

If only/What if?

Andrew Bracey

Hans Ulrich Obrist asks one question repeatedly in his interviews: 'What are your unrealised projects?' a question that can reveal enormous potential, ambition and imagination. Over the years there have been famous stories of films that never make it to the silver screen, falling foul to budget restraints, ill-timed movie star deaths, loss of interest and more often than not nervousness by producers, funders and studio bosses. Here are some of my favourite cases.

Russ Meyer was to have directed *Who Killed Bambi?* a Sex Pistols equivalent to *A Hard Days Night*. Just over a day of filming took place before shocked studio bosses pulled the plug. Francis Ford Coppola reportedly made three studio films (*Bram Stoker's Dracula*, *Jack* and *The Rainmaker*) to fund his vision of a utopian New York City, *Megalopolis*, but 9/11's occurrence made the film untouchable. In a precedent to the Dogme '95 aesthetic, Alfred Hitchcock's shelved *Kaleidoscope* was to be highly experimental, featuring hand-held camera work and natural lighting.

Some films make it to the cinema, but with a change of director that completely alters the tone, feel and look of the film. Stanley Kubrick was reportedly asked by The Beatles to direct them in *Lord of the Rings*; Kubrick refused, saying the book was unfilmable. Imagine what might have been if Cronenberg or Lynch had directed *Return of the Jedi*, as originally mooted. Cronenberg was also slated to direct *Total Recall*, spending over a year writing 12 drafts of the script. This was to have been closer in tone to Phillip K Dick's novel than the action style of Verhoven and Wiseman's versions. He wanted William Hurt to play Douglas Quaid; a far cry from Arnie or Colin Farrell. Cronenberg has said 'the whole point of that character was that he was a unique, shy, mild character. And you know you can't hide that part of Schwarznegger, it's just impossible'.

The story of getting Frank Herbert's book *Dune* turned into a film is perhaps the most tantalising though. David Lean turned the job down, before the project famously passed to the maverick director of *El Topo*, Alejandro Jodorowsky, in 1974. In the trailer for a forthcoming documentary Jodorowsky says 'I wanted to do a movie that would give the people who took LSD at the time the hallucinations you get with that drug, but without hallucinating...I wanted to create a prophet to change the young minds of all the world'. If the film had been made he might just have managed this. Douglas Trumbull, who famously created the 'Star Gate' sequence in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, was hired to create the special effects. Karlheinz Stockhausen and Pink Floyd were to have provided the soundtrack. It was to last somewhere between 10 and 14 hours, with stars including Orson Welles, Mick Jagger and Gloria Swanson. Brilliantly, Salvador Dali demanded to be paid \$100,000 an hour for his role as the emperor, to which the director agreed, preparing a schedule that would only require an hour of filming. Chris Foss designed the sets, with H R Gieger and Moebius creating the look for the creatures and characters, years before *Alien*. In 2009 Tom Morton curated a show of their production drawings at the Drawing Room in East London. The show also included new commissions from contemporary artists, Steven Claydon, Matthew Day Jackson and Vidya Gastaldon. All this hints at what a film it would have been, if costs had not spiralled; a far cry from Lynch's most flawed film.

Jodorowsky has said that, 'For me *Dune* did not belong to Herbert as *Don Quixote* did not belong to Cervantes'. Several films have been made of *Don Quixote*, and two notorious unfinished adaptations have tagged the title with being 'cursed'. The disastrous early days of filming on Terry Gilliam's version were made into an entertaining and insightful documentary, *Lost in La Mancha*. Orson Welles' version was perhaps his most personal project, which he filmed over 30 years until his death in 1985. He trusted no studio on this project, using instead money raised from films he made, but had wanted no or little part in. The script was continuously revised, with filming taking place around the globe, as the cast aged or were changed. The film was set in the modern day, but *Don Quixote* and Sancho Panza were from the time of Cervantes' novel. In a recently

discovered scene, Don Quixote enters a cinema and leaps onto the stage to slash at soldiers with his sword in an attempt to rescue a damsel in distress. Cinema's suspension of disbelief is perfectly encapsulated, and I would argue that the scene is also a metaphor for Welles fighting back against the studio system he hated. In Giorgio Agamben's essay about the clip, *The Six Most Beautiful Minutes in the History of Cinema*, he ponders: 'What are we to do with our imaginations? Love them and believe in them to the point of having to destroy and falsify them.' Perhaps this is an apt statement for all the unrealised films by great directors.

Andrew Bracey is co-curating a touring exhibition, *Misdirect Movies* with John Rimmer, opening at The Royal Standard in Liverpool, the starting point for which is the cinema scene from the Welles' Don Quixote discussed above.