welles’ life there was over 300,000 feet of film of Don Quixote and by extension cinema itself.

The artists in Mediatracks make all work that uses images and footage gleaned from cinema and film. The artwork included pushes at new possibilities of collage, through diverse media. The idea of collage is extended into the changing selection of artworks and venue to venue and this essay’s parallel cluster of quotes. Montage through montage and juxtaposition is the material is appropriated and transformed into moments significant to the artist. These are accompanied by a short phrase, which later work their way onto the bottom of the paintings.

The arrival of the domestic video cassette recorder, and the distribution of industrially produced films on videotape, put the material substrate of the narrative into the hands of the audience. The order of narrative could now be routinely countermanded. For example, control of the film by means of VCR allows such symptomatic freedoms as the repetition of a favourite sequence, or fixation upon an obsessionale image. The subsequent arrival of digital video editing on ‘entry level’ personal computers exponentially expanded the range of possibilities for dismantling and reconfiguring the once inviolable objects offered by narrative cinema. Moreover even the most routine and non-resistant practice of ‘zapping’ through films shown on television now offers the sedentary equivalent of Breton’s and Vaché’s amble dérive.”

‘We are surrounded today, everywhere, all the time, by arrays of multiple, simultaneous images — in the street, at airports, shopping centres, and gyms; but also on our computers and televisions sets. The idea of a single image commanding our pause and grab from a DVD (Mulvey) or the wealth of information (Colomina). The pensive spectator who ‘two kinds of time blend together’. And the ‘pensive’ spectator ultimately returns to the inseparability of stillness form movement and flow: in Bellís’s words, ‘two kinds of time blend together.’

Like the majority of the artists in the exhibition, Elizabeth McAlpine mines the archive of cinema to create artworks. A forensic approach is coupled with a consistent economy of means, as she looks to the simplest way of resolving her issues. Light Readings: 1500 Cinematic Explosions is perhaps the most colourful monochrome imaginable, with 1500 whites digitally sutured (Burgin) together in time. The brightest moments from a selection of films have been rendered inert as isolated images by the removal of the original exploitive context, only for a pulsing power to be reinstated by the frantic movement and the crackly soundtrack.

A similar sensitivity to her craft is equally visible in McAlpine’s condensing of Don’t Look Now. By filming someone watching the film the artist was able to carefully note and retain every moment of Nicolas Roeg’s masterpiece that was project that spiralled out of control by Welles’ ambition for it. This dilemma must be common to many filmmakers, and also to artists who scour the archive of cinema in order to create works of art.

Cathy Lomax’s Film Diary is an on-going painted database that reflects on the artist’s love for cinema. The minutes of a film watched by Lomax is carefully recorded in a notebook, with each dissected into moments significant to the artist. These are accompanied by a short phrase, which later work their way onto the bottom of the paintings.

These grabbed images are printed and pinned in the studio, within a grid (fig. 3). Often multiple possibilities for each film remain open on the studio wall, as the decision over which image works best with the others in the grouping is refined. The frozen frames from each film are combined with 11 other images (Rehodie) in the group to create potential narratives, expanded from the 12 original films. The viewer is rewarded by the alchemic transmutation of film imagery into paintings, which reflect an obvious passion for and knowledge of cinema.

This love for cinema is present in my own work in the exhibition. The Six Most Beautiful Minutes in the History of Cinema offers a bewildering cacophony of iconic stills from films (Newhall). The evolution of film history is presented on mass, from the Lumière’s La Sortie des usines Lumière to Lyon through French New Wave to need to be distracted in order to concentrate, as if we — all of us living in this new kind of space, the space of information — could be diagnosed en masse with attention deficit disorder.”

(Victor Burgin) “The arrival of the domestic video cassette recorder, and the distribution of industrially produced films on videotape, put the material substrate of the narrative into the hands of the audience. The order of narrative could now be routinely countermanded. For example, control of the film by means of VCR allows such symptomatic freedoms as the repetition of a favourite sequence, or fixation upon an obsessionale image. The subsequent arrival of digital video editing on ‘entry level’ personal computers exponentially expanded the range of possibilities for dismantling and reconfiguring the once inviolable objects offered by narrative cinema. Moreover even the most routine and non-resistant practice of ‘zapping’ through films shown on television now offers the sedentary equivalent of Breton’s and Vaché’s amble dérive.”

Image 294x312 to 466x499}

Image 873x57 to 1044x296

Fig 2

(Laura Mulvey) “The pensive spectator who ‘two kinds of time blend together’.”

(Beatriz Colomina) “We are surrounded today, everywhere, all the time, by arrays of multiple simultaneous images — in the street, at airports, shopping centres, and gyms; but also on our computers and television sets. The idea of a single image commanding our attention has faded away. It seems as if we
late 1960’s at a time when he shifted away from the landscape. Curiously Reed visited this iconic location to paint en plein-air in the landscape of his painted marks, which stand in for Monument Valley. 

That frames the depictions of someone else’s lives, “say something about me and probably define me at this moment in time as much as anything could.” 10

(Sam Rohdie) “The mini-narratives are arbitrary and necessary: arbitrary because there is no evident connection between the images in a given narrative, necessary, because once the images are grouped there appears to be a connection (causation, linearity).” 11

(Beaumont Newhall) “To examine individual stills is to see only parts of a whole, the words of a sentence, the notes of a bar of music. Enlargements from actual cinema film often have remarkable force; this may be due to the fact that from so vast a choice of pictures, the most effective arrangement can be chosen.” 12

(David Campany) “Barthes was interested in the idea that the mechanically recorded image, filmic or otherwise, contains more potential meaning than can ever be accounted for. In cinema we do not see excess, since the individual images are not there long enough for us to contemplate them. Imagine a cinema audience watching a narrative film. At any one moment most eyes will be focused on just one portion of the screen, usually a face or something on the move. Given just a single frame to look at, the gaze will begin to drift around the image in more individual ways. Eyes and mind can wander, chancing upon details beyond the conscious intention of the director or performers.” 13

(Manny Farber) The most inclusive description of the art is that, termite-like it feels its way through walls of particularization, with no sign that the artist has any object in mind other than eating away the immediate boundaries of his art, tradition towards the expansion of (abstract) painting, (Danto) informed by the language of cinema.

There is a analogue attitude to Reed’s work, but mapped onto a digital feel; these are paintings which look like they are made in Photoshop when seen reproduced on the screen or in print and could only have been made by hand when seen in the flesh. I would argue that Reed has a collage affinity within each of his richly distinctive canvases. Elements appear to float within each composition, as transposed from another canvas, perhaps akin to the layer feature in Photoshop, but infinitely more complex. The Searchers appears to inhabit this space between the painterly and the digital in an exemplary manner, there is confusion over what is created in the ‘real-world’ and what in the digital. There is also a sly nod to the painterly possibilities of creating worlds within films with the use of CGI, whilst maintaining a wonder in the majesty of landscapes captured by celluloid in films such as Ford’s masterpiece.

John Rimmer’s interest in film is matched by a cynicism of the darker side by his use of footage appropriated (Bourriaud) not only from films, but alongside associated imagery of advertising, war and pornography. These later issues (indirectly) feed and sustain the cinematic machine. Rimmer’s films similarly keep the imagery lurking in the background, there if you dig a little, but safely hidden from surface viewing. In pieces such as Derivatives (fig. 5) and Conveyer the recognisability of the footage Rimmer initially grabbed is overwhelmed by the compression, juxtaposition and shifting of the image into moving, digital, abstract paintings.

In a further development some films are translated into paintings, as well as the space.” 18

(Mark Cousins) “These single frames were just one twenty-fourth of a second in length. When viewed on the cinema screen in real time, they rush past in a disorienting blur. Gance knew that each could not be seen clearly by the audience, but wanted to give the impression of panic in his main character, the sense of perception and feeling accelerating intolerably. The scene was revolutionary and caused artist, poet and filmmaker, Jean Cocteau to say “There is cinema before and after La Roue, just as there is painting before and after Picasso.” 16

(David Ryan) “Reed sets up possible vampiric, parasitic relationships with such mediated images. Through digitally inserting his own paintings into video footage of these films, they become one fictional image within, and amongst, a host of others.” 16

(Giles Deleuze) “Doors, windows, box office windows, skyslits, car windows, mirrors, are all frames within frames. The great directors have particular affinities with particular secondary, tertiary, etc. frames. And with reverting framing of frames that the parts of the set or of the closed system are separated, but also converge and are reunited.” 16

(David Reed) “When I was painting, I kept imagining ways to break open the space to see what would leak out. In The Searchers, I love the scene behind the cave when John Wayne is cut open with a knife to remove an Indian arrow he’s been shot with, because it represents the breaking open of his image as well as the space.” 16

(Arthur C. Danto) “It is a practice in which painters no longer hesitate to situate their own paintings by means of devices which belong to another media — sculpture, video, film, installation and the like. The degree to which
to Méliès, of a magician-like figure playing with layers of moving imagery. The impossible reality of the space where Rimmer and Méliès’ films gives way to a delight in the imaginative and the fantastical that recalls the imaginary films of Max Castle. The floating philosopher and theorist’s heads that hover around the footage from Anne Stet Your Gun in Interference, could be seen as being like the aliens zapped by umbrellas in Trip to the Moon.

There is a similar tenuous kinship between Charles and Ray Eames’ study of the microscopic. Griffiths has created magical digital astronomer-like approach, to that of a biologist or forensic scientist’s redundant projectionist’s cue dots (Palmer). Each plays with scale and what can transpire when you look just that bit harder. The Griffiths Cine-Dot Observatory has resulted in a diversity of media in his works, including, solarplate prints, light boxes and even a microscopical viewer. In aarium (fig.6) the grid of frozen frames, (Barthes) can be slowly or quickly scanned over. The viewer directly re-activates a movement that has been removed in Griffiths’ collection of still images; this is far from a deadlier archive of image. (Cubitt)

A new work, Views from Inner Space, shifts from an archivist or astronomer-like approach, to that of a biologist or forensic scientist’s study of the microscopic. Griffiths has created magical digital collages viewed on slides through a microscope. Views from Inner Space is inspired by late Victorian slide-mounters, who created magnificent and elaborate arrangements of tiny objects. This work again magnifies Griffiths works’s empathy with Power of 10.

Rosa Barba has been creating a secondary printed archive since 2004 to accompany her more familiar celluloid and projector works. Printed Cinema (fig. 7) offers a glimpse into the research process and is essentially nomadic in nature. Sometimes they relate directly to exhibitions or films and sometimes the relationship is more abstract or seemingly ambiguous.

Nicolas Bourriaud) “When we start a search engine in pursuit of a subject, a mass of information issued from a labyrinth of databanks is inscribed on the screen. The “semiautomatic” imagines the links, the likely relations between disparate sites. A sampler, a machine that reprocesses musical products, also implies constant activity; to listen to records becomes work in itself, which diminishes the dividing line between reception and practice, producing new cartographies of knowledge. This recycling of sounds, images and forms implies incessant navigation within the meandirings of cultural history, navigation which itself becomes the subject of artistic practice.” 40

Judith Palmer) “If the cue dot marks a point of transition in a movie (form one reel to another), Griffiths’ cue dots filmworks mark a point of transition in film history." 41

Printed Cinema offers an intriguing way of returning film in a texturally rich manner (Vishmidt) to the page format from which it usually starts in the scriptwriter’s hand. Like a script they also open up different possibilities for reading Barba’s films, adding further layers of context and meaning. Intriguingly in the context of this exhibition they offer a different possible framing for reading stage (for even asking whether you can read a book cinematically). The reader can edit together their own take, by the time they take or the order they turn the pages. This order can be changed and becomes a form of collage.

In 1927, Esfir Shub directed and edited The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty, which is regarded using material gleaned from (hundreds of) other films, including newreels and home movies. Shub unearthed and rescued these from damp cellars and other neglected corners of the Sniornadoes and spliced them into a whole that was greater than the sum of its parts. In much the same way Misedirect Movies can be read as a collage of an exhibition, incorporating artists that in turn are testing the idea of what collage can be. Each start with found footage, captured in diverse ways and then, like Welles’s version of Don Quixote, slash and break the imagery of cinema to create new possibilities. I believe that each artist uses the footage to interrogate cinema in interesting and intelligent ways to create works of art, that are a far cry from Jess Franco misguided use of Welles’ vast amount of footage for Don Quixote.

Rosa Barba) “The still, by instituting a reading that is at once instantaneous and vertical, scorns logical time (which is only operational time); it teaches us how to disassociate the technical constraint from what is the space free-dread which is the ‘indescribable’ meaning.” 42

(Sean Cubit) “As divine and changeless present, the frameline as we see it in those lightbox displays cannot be. A gallery exhibition of motionless frames is like a museum case of pinned butterflies: lovely but dead.” 43

(Marina Vishmidt) “As the book is deemed to be the home of narrative, so Printed Cinema adopts that format only to displace it from its likely paths, reshaping the shards of word and image from the films into provisional stillness.” 44