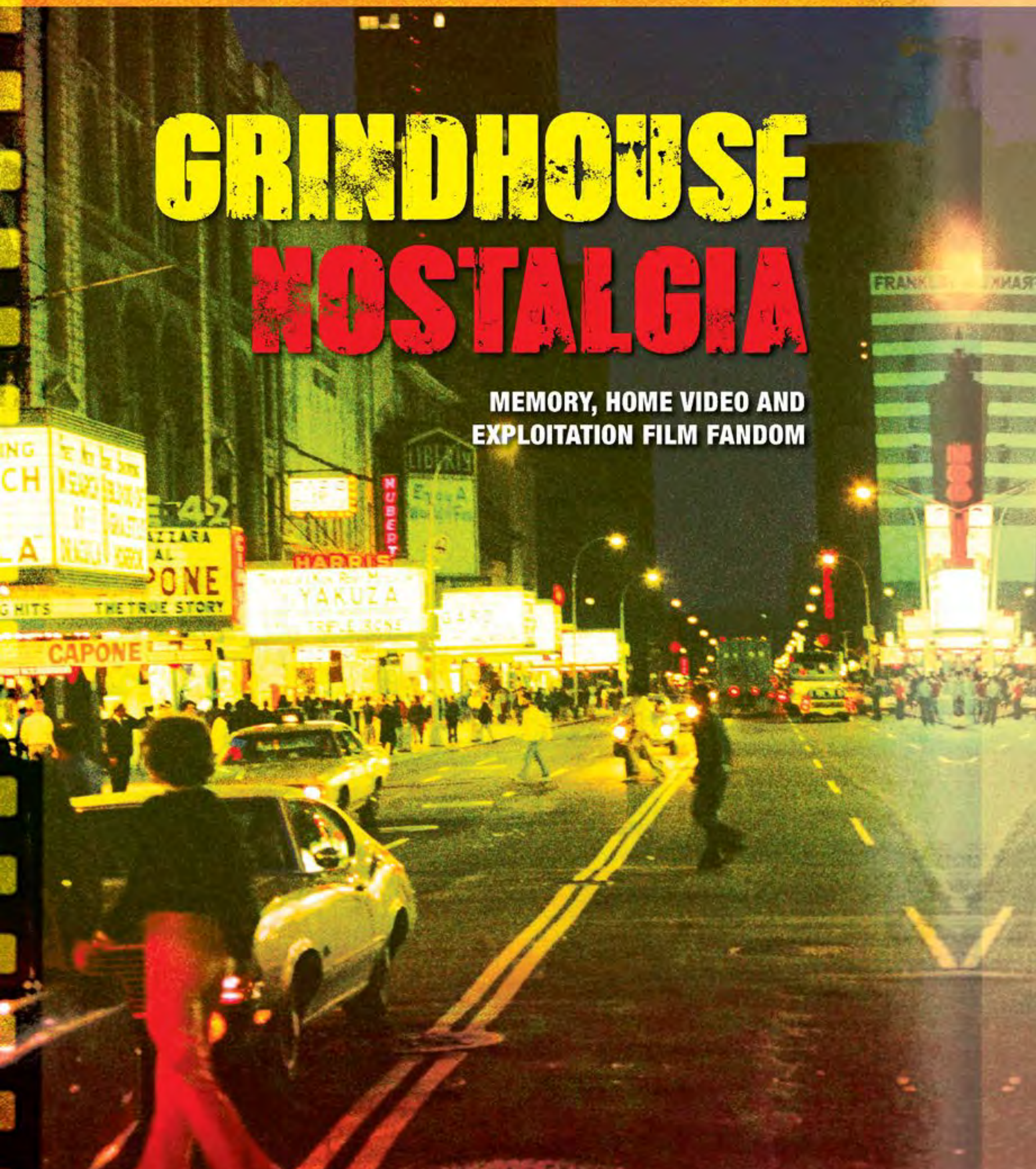
GRINDHOUSE NOSTALGIA

MEMORY, HOME VIDEO AND EXPLOITATION FILM FANDOM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Grindhouse Nostalgia

Memory, Home Video and Exploitation Film Fandom

David Church

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Contents

List of Figures vi
Acknowledgements viii

Introduction 1
1 A Drive-in Theatre of the Mind: Nostalgic Populism and the Déclassé Video Object 29
2 42nd Street Forever? Constructing 'Grindhouse Cinema' from Exhibition to Genre to Transmedia Concept 73
3 Paratexts, Pastiche and the Direct-to-video Aesthetic: Towards a Retrosploitation Mediascape 119
4 Dressed to Regress? The Retributive Politics of the Retrosploitation Pastiche 176
Conclusion 243

Appendix: Selected Filmography and Videography of Retrosploitation Media 258
Selected Bibliography 264
Index 278

Figures

I.1 Modelling reductive reception: *The Touch of Satan* (1971) receives plenty of historically chauvinistic mockery. 15

1.1 Japanese import *Destroy All Monsters* (1968) receives marginal billing below general-interest Hollywood films in a *Milwaukee Journal* newspaper advertisement. 36

1.2 In John Waters's *Polyester* (1980), the humorous incongruity of a dusk-to-dawn drive-in triple feature of erudite Marguerite Duras art films. 47

1.3 Mill Creek Entertainment's fifty-film *Drive In Movie Classics* box set. 55

2.1 42nd Street by night, c. October 1970, featuring a sexploitation double bill at the Victory. 89

2.2 Marquee for the hard-core feature film *Sometime Sweet Susan* (1975) and quasi-hardcore 'white coater' documentary *Swedish Marriage Manual* (1969). 89

2.3 In Bette Gordon's *Variety* (1983), Christine (Sandy McLeod) flips through a magazine in a Times Square adult bookstore. 90

2.4 BCI's 'Welcome to the Grindhouse' DVD menus. 108

3.1 DVD/VHS combo pack for Justin Russell's retro-styled slasher film *The Sleeper* (2012). 120

3.2 The evocation of a battered and degraded pulp paperback cover in the poster design for *Black Snake Moan* (2006). 129

3.3 A title card as seen in Robert Rodriguez's original *Machete* trailer that opened *Grindhouse* (2007). 131

3.4 The frame abruptly jumps and a horizontal splice appears for a split second as a zombie smashes a cop's head open in *Planet Terror* (2007). 153

3.5 Poster for the American double-feature theatrical release of *Grindhouse* in April 2007. 155

3.6 Cover for the late-2007 US DVD of Quentin Tarantino's disjoined *Death Proof.* 157

4.1 In *The Minstrel Killer* (2009), the titular minstrel dances along to a country boy playing ‘Dixie’ on the banjo, just before killing him. 188

4.2 Black Dynamite (Michael Jai White) teams with a group of black revolutionaries to stop a governmental plan to emasculate the African American community. 193

4.3 Original promotional poster for Rob Zombie’s *The Devil’s Rejects* (2005). 198

4.4 Part-time projectionist Tyler Durden (Brad Pitt) self-reflexively points out the emulsion scrapes signalling *Fight Club*’s (1999) approaching reel change. 206

4.5 In *Viva* (2007), writer/director/actor Anna Biller’s starring credit appears while her protagonist reads middlebrow *Viva* magazine. 213

4.6 Valerie (Geneviere Anderson) is sprayed down by a female prison guard in *Sugar Boxx* (2009). 231

C.1 The *Machete* trailer’s image of machete-wielding Latino immigrants raised white supremacist paranoia. 251

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Introduction

Our film opens with an old farmer leading his cow into the barn for the night, where an assailant brutally stabs him to death with a pitchfork. Meanwhile, Jodie is a young man travelling alone in search of himself during a cross-country road trip. Stopping beside a small pond in the California countryside, he meets Melissa, a captivating young woman who invites him back to her family's farmhouse. Melissa's parents are not pleased to play host to a stranger, especially once senile but murderous grandmother Lucinda begins leaving her room. To his horror, Jodie soon discovers that Melissa and Lucinda are actually witchcraft-practising sisters hundreds of years old. Melissa had made a satanic pact to save Lucinda from being burned alive by angry townspeople, allowing the former to remain eternally youthful while the latter ages horribly and becomes increasingly homicidal. Such is the bizarre story of *The Touch of Satan* (1971), a minor exploitation film distributed by Futurama International Pictures in an attempt to capitalise on the earlier success of *Rosemary's Baby* (1968).

At first glance, this is not an instance of a film that would seem to be a likely candidate for cultural remembrance but, like many other low-budget exploitation films, it has proven remarkably resilient against the forces of obsolescence, in part because it has moved across a range of material sites – from theatrical exhibition to VHS to television to DVD – and garnered a variety of uses by fans along the way. These different material sites include not only a shift from theatrical to non-theatrical spaces but also encompass each distinct video format as well, since each can be invested with mnemonic value. Though, for example, *The Touch of Satan* would have probably played at drive-in theatres and urban grind houses upon its initial release, the film's continuing fan following today derives largely from having featured in a 1998 episode of *Mystery Science Theater 3000* (1988–99), the cult television series that features hosts offering sardonic running commentary on the perceived aesthetic shortcomings of substandard genre pictures.

At the same time, however, not all contemporary fans of the film necessarily want to keep its memory alive through the reductively ironic lens of mockable 'badness', instead tempering an awareness of the film's datedness with a straight-faced appreciation of its relative effectiveness even today. Indeed, the overlapping, or even conflicting, sources of pleasure that fans may derive from the historical pastness of a film like *The Touch of Satan* are suggested by discussion-board postings on the film's Internet Movie Database page. One user, for example, identifies him/herself as a loyal fan of *Mystery Science Theater 3000* but also complains about the tendency for some fans merely to follow the show's lead in finding the film an object of derision:

> I love MST3K. I have most episodes on tape. But if you want to spit out heckels [*sic*] from the show then do so on the MST3K page. Don't waste everyone else's time. I love the *Touch of Satan* episode of MST, but I also own a VHS original copy of the actual movie *The Touch of Satan*, not the edited and censored version that made it to the comedy show's broadcast. While there are some inherent problems in the film, pacing being one of them, I actually enjoy the movie itself and have gone back to it several times.

This fan's claims to more faithful devotion are figured through the ability to enjoy the film (despite its faults) without a thick slathering of ironic humour, plus ownership of a more 'complete' version of the film on an increasingly outmoded video format. Another fan concurs with this sentiment, declaiming at length:

> Thousands of young fans are wasting their time, and I'm talking about tens of thousands of hours in front of the DVD screen, watching what they have been told is disreputable entertainment, the lousier the better. It might be softcore sex films (take your pick from Column A reading Joe D'Amato and Jess Franco or Column B featuring Joe Sarno and the Something Weird brigade) or horror films (same guys plus the hundreds of no-budget videomakers and their favorite low-rent scream queens). But they are missing the point. We older film buffs (and I admit to plenty of mileage) were ALWAYS attracted to unusual/exotic/B movies. [. . .] [F]ilm buffs from the '30s through '70s (PRE-VHS, PRE-BETA, PRE-DVD, PRE-BLU-RAY) paid our dues. We traveled to remote or disreputable cinemas to catch rare films. We sifted through miles of celluloid in search of a GREAT, UNSUNG movie, not to find the worst. [. . .] I don't recall wasting much of my time arguing the demerits of crap or making fun of it the way Ghoulardi or other chiller theater horror hosts used to do, or parasitically making one's own programming out of it as MST3K did.[1]

This second commenter suggests that a generational divide has made younger audiences not only more inclined towards ironic distance but also more passive consumers than the pre-video film connoisseur. According to this logic, the sheer *quantity* of hours intentionally spent watching 'bad' movies through an ironic default mode is outweighed by the *quality* of interpretive labour once necessary both to track down and to find more than just unintentional humour in exploitation films. Of course, this commenter also plays down the fact that fans of D'Amato, Franco, Sarno, or Something Weird Video releases can and do interpret those films with earnest appreciation, not just ironic derision; and that, for some viewers, *Mystery Science Theater 3000* could also trigger fond memories of the horror hosts who brought exploitation films to local UHF television stations during the pre-video era. As Something Weird's founder Mike Vraney put it, 'The older you get, the more nostalgic you get – the more you hate today. And the more you just want to revel in your youth and your parents' youth and all this time period that came and went. [. . .] I just want to take the wayback machine and go there.'[2]

What these examples of fan discourse indicate, then, is the extent to which the residual value of a film like *The Touch of Satan* is linked to its uneven mnemonic use by fans as a means of nostalgically recalling past times and spaces of consumption. Where one fan considers possession of the original VHS release a source of nostalgia and fan-cultural privilege, another celebrates the days before home video made once-obscure films easily available to fans who can write a cheque but are supposedly incapable of non-ironic appreciation. These seemingly insignificant quibbles over the *who* and *how* of interpretation bespeak a deeper concern with the *where* and *when* of consumption, especially as the audiences and venues that theatrically screened these films increasingly recede into the past, making it more difficult to separate the lived places and symbolic spaces of exploitation film consumption in the home video era. Furthermore, accounting for the mnemonic desires that exploitation fans feel towards past texts and sites illuminates how culturally neglected cinematic artefacts are remembered and revalued during a period of unprecedented textual abundance and accessibility. That is, in response to industrial and technological shifts that might seem to equalise the cultural histories of specific films, fans increasingly reflect upon the *historicity* of these texts as objects whose value becomes inseparable from inflection by nostalgia.

Exploitation fandom is especially relevant in this regard because the exploitation film, as more of a broad mode or sensibility than a distinct genre in its own right, echoes the diffusion and mobility of contemporary fandom itself, having arguably become a cinematic corpus tied together by a sense of pastness. Much as James Naremore says of film noir, *exploitation cinema* is a discursively constructed idea projected on to the past, which helps account for its various uses as a genre, a mode, a style, a sensibility, a set of politically convoluted viewing practices, and so on. Indeed, 'depending on how it is used, it can describe a dead period, a nostalgia for something that never quite existed, or perhaps even a vital tradition'.[3] Yet, unlike film noir, the exploitation film has also existed as an industrial set of practices before being taken up by critics and fans with diverse reasons for identifying a given film as such. In fact, the cyclical qualities of exploitation cinema as a mode of production have proven remarkably conducive to fans' memorialisation of these films, despite the often short-sighted economic objectives of their original producers and distributors.

At its heart, this is a book about nostalgia as not only a common form of cultural memory (memory that transcends the individual) but, more particularly, a 'structure of feeling' upholding a 'positive evaluation of the past in response to a negatively evaluated present' which supposedly threatens sources of agency, identity, and community.[4] In terms of agency, identity, and community, media fandom has often been described as a subcultural formation. There is, however, an increasing awareness among film producers and scholars alike that fans are not 'a manifestation of a spectacular subculture' but rather 'fixtures of the mass cultural landscape'. This is especially true as media convergence hails all users as potential fans by spreading content across multiple platforms, and as film consumption becomes primarily centred within the home.[5]

This does not mean, however, that subcultural ideologies of alleged authenticity, connoisseurship and transgression cease to operate within increasingly mobile and diffuse fan cultures. Even if some fans may seldom interact in person, 'through repeated acts of imagination', they construct images of themselves that are 'fundamentally caught up in nostalgia for a specific absent community' that might seem threatened by cultural and technological shifts in consumption – despite that imagined community also potentially coming into view through technological platforms such as blogs, websites and social media.[6] Different nostalgic valences – sometimes conflicting, sometimes complimentary – play out in the minds of viewers whose once-obscure media choices are revived in the marketplace in ways that seem less confined to niche fan groups than ever before. This increased accessibility spurs longing for a sense of subcultural community that *perhaps never truly existed* but which persists as an object of nostalgia in itself. Consequently, nostalgia's affective qualities mediate between *intra*personal and *inter*personal aspects of fan identity that are subtended by broader changes in media industries, technologies and ongoing histories of social inequality.

Throughout this book, then, I argue that, when the material sites of film consumption change over time, nostalgia arises as a spatio-temporal structure of feeling that accommodates multivalent responses to the remediation of not only past films but also the structure of fandom itself.[7] For fans, a film can operate as a desirable *object of textual nostalgia* in its own right as a beloved artefact, as a *vehicle for contextual nostalgia* that triggers associated memories of a past time/place/audience, or as some combination thereof. In other words, nostalgia grounds the subcultural ideologies and capitals of film fandom by providing an imagined time and space in relation to which one's fandom can be mnemonically located. Much as nostalgia allows past time periods to be envisioned like spaces that can be imaginatively inhabited, past spaces of consumption can be nostalgically linked to particular time periods and audiences (for example, the 'grindhouse era'). Likewise, past periods of fandom can be envisioned as a particular time and space, a sort of territory arising as a locus for nostalgia, especially when the acceleration of format transitions in the home video market allows the shape of contemporary film fandom seemingly to grow more nebulous. As a means of distorting the past, nostalgia thus mediates between individual and more collective memories of the past, potentially offering both a buffer against, and source of anxieties over, perceived (sub) cultural and technological change. And as a key technology for juxtaposing different temporalities, home video constructs and mediates these cultural memories connecting the lived places and symbolic spaces of fan consumption. In this regard, home video has inherited the longer-lived significance of *media distributors* as key players in shaping the reception of potentially marginal films. Hence, this study explores fan practices more invested in imagined territories of pastness than in the latest technological advances, allowing us to better account for how cultural memory shapes the contours and pleasures of fandom in general.

Before proceeding, it is important to foreground the mnemonic connections between *place* and *space* as a means of understanding how cultural memory abstracts the loci of film consumption into what Pierre Nora calls *lieux de mémoire*, or material sites to which collective memory attaches and condenses, 'invest[ing] [them] with a symbolic aura'.[8] For Nora, 'every social group' must 'redefine its identity through the revitalization of its own history', and *lieux de mémoire* help serve this purpose as mnemonically charged locations for identity-building processes.[9] Yet, I would argue that these *lieux de mémoire* include not only physical buildings such as theatres but also the physical video formats that allow the replaying of memories at home. Specific drive-in theatres, for example, are lived places that individual audience members can visit, with each theatre offering unique variations on the general drive-in exhibition concept. Yet, the spatio-temporal idea of *the drive-in theatre* as an exhibition site also operates more broadly as a 'generic place' categorised on the basis of 'comparable scale, social similarities, [and] institutional relationships'.[10] As my first two chapters will elaborate, nostalgia for generic places such as the drive-in theatre or the grind house remains an important factor in the self-image of contemporary fans, particularly when cues for nostalgia are encoded into the video formats that deliver remediated exploitation films into the home.

As Cornel Sandvoss notes, 'Places of media fandom are of such particular importance to fans . . . because they offer the rare opportunity to relocate in place a profound sense of belonging which has otherwise shifted into the textual space of media consumption'.[11] With niche-interest texts so readily available today on home video and online, imagined fan communities are united more by ideologically charged ideas about privileged sites of consumption than by simply acquiring access to a specific text itself. This seems all the more true if the physical places where fandom most commonly occurs, such as the domestic sphere, are under a special burden to 'accommodate the imagined symbolic content of such communities'.[12] Indeed, for Giuliana Bruno, films and their consumption sites can become *lieux de mémoire* since film spectatorship commodifies the audiovisual experience of imaginatively travelling through space and time. Spatial consumption becomes linked to the spaces *of* consumption, with one's attendant experiences of subjectivity and temporality affected by changes in the film/viewer's cultural location. Much as places can be invested with memories of spectatorship, viewers can read their own memories as inhabitable spaces that can be revisited in new contexts, unleashing a sense of desire that inflects the viewing experience over time.[13]

According to Sandvoss, the self becomes a performed object in fan performances of identity because fandom both 'reflects *and* constructs the self' through the recognition of part of oneself in one's fan object (and vice versa). Consequently, public performance of fandom is not necessary under this logic because 'the first and foremost audience for the performance of fans is the fan him- or herself'.[14] As Will Brooker argues, fans experience a sort of spiritual connection with the fan text itself, pleasurably reuniting with a familiar textual universe upon repeated viewings, which is not necessarily dependent on feelings of connection with an imagined, wider fan community – and may, in fact, be antithetical to it if one wants to preserve the text's personal significance as a mnemonic trigger for other recollections. Regardless of whether or not it actually existed at one time, an imagined sense of community seems 'now lost in nostalgic memory', occupying the spatio-temporal realm of the past.[15] Holding and sharing particular nostalgias for select films and their means of consumption thereby become a way of situating oneself within a given fandom's imagined territory, especially through one's degree of imagined identification with past fans. Indeed, fan cultures develop through a shared sense of pastness that is cultivated over time by embracing myths about subcultural resistance and belonging, and by becoming part of the cultural history of their chosen objects.

To avoid unnecessary oppositions between history, memory and nostalgia, I adopt Pam Cook's model of these terms as

> a continuum, with history at one end, nostalgia at the other, and memory as a bridge or transition between them. The advantage of this formulation is that it avoids the common hierarchy in which nostalgia and some 'inauthentic' forms of memory are relegated and devalued in order to shore up notions of history 'proper'. Instead, it recognises that the three terms are connected: where history suppresses the element of disavowal or fantasy in its re-presentation of the past, nostalgia foregrounds those elements, and in effect lays bare the processes at the heart of remembrance.[16]

This model thereby allows us to account for the intertwining of 'real' historical context, appeals to nostalgia, and the overall mediation of memory in fans' consumption practices. Indeed, as Andreas Huyssen suggests, 'The real can be mythologized just as the mythic may engender strong reality effects', so there can be 'no pure space outside of commodity culture' for evaluating a concrete distinction between history and memory. Consequently, 'opposing serious memory to trivial memory . . . would only reproduce the old high/low dichotomy of modernist culture in a new guise'.[17]

José van Dijck's concept of *mediated memories* is my guiding principle in understanding how these memory objects can be both personal and cultural, since cultural frameworks influence what and how we remember, while our individual choices jointly influence those cultural frameworks in turn. Mediation 'comprises not only the media tools we wield in the private sphere but also the active choices of individuals to incorporate parts of culture into their lives'. We may, for example, have 'unconscious preferences for a particular mode of inscription' via technologies that privilege 'particular sensorial perceptions over others', as is arguably true of different video formats. Overall, then, mediated memories encompass '*the activities and objects we produce and appropriate by means of media technologies, for creating and re-creating a sense of past, present, and future of ourselves in relation to others*'.[18] Notably, these can include not only the use of technology to record one's own memories but also the commercial acquisition of pre-recorded media artefacts invested or investible with memory. Encompassing the use of films as objects of textual nostalgia and vehicles for contextual nostalgia, these performances of self-formation blur into wider forms of sociality, producing struggles over which memories should be inscribed for oneself and which should be shared with wider audiences under certain conditions.[19]

Sandvoss, for instance, argues that fandom involves a projection of self-identity on to the collective group that reinforces one's spatially imagined sense of belonging by offering a sense of security and 'emotional warmth' – but this process 'always involves an evaluation and categorisation of others', implying 'a sharp division between "us" and "them" in the form of a constructed "Other"'.[20] In this sense, a fandom can continue to use visions of pastness in policing its imagined borders and building its fan-cultural competencies, despite – or, perhaps more appropriately, because of – the diffusion and mobility of texts that render shared images of the past all the more open to contestation. If our consumption choices contingently perform our senses of belonging to multiple social groups, then the more groups we occupy, the more multivalent are the nostalgias about our own and others' prior engagements with films claimed as markers of belonging. In this respect, 'the more "collective" the medium (that is, the larger its potential or actual audience), the less likely it is that its representation will reflect the collective memory of that audience'.[21] The remembered spaces of film consumption thus potentially become all the more important in maintaining one's nostalgia for texts that otherwise gain wider circulation. Tensions between differently inflected nostalgias about past forms of culturally marginalised cinema consequently animate a commingling of desire for, and reluctance towards, fan-cultural belonging as niche films increasingly move from the margins to mainstream accessibility.

Exploitation films permit an appropriate cluster of case studies in this regard, not only because of their cult reputations sustained through home video but also because the tensions between ironic distance and sincere appreciation in their contemporary reception echo the tensions generated between the perceived fragmentation and coalescence of fan-cultural memories as films are remediated across different video formats and reach broader taste publics. As suggested by the aforementioned *Touch of Satan* example, an exploitation film's contested status as a mockably 'bad' atrocity, an underrated gem, or some variation between can depend upon the fan's historical distance from the text's original spatio-temporal reception context, the technological means of presently accessing the film, and how much accumulated film-historical knowledge the fan possesses at the time of viewing. As ways of making claims to authenticity, connoisseurship and nonconformist tastes, these factors all share a common concern with memories of film history's material sites – memories that help construct affectively charged relationships to texts which have become part of one's own personal history as a fan. Consequently, they can all factor into a fan's feelings of (sincere) closeness to, or (ironic) distance from, the broader groups of viewers that may crystallise as home video mobilises nostalgia by allowing its objects to better move through time and space in the marketplace.

Irony and nostalgia are often socially coded as opposed to one another but viewers do not necessarily experience these as binary positions; nor do these aspects of the reception experience cleanly map on to arbitrary distinctions between so-called 'high' and 'low' culture. As Svetlana Boym observes, some forms of nostalgia may regressively attempt to revive the past unchanged whereas others invoke a far more ironic and critical approach to past objects presently perceived as cultural ruins.[22] Accordingly, different valences of nostalgia – some more ironic or sincere than others – can contingently shift and recombine depending on the fan's respective level of historical proximity to the text or fandom in question. Likewise, nostalgia is not inherently conservative, even if it has often been deployed for politically conservative purposes; rather, it can serve very different political aims depending on the user and the reception context.[23] Moving past the simple equation of nostalgia with reactionary politics broadens our focus on how appeals to pastness may be unevenly successful in targeting consumers who have their own reasons for recovering texts that have often been overlooked by conventional film histories. Even as nostalgic valences may be used as a means of gaining imagined refuge from present industrial demands and cultural shifts, these selective visions of the past are always subject to suspicion as mythic falsifications of a history which is perpetually debated in fan discourse – hence the ambivalent blend of ironic distance and retrospective longing potentially felt towards past and present periods of fandom themselves.

Existing fan studies have too often focused on the technological advances that are quickly appropriated by fan cultures but have paid less attention to fandoms rooted in media-implanted memories of a desired distance from the contemporary moment. This is certainly not to say that exploitation fans share a Luddite sensibility but that their stance towards emergent technologies is often infused with a longing to occupy the past – even as they may nevertheless take advantage of the increased access to once-obscure texts and fellow viewers that complicate their assumed claims to exclusivity and nonconformity. Taking fuller account of cultural memory's role in structuring both the personal and collective dimensions of fandom thus allows us to understand better how and why the past is distorted by media producers/distributors and everyday users, indexing social and economic inequalities that cannot be merely reduced to ironic mockery or distanced contemplation. Likewise, while most cultural memory studies have focused on collective forms of trauma, national forgetting and public commemoration, this book focuses on more private, individualistic uses of memory objects which allow us to challenge the presumption that fan cultures possess a uniformly collective subcultural consciousness.

Though the following chapters attempt to provide a backdrop of historical facts behind the changing material sites of exploitation films, it is more crucial to observe *how* and *why* media producers and fans alike distort the past for various purposes. In other words, because historically erroneous or oversimplified cultural memories may play a large role in informing subcultural ideologies, analysing the contemporary form and function of such memories is more vital than correcting their potential distortions of historical 'truth'. After all, as Sandvoss observes, 'facts become relative within the meta-narrative of the myth [built up around a fan text], which in turn is reflective of the fan's values, beliefs, and image of self'.[24] Personal memories and more collective forms of group memory may insulate themselves from historical criticism by dissolving memory into mythology but this dynamic is more important with forms of cultural memory that (by definition) transcend the individual in making shared claims about the past. Whereas the assemblages of formative memories held by an individual may be rather idiosyncratic, the common past shared by a social group is more likely to overlap with the broader domain of history, and thus make more hegemonic appeals to consensual interpretation – even if that consensus remains inevitably contested.[25]

Exploitation Cinema between History and Memory

To begin exploring the selective contours of the corpus of films under consideration in this study, we should allow that a concrete definition of *exploitation film* would merely prove a moving target for analysis, given the term's historically shifting connotations. As it is commonly known today, the exploitation film encompasses a mode of low-budget film-making that emphasises sensationalism, spectacle and direct appeals to the viewer's body. Often read as such during the process of reception, it seems closer to a style or sensibility that can be recognised in a broad range of genres and subgenres, particularly when films are marked by visible signs of budgetary restriction, deliberate excess, sleaziness and apparent 'bad taste'. It is particularly worth noting that 'bad taste' is often seen as a symptom of budgetary impoverishment, since higher-budgeted or more prestigious productions are perhaps less likely to be accused of pandering to 'lower' tastes. That is, exploitation films tend to 'offend not only because they show grisly violence, but also because in their grainy, low-lighting shaky-cam amateurism they transgress notions of filmic decorum as they do so'.[26]

Yet, despite the auteurist emphasis often placed by critics and fans upon the romanticised role of low-budget film-makers, this book finds the role of *distributors* key to understanding the propagation of exploitation cinema, because distributors often suggested and assembled lurid publicity materials, strategised where and how to exhibit films, retitled or recut prints for different regions and periods and, in later years, licensed these films for home video release. Then, as now, garish advertising and ballyhoo are longstanding trademarks of the exploitation film, so much of a film's initial and continued framing as 'exploitation' derives from its paratexts, including trailers, posters, lobby displays, newspaper advertisements and so on.

Eric Schaefer describes classical exploitation films as a distinct category and market of independently produced and distributed films that formed by the 1920s, paralleling the rise and fall of classical Hollywood's studio era by offering lurid sights and subject matter forbidden under the Production Code. Barred from playing in studio-affiliated theatres, classical exploitation films, such as *Marihuana* (1936), *Mom and Dad* (1945) and *Because of Eve* (1948), were more likely to be screened to adults-only audiences at independently owned theatres. Though they may have been made to capitalise quickly on timely social problems, such as drug abuse or vice scandals, the films often played for many years on the American exploitation circuit, even over a decade after their initial release as they circulated through travelling roadshows and the states' rights market. For Schaefer, the Hollywood film industry tried to construct its public image in opposition to the disreputability of exploitation films, while exploitation film-makers accepted their otherly social position as a mark of pride and distinction.[27]

As the studio system crumbled during the 1950s, films addressing once-taboo subject matter could be made and shown much more openly, heralding the end of market demand for classical exploitation films. Schaefer notes that the far more diverse range of later films dubbed 'exploitation', such as titles from mainstays like American International Pictures (AIP), may have relied heavily on hyperbolic publicity and gimmickry but were typically more technically polished than classical exploitation films had been, and were more directly targeted at teen/youth viewers.[28] These post-classical films generally turned to exploitation techniques to overcome their low budgets, lack of star power, and uncertain viewer demographics. Imitating the formulas of successful major-studio genre films while spicing up their substandard offerings with juicier titles and promotional imagery became key components of exploitation film-making ever since. With the titles and posters for exploitation films often developed long before scripts, these films were effectively low-budget, 'high-concept' productions that developed into cycles by formulaically imitating the most sensational (para)textual aspects of major-studio successes.[29] Yet, independents also sometimes initiated cycles that were subsequently picked up by the major studios, as with the science fiction films *Rocketship X-M* (1950) and *Destination Moon* (1950), so major-studio influence was not a one-way street.[30] Indeed, the post-1950s era saw many different industries embracing how

> the counterculture seemed to be preparing young people to rebel against whatever they had patronized before and to view the cycles of the new without the suspicion of earlier eras. Its simultaneous craving for authenticity and suspicion of tradition seemed to make the counterculture an ideal vehicle for a vast sea-change in American consuming habits,

eschewing the thriftiness and brand loyalty of older, 'conformist' parent generations in favour of the contingently 'hip' products connoting 'rebellion'.[31]

A series of changes during the 1970s and 1980s dramatically altered the American marketplace for exploitation cinema. Taking inspiration from independent successes such as *Billy Jack* (1971), Hollywood's increasing adoption of exploitation subject matter and marketing/distribution strategies for big-budget spectaculars such as *Jaws* (1975) eventually squeezed many independent exploitation companies out of the market.[32] Higher production values became the new norm for sensational genre material while less reputable exhibition sites (drive-ins, subsequent-run theatres) became targeted by the majors' newfound penchant for saturation booking and advertising. As Roger Corman recalls, 'when the majors saw they could have enormous commercial success with *big-budget* exploitation films, they gave them loftier terms – "genre" films or "high concept" films'.[33]

One of the most crucial changes during this period was the rise of home video, which may have had a negative impact on the long-standing theatrical venues for exploitation films but succeeded in tangibly placing decades' worth of low-budget genre pictures at audiences' fingertips for the first time. Though celluloid copies of theatrically released films had been available as 8 mm prints for home film collectors for years, the easier duplicability and circulation of films on analogue video formats made far more titles distributable on VHS, relegating 8 mm collecting to greater obsolescence. Some exploitation distributors initially benefited from releasing both older and newer titles on VHS (introduced in 1976) but many were eventually driven out by the home video market's consolidation in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Nevertheless, the sudden ability to choose from a wide range of exploitation titles, and to apply a variety of reading strategies to them over subsequent re-viewings, encouraged the growth of fan cultures that became fresh markets for the films as cult objects. Ironically, many of these films became patronisingly labelled 'trash cinema' at the very time they were being not only economically revalued for the first time in years but also becoming incorporated into the lived spaces of fan identity at home. Whether circulating bootlegs of hard-to-find titles or buying official releases as video sell-through prices dropped during the 1990s, these fan cultures took up the mantle of researching, archiving and assigning value to a wide swathe of cinema history that had been overlooked or deliberately ignored by film historians, high-minded critics and various arbiters of cultural taste.

Cultism and Subcultural Capital

Sarah Thornton convincingly argues that subcultures do not form organically but, rather, develop through fans' relation to media industries from the start. The fanzines which sprang up around home video, for example, tended to be infused with nostalgia for past points in subcultural history, such as times with different censorship restrictions or times when exploitation films were exhibited in theatres. Some of these publications even supported themselves by offering mail-order sales of the very VHS bootlegs that helped construct their readership. Yet, Thornton argues that supposed distinctions between subcultures and the nebulously imagined 'mainstream' that they define themselves against routinely blur. Even if the shape of a given subculture does not conform to its ideal self-image as an 'underground' cultural formation, certain hip ideologies and competencies (*subcultural capital*) remain relevant to the policing of imagined subcultural boundaries. This even occurs at the risk of reproducing wider social inequalities (such as gender-based exclusions) that uphold dominant ideological values.[34] Thus, even if fans may continue to latch on to subcultural ideologies to (erroneously) imagine their social position as special or unique, it is impossible to pinpoint subcultures themselves as internally coherent or ideologically resistant entities.

A central subcultural ideology expounded by exploitation fans celebrates these films as the ‘authentic’ product of rebels working outside, or on the margins of, the Hollywood industry, combating budgetary impoverishment with shocking, inventive or boundary-pushing attempts to thrill audiences with depictions of sex and violence that violated the tastes of bourgeois, conformist society. Whether heralded as glorious failures or hailed for making more money than their Hollywood-spawned kin, exploitation films play into a thoroughly romantic mythology of excess, hedonism and transgression that has since been mapped on to the broader notion of the ‘independent film’ as well. One fan, for example, describes the 1970s exploitation world as ‘something renegade, outlaw. The beginning of a new cinema where anyone could do it for any reason at all. A cinema that would spiral away into the current day and age of modern digital video and computerized editing.’[35] Still, even as he laments digital shifts in film production, the changing shape of post-1970s film distribution had more to do with exploitation cinema’s own shifting sense of time and space as it entered the home as collectible, replayable video objects.

Within academic considerations of exploitation cinema, these subcultural ideologies have been most notably raised through Jeffrey Sconce’s influential concept of ‘paracinema’ which he associates with the fan-cultural practices of trading and selling exploitation films on home video in the 1980s and 1990s. For Sconce, the ‘so bad it’s good’ reading strategy, which privileges wild moments of excess, continuity errors, and other symptoms of film-making desperation, can be raised to the level of political critique by ironically celebrating the aesthetically ‘worst’ films as masterpieces of the medium. Exploitation cinema’s tendency towards unintentional textual disruptions which expose the profilmic means of production allows viewers to champion these films as a ‘counter-cinematic’ practice on a par with the work of more celebrated avant-gardists. A paracinematic reading strategy thus allows one to resist the reified canons of legitimate film culture by asserting one’s ‘bad taste’ as a valid rival to the ‘good tastes’ of film aesthetes.[36]

Yet, I would argue that Sconce’s (over)emphasis on the ‘badness’ of some exploitation films plays down more traditional viewing pleasures that uneasily coexist with the profound negativity of paracinematic reading strategies. In my estimation, scholars have too often overextended Sconce’s argument by neglecting that paracinema as a *reading strategy* does not always dominate the corpus of films upon which such readings focus.[37] Indeed, it has been far more common to find subsequent scholars quoting Sconce’s laundry list of films that might be clumped under the umbrella of ‘paracinema’ than heeding his all-important caveat that the term describes

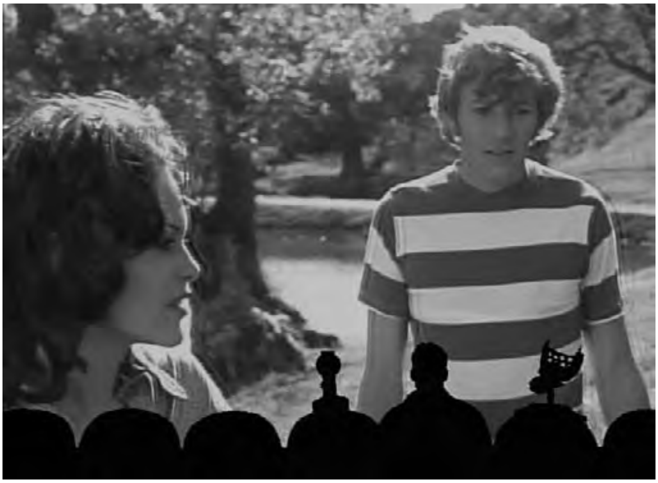

Figure I.1 Modelling reductive reception: *The Touch of Satan* (1971) receives plenty of historically chauvinistic mockery in a 1998 episode of *Mystery Science Theater 3000* (1988–99). (Source: DVD.)

'less a distinct group of films than a particular reading protocol' that the films' textual traits certainly cannot guarantee. Hence, as undeniably useful as Sconce's concept is, it offers only partial explanation for the fan appeal of these films. By his own admission, Sconce's paracinephile is much like the commentator–hosts of *Mystery Science Theater 3000*, actively seeking textual sources of unintentional humour wherever they can be found (Figure I.1).[38] Yet, as the aforementioned *Touch of Satan* example indicates, there are many fans for whom paracinematic irony may not be the preferred mode of exploitation film consumption. There are, after all, many exploitation films that are least competently made within their respective budgetary constraints, and many are not just critically championed by fans as inverted 'great works'.

Alternatively, I find it more common for fans to view exploitation cinema with a degree of paracinematic irony that recognises the datedness of a film's sensational appeals and the technical/artistic limitations placed upon the production but without those elements necessarily overwhelming more moderated reading strategies that attempt to take the film on its own terms. One film might encourage a different array of reading strategies than another, some veering more strongly towards irony or earnestness. While more casual observers might primarily mock the cheap film-making of an early Roger Corman creature feature or the over-the-top excesses of a Harry Novak sexploitation production, devoted fans are more likely to use their accumulated knowledge to contextualise these films within production trends, censorship histories and the publicity strategies of their respective eras. A fan-scholar's DVD review of *Malibu High* (1979), for example, notes that '[t]he script jumps all over the place, the photography is dark and amateurish, and the dialogue provides plenty of [unintentional] belly laughs' – but he also describes Crown International Pictures' 'everything but the kitchen sink' approach to making successful drive-in fodder, the film's 'surprising social commentary on the American class system', and its 'cheap thrills and anything-goes attitude that continue to entertain and enthral viewers bored with the mainstream'.[39]

Nostalgia's dialectical relationship between a celebrated past and devalued present permits a tension between the presentism of our historical distance from films that may seem quaint, primitive or silly in their exploitative appeals, and a more serious retrospective appreciation when these films seem successfully to transcend their historical context by still working their sleazy or sensational magic even today. This is not unlike how more traditional cinephiles commonly recognise the artistry of studio-era Hollywood films in ways that contemporary viewers with less cultural capital may not appreciate. In this sense, I find that the undergraduate film student who sees unintentional humour in the datedness of an established Hollywood 'classic' from the 1930s is little different from the scholar who recognises but does little to move beyond the exploitation film's perceived 'to-be-laughed-at-ness'. The ramshackle exploitation text may comparatively exhibit more obvious deficiencies from a contemporary aesthetic or political standpoint but, for viewers with a lack of knowledge about such films (and, at worst, an unwillingness to learn), this is less a difference in kind than in degree.

Often treating the terms *cult* and *subculture* as synonymous, academic attention to exploitation cinema has also resonated with the study of cult films, which are generally associated with select but devoted groups of fans who engage in repeated screenings, ritualistic viewing behaviours and specific reading strategies. Yet, in our contemporary media landscape, most fan practices are not visible subcultural behaviours but situational (though not casual) affective affinities with a range of cinematic texts.[40] Sconce suggests that 'cult cinema' belonged to the historical period of 1970s midnight movies when repeated 'access to certain films remained somewhat limited' to niche theatrical exhibition whereas, today, the term is commonly associated with the connoisseurship of exploitation films readily available on DVD, 'providing a few extra inches of critical distance that help better protect said cultist from the implications of simply enjoying exploitation for what it is – *obsolescent sex and violence*'.[41] He thus nostalgically positions 'true' cult fandom in past times and places while arguing that today's 'cult' has been emptied of meaning as a marketing label applied to all manner of media texts with fan followings.

Yet, Thomas Elsaesser views labels like 'cult film' as a way of 'coping with the sudden distance *and* proximity in the face of a constantly re-encountered past' made possible by the huge number of titles available on DVD (introduced in 1997).[42] Similarly, Elena Gorfinkel argues that '[c]ultism may have been more attuned to and defined by the shift to video than cinephilia, which still sustained the prestige of the art cinema and international festival circuit to anchor it in specific locations and to the primacy of theatrical exhibition'. The cultist and the cinephile who similarly search for fleeting, fragmentary moments of excess and profilmic revelation may have begun to blur during the midnight-movie era but have since become increasingly indistinguishable in the home video era, with cultism operating as a historical subcategory of cinephilia when films can be endlessly replayed.[43] Like the nostalgic idea of coherent or visible subcultural sociality, then, 'cult' shares with 'exploitation' a certain association with culturally outmoded practices and dynamics that may nevertheless remain important to a fan's self-image, despite the latter-day easy accessibility of texts that are no longer restricted to the niche audiences who have increasingly become foci for contemporary fans' nostalgia.

Many of fandom's *intra*personal pleasures hinge upon personal or cultural memories of times and spaces of past consumption while others centre upon *inter*personal dynamics that generally arise over competitive investments in one's perceived level of 'authenticity' or connoisseurship as a fan. This also reflects some viewers' ambivalence over self-application of the term 'fan', suggesting different degrees of performing a fan identity, which do not always correlate with different levels of intensity or involvement with media texts. After all, one's investment in a media text need not take the form of stereotypically 'fannish' behaviour but may be no less powerful even if it remains largely private and invisible. Matt Hills, for example, posits a continuum between *actual subcultural capital*, which circulates through fan cultures in the form of active participation directly recognised by other fans (for example, convention attendance or online discussion), and *potential subcultural capital* which does not circulate beyond the lone viewer or close friends/family. Neither fan performance is more 'authentic' than another but each side of the continuum simply activates subcultural capital in different ways.[44] Because one's tastes cannot be completely divorced from one's sociality, however, even our most seemingly idiosyncratic consumption choices remain fluid and shifting openings to wider social groups. A simple web search, for example, will yield dozens of online retailers specialising in exploitation films, many of which would have previously been accessible only through mail-order catalogues, advertisements in specialist fan magazines, booths at fan conventions, and other venues accessible by viewers ‘in the know’. Individualism is thus tempered by the fact that today’s viewer of even the most obscure texts can potentially locate fellow fans online, perpetually situating even wildly distinctive tastes in relation to a wider community, regardless of whether one actualises this potential subcultural capital by interacting with other fans.

Rooted in both individual and shared tastes and pleasures, the interpretive field provided by cultural memory mediates between the singular fan and the open, unstable groups that he/she situationally occupies. That is, the structures of feeling provided by cultural memory, including nostalgia, motivate *intra*personal performances of fandom by serving as partial justification for tastes set against the backdrop of *inter*personal sociality. Furthermore, the continued circulation of marginal texts can also confer a valuable sense of pastness upon the very fan audiences who continue to support films that have been otherwise forgotten or minimised in traditional media histories. The films’ ongoing consumption generates nostalgic myths about a sense of community that ‘perhaps never really existed’ within these ephemeral social groups but which ‘nevertheless create a state of mind that . . . seems called upon to last’.[45] The pleasures of fan identity thus hinge upon not only one’s own formative memories of media consumption but also one’s degree of access to the affective affinities of other viewers actively recalling these texts.

But, even as these myths provide a shared mnemonic territory for fans, communal consensus remains elusive because subcultural capital is still primarily actualised and negotiated on an individual basis. The symbolic territory represented by any given fandom is perhaps less about an authentic nostalgia for community than about the individual fan’s need to manage competing interpretations that could diminish his/her claims to subcultural capital. Though ‘[t]he interpretation of the cult text in the future is made to appear as the extension of a supposedly consensual and objective view of the past’,[46] interpersonal antagonisms perpetually threaten to fragment fan cultures when cultural memory provides links to the participation and interpretation of others beyond the self. Nostalgically positioning oneself in relation to past audiences who encountered the same films earlier in their reception tails (by, for example, privileging older theatrical or residual video modes of circulation) allows contemporary fans to imagine themselves connected across time to supposedly more ‘authentic’ and sincerely affected audiences than the more casual viewers who might encounter these films on mass-produced DVD editions. Fan cultures may thereby demand enough investment in subcultural capital to make social use of the past but the past's increased commodification, via remediation on to commercially accessible home video formats, can threaten the supposed exclusivity of existing fan-cultural participants.

Mediated Memories and Home Video

Much as lurid paratexts can frame a film's status as part of the exploitation tradition, technologically embedded frames of meaning have arguably become more significant in influencing how films are remembered when encountered away from special sites (such as certain types of theatres, specific video-store shelves, and so on) and, thus, how they can potentially appeal to various market segments – including those beyond long-time fan communities. If shared consensus about the meanings of a technology can fragment and open up when social groups themselves shift and open up,[47] then digital video formats' increased garnering of access to niche texts might be productive of new meanings that both threaten the stability of fan cultures but also force them to rework themselves to accommodate potential new members. Though fans may feel threatened by the ostensible 'mainstreaming' of their memory objects via widely available formats, memory has *always* seemed to be under threat because technologies of memory are always changing.[48]

Andreas Huyssen suggests that the explosion of information technologies has made memory objects more available to us than ever before; yet, 'many of the mass-marketed memories we consume are "imagined memories" to begin with, and thus more easily forgotten than lived memories'. Consequently, 'the more we are asked to remember in the wake of the information explosion and the marketing of memory, the more we seem to be in danger of forgetting and the stronger the need to forget'.[49] When exploitation film fans today recall the urban grind house as a nascent site of 'rebellious' subcultural tastes, for example, the latterly mass-marketed memory of this distinctive exhibition context is more probably rooted in retrospective fantasies than in fans' personal experiences of such bygone sites. Rather than seeing the nostalgias described in this book as, say, symptoms of cultural crisis over changing mores,[50] they are more likely to be symptoms of technological changes in degrees of textual access. Though technological transition may unsettle *how* we remember, *what* is remembered will nevertheless tend to be films that could remain potentially profitable when marketed to a new generation of viewers via a new generation of media formats. Hence, fans affectively invest in texts that allow them to recall past times and places of media consumption (even if not personally experienced), potentially sharing these experiences with other fans who might have similar memories – particularly if wider society does not share this remembrance of film history's overlooked sites and artefacts. The nostalgia that exploitation fans often have for outdated exhibition contexts or marketing tactics may thus be a sort of 'imagined' or 'implanted' memory of a time and place not personally lived through, but we should not assume outright that nostalgic discourses merely dupe fans into being unable to see through a capitalist ruse, because this assumption would play into the same all-too-familiar taste hierarchies that associate 'passive' and 'unthinking' audiences with the cultural dregs. After all, 'If nostalgia appears as the antithesis of enlightenment, the low status it often receives amongst contemporary theorists and critics is in its own right a paradoxical instance of nostalgia' for a supposedly less mediated past.[51] As this book will demonstrate, fans may have rather ambivalent responses to the marketing of nostalgia so, even as remediation may selectively stabilise cultural memories in some ways, not all appeals to pastness will be effective with all viewers.

Indeed, home video is a replayable technology of memory that has proven particularly generative for what Lucas Hilderbrand calls 'a shift in collecting practices from seeking out various forms of *objects related to* the production or promotion of a film to collecting *the film itself*'. Video objects become not only a way in which media history is kept in circulation indefinitely but also a means for people to save or seek out memories that shaped them.[52] Barbara Klinger similarly observes that possessing a film on video allows the viewer to commingle his/her personal history with that of the text itself while encouraging successive viewings that make 'the personal flashback a primary feature of reception', especially when triggered within the private space of the home.[53] The word 'nostalgia', after all, etymologically means a painful desire to return home – often to some more 'authentic' experience from a historical past *felt as if* overlapping with one's lived past (regardless of whether this overlap truly existed or is an 'implanted' nostalgia). In this sense, 'the trace of all those readings remains as a sedimentation in which the layers of past engagement inflect every new one, comparing, assessing, remembering, quoting'.[54]

This sedimentation of memories associated with the fan's repeated viewings of the mediated memory object is linked to the sedimentation of such objects in the marketplace. Video produced 'a wholesale collapsing of horror and exploitation production history' since films from many different historical periods and cultural contexts suddenly appeared on store shelves within the span of a few years.[55] Will Straw identifies the video store as a force slowing the cultural obsolescence of older film titles by allowing texts to accumulate spatially, instead of being replaced temporally, thus allowing people to navigate through these artefacts in idiosyncratic ways. Historical chronologies are muddied as viewers can follow intertextual links back and forth across older and newer films of all types.[56] Attempting to differentiate themselves from other viewers, fan cultures often carry out shared lines of unconventional travel through these dense mazes of video spatiality. As one fan recalls, 'You drifted, in the aisles, picking at boxes, scoping, digging bins, trying to keep track, agog at incongruous juxtapositions. You could be dithered by the box auras[;] your taste in movies – your filtration and rationality – were now victims of the postmodern clusterfuck.'[57] Furthermore, the very pastness of technologies such as VHS can be romanticised to help justify a romanticised view of fan cultures themselves. As such, moments of format transition are particularly productive of mediated memories because the coexistence and co-influence of emergent and residual media encourage us to alter our personal and cultural mnemonic processes.[58] Therefore, fans often retain format-specific memories of media consumption (such as a fetishisation of image grain and artefacting) that remain in tension with the nostalgias officially encoded into emergent formats by media producers and distributors – as seen, for example, in the retro-styled exploitation pastiches explored in my final chapters.

From DVD's inclusion of trailers and advertisements from across a film's reception tail to the Internet's annotated display of retro-coded goods for sale, a sense of loss has become commodified during a historical period paradoxically filled with textual (over)abundance. Klinger, for instance, notes that DVD reissues of older films invite the viewer to nostalgically re-experience history through bonus features and special packaging that allow one seemingly to gain some small measure of access to the films' own textual pasts – albeit through digital technologies 'modernising' the films' appeal to contemporary audiences.[59] As a means of imagining past times and spaces, such appeals to nostalgia reassert the semblance of historical distance as an attempt to assuage anxieties over cultural or technological change, 'help[ing] to constitute the uncommon, sought-after media object, [and] suggesting that the collector's trade has found a way to construct the categories of authenticity and rarity for mass-produced film artifacts'.[60] Yet, media technologies can only ever be unevenly successful in implanting certain memories, engendering continuing conflicts between the past-as-past and the past-preserved-as-present. After all, these modernised ('complete, uncut, restored') editions of historic films often displace the older textual iterations that may fondly linger in one's memory but increasingly become lost chunks of film history, complicating one's imagined connection to past audiences.

Futhermore, the rise of emergent video technologies over the past two decades has accelerated the turnover rate of older formats, compressing the temporal delay through which past delivery systems are nostalgised. These format transitions have thereby created a more acute tension between, on the one hand, the push towards personal/group fragmentation as access to niche texts becomes more open through remediation, rendering fandom inevitably open and unstable; and, on the other, the nostalgic desire for subcultural coalescence imagined to exist somewhere in the past. Cultural memory's resulting importance arises as a means of not only maintaining potential and actual subcultural capital through the accumulation of past knowledge and experience but also inspiring the affective pleasures of engaging with outmoded texts as a meaningful part of one's self-image. From desiring the text itself to desiring remembered experiences associated with the text, these pleasures are manifest in the retrospective celebration of exploitation cinema's past material sites of consumption – and, by extension, the past fans who inhabited the lived places and symbolic spaces that share mnemonic echoes in the present. Yet, the very name 'exploitation' additionally suggests that the films under consideration here reflect a range of social and technological inequalities that nostalgia's dialectical friction between past and present can invoke but not necessarily resolve, raising the political implications of living in our own time and space.

As a scholar-fan of exploitation films, this book reflects a certain unavoidable degree of nostalgia on my own part, because I do not assume to speak from a wholly rational, academic remove from my objects of study. When writing about the early years of VHS rental, for instance, how can I not flash back to my own childhood memories of wandering through video store aisles and sneaking into the horror section to peruse the lurid box art with imagination aflame? Thus, despite the discomfort I have often felt when peripherally engaged in struggles for subcultural capital, and my consequent feelings of distance from traditionally 'subcultural' fan practices, this remains a personal project in many ways. It would be naive to assume, for example, that presenting my own work to a public readership is not, in some small way, motivated as an intervention into wider bids for subcultural capital.

To avoid the shortcomings of an approach rooted exclusively in critical readings, historical reception study, or cultural theory, I mobilise those lenses in methodologically impure ways befitting the conflicted fan responses to widely circulating memory objects. Some of the following chapters are weighted more towards one critical lens than another – but, like the valences of nostalgia itself, these approaches need not be seen as contradictory or mutually exclusive. Likewise, much as exploitation cinema's development is a non-linear process building from memories of prior cycles, these chapters are not arranged as a historical chronology; instead, they offer multiple ways to approach nostalgia's importance in film consumption. As a means of exploring how the past is used or distorted by nostalgia, each chapter briefly engages with the industrial or cultural history behind the material sites of exploitation film consumption, and then moves into analysis of the juxtaposed temporalities offered by home video. Setting historical data against theories about memory and fandom shows how individuals and communities can alternately frame nostalgia as the desired recollection of a more 'authentic' past but also as a threatening mystification of history. If my own experiences as a fan animate my initial approach to the case studies under consideration here, then historical data and discourse analysis allow such observations to be grounded in wider patterns of market demand and fan reception. Discursive data also temper the generalising claims offered by critical theories about fandom, taste and cultural memory, preventing the theorist's individual experiences from becoming reified as universal.

Across this study, markets and fans often frame the tastes and values associated with one's degree of access to exploitation films in classed and gendered ways. Class disparities loom in the background of my first two chapters, reflecting the question of who has the ability to materially access these films as they shift sites over the decades; while gender inequalities increasingly come into play in subsequent chapters, especially when masculine fantasies of exploitation film consumption are complicated by home video's transition towards the broader demographics and feminine connotations of domestic viewership. The final two chapters also move further afield by focusing on the development of contemporary films that nostalgically simulate the look and feel of archival exploitation texts.

In Chapter 1, I explore the drive-in theatre as a *lieu de mémoire* that has become increasingly obsolete as a lived place, yet persists as a symbolic space invested with multiple class-inflected nostalgias. Exploring the historical mobility and diffusion of drive-in theatres and their patrons provides an explanatory lens for the shift from theatrical to non-theatrical exhibition of exploitation films, even as the populist appeal of both exhibition site and screened content potentially conflict with present-day fans' claims to subcultural capital. Examining populism's central but paradoxical role in exploitation fandom, I demonstrate how fans and media distributors alike can mnemonically abstract a generic place such as the drive-in theatre, with contested control over access still echoing historical class inequalities.

In similarly tracing the discursive history of a specific locale that has attained mythic proportions in the remembrance of exploitation cinema, Chapter 2 argues that the term 'grindhouse' has transitioned from a specific exhibition context, to a generic label synonymous with exploitation cinema, to a transmedia concept, owing to a tendency for non-normative exhibition sites to be coded generically to normalise Hollywood films and exhibition practices. Specific urban spaces, such as New York City's 42nd Street at Times Square, may be symbolic sites of unfulfilled cinephiliac fantasies among exploitation fans – yet the flexibility of 'grindhouse' as a commodity across different media formats illustrates how nostalgia for an exhibition site can spawn deeply ambivalent responses when revived for easy consumption through the economic forces that have similarly refashioned areas like Times Square itself.

Accompanying the remediation of archival exploitation films on home video, the historical weight of the past upon more recent films has increased as cultural memories of the grind house have come home. Accordingly, Chapter 3 looks at a recent cycle of nostalgia-driven, retro-styled exploitation (or 'retrosploitation') films which internalise the coexistence of irony and sincerity found in the fan reception of archival exploitation texts. It can be difficult, however, to discern these latter-day pastiches' evaluative tone towards their historical referents. Consequently, fans express divergent reactions when these creative rewritings of exploitation film history seem not only too closely associated with the 'feminised' domestic sphere but also subject to the wider film industry's recent and ongoing blurring of lines between direct-to-video and theatrically released films.

If Chapters 2 and 3 describe fans' ambivalent reactions towards exploitation cinema's retro-stylised revival, Chapter 4 focuses squarely on the political implications of this ambivalence. While some viewers excuse the anachronistic political incorrectness of retrosploitation films as an escape from contemporary attitudes, others maintain their fan-cultural connoisseurship by remaining critically attuned to the political work that these ostensibly regressive films do. Much as exploitation cinema has today reached broader audiences than the straight white men who were often its original intended viewers, the selective use of particular genres and cycles as retrosploitation's historical referents demonstrates both opportunities and limitations in using the cinematic past as raw material for addressing contemporary political concerns that extend beyond the traditional interests of socially dominant demographics.

Overall, then, this book addresses the affective and social importance of cultural memory in structuring contemporary film fandom. None of us is immune to the forces of cultural memory but there are, perhaps, those of us who choose to live with tastes more attuned to the outdated and nostalgic, feeling themselves out of step with the present day even as they make use of contemporary video technologies to keep one foot planted in the past. Highlighting the reciprocal influences between remembered times and spaces of consumption thus allows us better to account for the territorial skirmishes in which fans may engage as new material formats come and go. This study does not make sweeping predictions about the continuing place of exploitation films as their reception tails grow ever longer but it does argue for the need to understand how culture industries are increasingly mining obscure corners of film history for 'new' products to market as commodified objects of nostalgia. As older filmic styles are reworked for contemporary consumption, we at least find fans envisioning the times and spaces of their own futures through residual and emergent lenses of the past, intervening in the work of cultural memory to negotiate the terms of their own potential exploitation.

Notes

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4. Stuart Tannock, 'Nostalgia Critique', *Cultural Studies* 9, no. 3 (1995): 454, 456.
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20. Sandvoss, *Fans*, pp. 64–5.
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23. Tannock, 'Nostalgia Critique', pp. 455–6.
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26. Stephen Thrower, *Nightmare USA: The Untold Story of the Exploitation Independents* (Godalming: FAB Press, 2007), p. 27. Also see Joan Hawkins, *Cutting Edge: Art-Horror and the Horrific Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 195.
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60. Ibid., p. 67.

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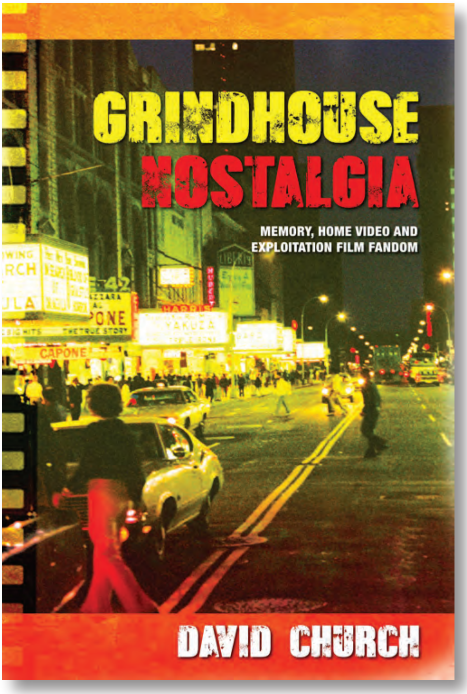
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