SIMON HOBBS

CULTIVATING EXTREME ART CINEMA

TEXT, PARATEXT AND HOME VIDEO CULTURE

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I would like to dedicate this book to my granddad, Charlie Hobbs.
I think he would have enjoyed reading this.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Acts of unsimulated sex and extreme violence have become increasingly visible within a number of contemporary art films. Films such as *Funny Games* (Haneke 1997), *Romance* (Breillat 1999), *Trouble Every Day* (Denis 2001), *Irreversible* (Noé 2002), *Twentynine Palms* (Dumont 2003), *A Hole in My Heart* (Moodysson 2004), *9 Songs* (Winterbottom 2004), and *Antichrist* (von Trier 2009) push the limits of acceptability by hybridising art cinema traditions with exploitation film techniques. By merging slow, often banal narratives and experimental visuals with sequences of extreme, gory violence; real, penetrative sex; and controversial and taboo themes, these difficult and at times offensive films straddle the divisions between 'high' and 'low' culture, breaching longstanding taste distinctions. In essence, these films challenge, confront, and even assault their audience, destroying audience passivity in ways Tanya Horeck and Tina Kendall claim are productive for film theorising and study (2011: 2).

Yet the critical and academic response to these films has been commonly defined by two reoccurring traits, which ultimately disregard Horeck and Kendall's assertion. Firstly, extreme art cinema has been largely framed as a new phenomenon, dating from the late-1990s and reaching its peak in the early- to mid-2000s. This trend has isolated a group of texts from the broader traditions they are clearly part of, and divorced them from the histories of both art film and exploitation cinema. Secondly, critical and academic literature has regularly suggested that the scenes of rape, incest, violence and unsimulated sex that define these narratives are simply sensationalist embellishments used to ensure the film greater visibility within an increasingly crowded and competitive market. These well-established frameworks undoubtedly offer some useful readings of the field. There was a notable swell in the production of extreme art films in the late 1990s through to the early 2010s. During this period, the narratives that flooded the market unquestionably offered some novel and unique images of transgression, offering audiences unparalleled access to

sequences of extremity. It is therefore understandable that they became collected under time-sensitive labels which could promote and explain their distinctiveness. Furthermore, it is undeniable that these films, and their filmmakers, enjoyed a level of prominence traditionally reserved for only the most successful, highly acclaimed, art narratives. Their scandalous nature incited critical and academic debate, encouraged festival walk-outs, and made them difficult to ignore. This resulted in increased coverage in both 'highbrow' and mainstream outlets and ultimately led to the types of lucrative distribution deals that are often hard to come by for non-mainstream productions. Without doubt the ease in which these narratives found willing dissemination in the home video market confirms the innate commerciality of cinematic extremity.

However, these approaches have rarely been interrogated. The idea that art cinema's co-option of exploitation modes of addresses leads to greater exposure and coverage, and therefore economic security, has become something of an unspoken truth. Certainly, Horeck and Kendall's work offers a stance which values the films as art, and their 2011 edited collection offers a series of essays which looks beyond what has become a rather reductive reading, and there are others who approach these texts as more than mere money makers (see, for example, Aaron Kerner and Jonathon Knapp's *Extreme Cinema: Affective Strategies in Transnational Media* [2016]). Yet I challenge the accusations of gimmickry more directly. By adopting a paratextual methodology, I examine how 'in-text' extremity – moments of either aesthetic or thematic extremity that occur during the text's runtime – shapes the commercial identity of a film when it reaches the home video market.

It is perhaps worth mentioning that my use of the term 'home video', both here and in the book's title, is not a reference to VHS or Betamax. Of course, there is little doubt that these technologies played an important role in the introduction of extremity into the home. However, I am using 'home video' to describe more contemporary, disc-based home entertainment products, and later streaming platforms such as Netflix and Amazon Prime Video. In essence, this work approaches the DVD and Blu-ray object as a vessel of communication, a canvas on which a film's persona is established. The manner in which these commercial objects amass cover art, alternative cover art, blurbs, slip cases, art cards, commentaries, 'Making Of' documentaries, and various other special features enable them to shape the audience's expectations and understanding of the text itself. By studying these trimmings in detail, my work is able to measure the extent to which extremity dominates the public persona of the film, the manner in which it pervades these locales and casts the primary text as

transgressive, sensationalist, forbidden, marginal and, of course, extreme. Fundamentally, I evaluate the degree to which the promise of extremity informs these films' commercial aspirations, and thus to what point extremity can be read as a commercial gimmick.

Defining Extreme Art Cinema: Art Cinema, Exploitation Film and its Collision Point

Art and exploitation cinema, especially when considered in a study such as this one, can be defined as 'super-genres', elastic enough to categorise a series of often disparate films under a singular market label brimming with memories, associations and expectations. Yet the ways in which scholars have begun to challenge the effectiveness of the term 'art cinema' cannot be ignored. To some, the term over-simplifies a range of films which vary enormously in style, thematic concerns, geographical location, and era (Galt and Schoonover 2010: 6). To these scholars, 'art cinema' does not sufficiently account for the differences between a series of complex, challenging films, and only results in further confusion and misunderstanding. Significantly, a comparable re-examination has occurred within critical discussions of genre. Andrew Tudor noted as early as 1977 how flawed the theory was (1977), and since, numerous scholars, including the likes of Janet Staiger, have claimed that the idea of stable genres is an unrealistic one (2007: 187). Consequently, framing art cinema (itself a contestable term) within a genre framework (a much-debated area of film theory) potentially introduces several problematic variables.

However, genre is an unavoidable concept in a paratextual study of this sort. Its systems of classification – however flawed – motivate the categorisation methods present within the commercial sphere, and much of the imagery used upon commercial artefacts. As Rick Altman (1999: 14) and Barry Langford (2005: 1–2) assert, its processes of sorting are central to the economy of cinema. By placing comparable films together, genre trades off the audience's memory, offering purchase to both cinephiles and casual audiences. In bricks-and-mortar stores, it most commonly informs the shop's layout, allowing audiences to move quickly to their preferred section and to navigate an otherwise overwhelming amount of filmic material. Significantly, it continues to underscore the systems used on online platforms, wherein the ranges of products on offer are often significantly larger. Amazon.co.uk sees its 'DVD & Blu-ray' section divided into various 'Stores', which separate the stock into shoppable segments. These sub-divisions reflect both traditional genres, such as the 'Western', 'Science Fiction', and 'Horror', and newer partitions, such

as 'Gay, Lesbian & Transgender', and 'Children & Family'. Despite the supposed vagueness of these latter sub-divisions, they still rely on the consumers' ability to take existing knowledge and transform it into fresh consumption. Regardless of the size of the category, the potential customer still understands the nature of films they could encounter, as they draw linkages between the films assembled within the category and the ways they are represented.

Indeed, art cinema has become a commercial label, a 'genre' in the same way as those considered above. Jill Forbes and Sarah Street note its flexibility as a catch-all term for a series of films (2000: 40), whilst Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover observe the ways the term circulates as a loaded signifier, marking a product with a particular set of connotations and expectations (2010: 13). More recently, David Andrews has suggested that the label 'art cinema' taps into a very human preference for status and hierarchy, so even as the films themselves vary, they are all underpinned by a communal sense of cultural prestige (2013: 22). On amazon.co.uk, and within the sell-through industry at large, art cinema is predominately categorised within the 'World Cinema' section. Although this category problematically ignores the differences between large varieties of national productions while assuming an American-centric norm, it does indicate the industrial tendency to commercially configure art films into definable categories. It also suggests that audiences understand the meanings and associations this label possesses, and thus prepare for a particular filmic experience that differs from those offered by other genres. As Andrew Tudor claims, it was the well-educated, middle-class demographic that determined what art cinema was, piecing together films from the likes of Ingmar Bergman and Federico Fellini to create something of a 'house-style' (1977: 21–2). This style was – and continues to be – defined by experimentations and complexities unseen in mainstream productions.

As discussed by the likes of Steven Neale, art cinema is marked by a stress on visual style, a suppression of action, and a focus on character rather than plot (1981: 13). Additionally, art cinema has historically been concerned with representations of the body that differ from – and deliberately challenge – those of Hollywood (Neale 1981: 31). The films collected under the 'art cinema' label also present – to differing degrees – uses of realism which oppose the mainstream aesthetic, non-conventional narrative structures, and images that draw attention to the apparatus of filmmaking. These traits, although not exclusive to art cinema, have been repeated to such an extent that they are now expected by an audience who actively seek out the challenge they offer. Significantly, these visual and

thematic elements overpower the variances in geographical and temporal context, allowing a particular iconographical template to elastically characterise a series of texts. As is perhaps obvious, these textual choices inform the marketing strategies of art films – which will be explored in detail in Chapter 2 – as distributors look to inform the audience about the 'type' of film experience they are agreeing to consume. Indeed, it is this market-orientated definition of the art cinema – whereby the aesthetic, formal, and thematic experimentations are captured within a distinct, repeatable, and recognisable commercial image – that informs this book's exploration of extreme art cinema and its circulating paratexts. It is therefore worth stating that I am not so much discussing 'art cinema' as a filmic form, but 'art cinema' as a marketing label capable of promoting a particular 'kind' of 'highbrow', complex, and often transgressive cinematic product.

Similar cinematic patterns of reoccurring iconographies – motivated predominantly by production circumstances and centring once more on depictions of the body – can be noted within the exploitation industry. Stephen Thrower accurately summarises the production practices of the industry, stating they 'are independently made non-studio films produced either: a) to exploit the financial possibilities of a popular genre; b) to respond quickly to current interest in a contemporary topic; or c) to milk an existing market success' (2007: 12). Exploitation cinema is, therefore, profit-centred; a factor which shapes the narratives themselves, the time spent on pre- and post-production, the marketing strategies employed, the types of exhibition space inhabited, and the reception cultures the films enjoy. Additionally, these same factors give rise to an iconographical visual language which draws together narratives from a vast array of genres, historical eras and nations. Exploitation films are littered with abnormalities unseen throughout 'legitimate' cinema, with bad dubbing, jarring editing, substandard special effects and poor acting defining their sub-cultural pleasure. Over time, these cinematic shortcomings have come to comprise a counter-aesthetic (Sconce 1995: 385). Discussed at length in Jeffery Sconce's work on paracinema, the counter-aesthetic rises out of exploitation cinema's inability to duplicate the cinematic register of the mainstream, and has developed into a repeatable and a patterned visual language. Due to the disruption these cinematic failings cause, and the manner in which they re-work established and longstanding cinematic traditions, 'lowbrow' viewing practices often depend on active and pre-learnt reception strategies. In essence, the audience must be a something of an expert, as willing to test themselves against challenging and complex narratives as their 'highbrow' counterparts. They must also retain a specific level of knowledge about the ways certain historical contexts, national

practices and production conditions can impact a particular feature. This awareness guides the spectator through the viewing process, and allows for a more satisfying experience. Naturally, this can only be done if one can draw relationships between a series of otherwise independently functioning productions.

Alongside this cinematic deficiency is the constant presence of the human body. To make up for a lack of money, star power and cultural prestige, the exploitation industry ensures its own commerciality by promising a 'forbidden spectacle'. Within this dialogue between text and viewer, the body acts as canvas which is actively sexualised and violently deconstructed in order to – in the most part – provide scopophilic pleasure. Due to the competitive nature of the industry, these images become increasingly extreme, shocking and bizarre (Thrower 2007: 11). This once again develops into an expected feature of the industry, as spectators consciously seek out these products in order to see these illicit images. Decisively, the sexual and violent body exemplifies exploitation cinema regardless of any specific genre iconography. For example, the zombie narratives of Lucio Fulci feature the same treatment of the body as his Giallo films, while Jess Franco sexualises the human form to similar extents in his vampire films and women-in-prison texts. Accordingly, the entire industry can be approached as a commercially circulated 'super-genre', as a huge array of texts are defined by a set of iconographical patterns, production contexts, and consumption practices. I understand how this can be problematic, mostly due to the range of films included within this category, and the manner it conflates historical and geographical differences. Yet it is worth remembering that the comprehension of exploitation cinema is reliant on the spectator retaining a pre-established knowledge of its unique counter-aesthetic, excessive use of violence and sex, and improvised production conditions.

The above discussion has drawn attention to the intersectional nature of 'highbrow' and 'lowbrow' cinema, and the manner in which art and exploitation share points of contact and overlap. This, of course, has been noted before. Joan Hawkins, drawing from Neale's work on the art film's use of the body, notes the extent to which 'high' culture trades on the same images, tropes and themes that characterise 'low' culture (2000: 3). Others have noted similar findings, as the subjective nature of cultural hierarchies and taste distinctions undermine their ability to remain stable. However, while the finding itself is nothing new, it is suspiciously absent from discussions of extreme art cinema. Perhaps due to the heavy focus placed on the commercial nature of the narratives, the manner in which extreme art films emerge from a significant tradition of cultural hybridisation is often

overlooked, or underplayed. To address this, this book will foreground this history of crossover, positioning it as the foundation for both the new genealogy of extreme art cinema I offer, and the investigation of the films' commercial identity I undertake.

Yet it would be wrong to assume that the mutual use of extremity stimulates the same response in the audience. In the most part, exploitation films and 'lowbrow' genres use extremity as a means of titillation – exciting the audience and encouraging them to celebrate acts of violence and enjoy moments of sexualisation. Conversely, within the traditions of art film, the images of extremity – be it violence or hard-core sex – are perceivably more obscured and obstructed. Sequences of violence may occur off screen, or will happen with little build-up or warning. Moreover, the emotional aftermath following these acts of 'highbrow' transgression enjoy far greater screen time then they do within the 'lowbrow', somewhat curtailing their ability to excite and thrill. Equally, art films' co-option of hard-core sex – which continues a longstanding preoccupation with realism – is framed by aesthetic dexterity and psychological complexity so as to engage the intellect rather than, as is the case with most hard-core sexual representations, the body (Krzywinska 2006: 227).

This distinction can, however, prove overly simplistic. As the work of Kerner and Knapp warns, we cannot ignore the experience of the viewer's body when considering art films. Whilst not acting as a sexual stimulus as such, the aggressive nature of extreme art cinema provides an overwhelming sensorial experience (Kerner and Knapp 2016: 2), thrusting the body into displeasure and disgust. Extreme art cinema therefore does not discount the experience of the body, but rather uses images of extremity as a way to antagonise and provoke the viewer, destroying the notion of passivity through the dual engagement of mind and body (Horeck and Kendall 2011: 2). Tyler Davis agrees, noting that these films cause the viewer to consciously reconsider the expectations of the cinematic experience, rather than providing an experience that allows for passive viewing and an escape from the misfortunes of life (2014: 46). As Asbjørn Grønstad claims, these narratives assault their own audience and negate scopophilic pleasure, compelling the audience to look away rather than watch (2011: 194). Often, this is achieved via a reliance on realism and biological factuality, as well as injecting the sequences with complex identification points and positioning them in non-conventional narratives. The pseudo-reality of these images, which is discussed at length by William Brown in *Violence in Extreme Cinema and the Ethics of Spectatorship* (2013), deliberately removes the fantastical frame, forcing the audience to question their own reasons for consumption.

This is not to claim that the violence within extreme art cinema does not carry the hyperbolic spectacle it harbours within other spaces, most notably exploitation cinema. For instance, the drawn-out rape of Alex (Monica Bellucci) within *Irreversible*, and the hard-core sex that defines the cinema of Catherine Breillat, revel in their ability to alarm and stun the audience. Although the single take used during the rape of Alex refuses to objectify the body, the very length of the scene provokes the audience into both a physical and intellectual reaction. Similarly, while the sex scenes in Breillat's films invert, rather than endorse, the male gaze, they are still dependant on images that carry certain stigmas and 'lowbrow' connotations. In other words, it can be said that the hyperbole of transgression becomes reframed within the challenging rhetoric of art cinema, yet still retains its ability to shock and astonish. This is not to say that complicated representations of extremity are impossible within the 'lowbrow'. Sconce's work on paracinema considers the intricacy of 'lowbrow' reception cultures and the complicated modes of address used throughout the exploitation industry, and there are multiple examples of 'lowbrow' directors lacing their films with complex allegories and important social messages. Regardless of whether these aesthetic and thematic choices were enforced by production conditions, varying degrees of talent, or were in fact completely accidental, the manner in which certain exploitation features (explored in more detail in Chapter 2) rework normative viewing practices through the disregard of mainstream mores is hard to ignore, and problematic to discount.

Andrews' reconceptualisation of art cinema in *Theorizing Art Cinema: Foreign, Cult, Avant-Garde and Beyond* (2013), wherein he introduces the category of the cult-art film, argues that art cinema has a 'free pass' to use previously stigmatised images due to its ties to other validated traditions (Andrews 2013: 93). This freedom has allowed certain texts to attract a dualistic audience, as they become embedded within the art tradition (many cult-art films appear within festival programmes and are made by directors with 'legitimate' auteur credentials) while simultaneously relying on genre material that conflicts with the long-established values of the art critics (Andrews 2013: 107). Despite being a more encompassing label than that of extreme art cinema, Andrews' cult-art underscores the frequency in which the barriers of 'high' and 'low' culture are breached. In many ways, my definition of extreme art cinema exists within these breaches, as 'high' and 'low' overlap, touch, and coalesce. It is therefore these ruptures that give birth to extreme cinema, as violence and sex combine with art cinema's principals of realism, experimentation and allegory.

New Approaches to Extreme Art Cinema: History and the Paratext

Part of this book's intention is to contest the ways extreme art cinema has been approached as a new phenomenon. Historical segregation occurs in various yet intersecting ways, the most visible of which is the application of critically constructed labels. Of these labels, the most prominent is the 'New French Extremity' (Quandt 2004: 127; Hagman 2007: 37). Sanctioned by James Quandt and Hampus Hagman in their respective and influential articles (Horeck and Kendall 2011: 2–3), the qualifier 'New' is crucial in separating this series of contemporary productions from the vast histories of both art and exploitation cinema. Notably, other authors use similar signifiers in their interactions with the corpus. Guy Austin encases these extreme art texts within the slightly more hyperbolic banner of 'new brutalism' (2008: 114), as Martine Beugnet notes 'recent French film production seemingly brings art cinema to new heights of horror or graphic description' (2007: 16). Additionally, Horeck and Kendall, in *The New Extremism in Cinema: From France to Europe* (2011), foreground 'newness' through the deployment of the term 'new' in the title. Although the authors suggest the term reflects the need for extremism to be novel (Horeck and Kendall 2011: 6), the edited collection focuses on mostly post-2000 texts, and therein correlates with the tendency to neglect historical examples of cinematic extremity when discussing present-day incarnations.

Of course, this approach must not be dismissed, as it rightfully responds to a period of increased visibility and production. Nonetheless, the sustained historical quarantining allows for certain problematic readings to arise. For both Nick James and Quandt, earlier forms of art film transgression are granted intellectual superiority: 'pushing the boundaries of taste in art used to be about more than moral transgression of post Victorian mores – it was often satirical in an amusing way as well' (James 2003: 20), while 'the authentic, liberating outrage – political, social, sexual – that fuelled such apocalyptic visions as *Salò* and *Week End* now seems impossible, replaced by an aggressiveness that is really a grandiose form of passivity' (Quandt 2004: 132). Approaching the texts in this way denies contemporary forms of extreme art cinema the types of cultural capital affixed to those films even loosely associated with the art cinema tradition. Ultimately, the continued prevalence of this practice leads many to follow suit and disregard the narratives' various formal, aesthetic and thematic complexities as meaningless superfluities. I believe that it is this approach that sees the films reduced to commercial gimmicks, as a lack of 'meaning'

or 'value' affords the sequences of extremity little cultural grounding. I wish to interrogate this trend: firstly by positioning current examples of extreme art transgression as part of an on-going tradition, and secondly by investigating their paratextual presentation more directly.

I am not alone in seeking to position contemporary extreme art cinema within a larger historical narrative. Tim Palmer hints at the historical resonances of the current crop of films with his discussion of *Un chien Andalou* (Buñuel 1929) (2006: 23), and elsewhere Martine Beugnet more explicitly suggests the new extreme films are not novel, claiming 'there is a long, established practice of mixing "high" with "low" forms of popular expression and, in particular, of bringing elements of cinema's genres of "excess" into French art film' (2007: 34). More broadly, David Bordwell notes that 'the aesthetics and commence of the art cinema often depend upon an eroticism that violates the production code of pre-1950 Hollywood' (2002: 96), while, as we have seen, Neale insists that art cinema has always been concerned with representations of the human form that differed from those of Hollywood (1981: 31). Consequently, prior to this well-documented surge in French productions, art cinema preserved a transgressive reputation and was promoted as an uncensored outlet which could revel in what commercial cinema deemed unfit for general consumption (Galt and Schoonover 2010: 15). It is this historical arch which has too often been downplayed within the scholarship surrounding contemporary extreme art cinema. In response, my work will position the sexual extremity of *Salò, Or the 120 Days of Sodom* (Pasolini 1975), *The Virgin Spring* (Bergman 1960), and *Belle de Jour* (Buñuel 1967) as predecessors for narratives such as *Romance*, *Nymphomaniac Vol. I* (von Trier 2013) and *Nymphomaniac Vol. II* (von Trier 2013). Equally the violent destruction of the body apparent in the likes of *Weekend* (Godard 1967) will be seen as a precursor to the violence that defines films such as *Irreversible* and *Trouble Every Day*. Crucially, through applying a more expansive historical lens, my work does not seek to discount the important shifts in extreme cinema or the recent swell in production, but rather place it within a definable, long-standing and essential mode of artistic address.

However, if art cinema's reputation as transgressive has been underplayed in certain accounts of extreme art cinema, European exploitation cinema – itself a much-marginalised area of discussion – has been more problematically overlooked. As noted earlier, certain areas of the European exploitation tradition have rejected the mainstream in a similar way to that of their 'highbrow' counterparts. This suggests a more thorough investigation is needed to explore how certain exploitation auteurs, filmmaking

techniques, marketing practices and consumption processes influence the production, distribution and reception of the 'highbrow'.

Interlinked with the historical quarantining of extreme art cinema is the tendency to position France as the epicentre of extreme art production and innovation. Critical labels once again highlight this limited geographical lens, with the clearest example being the aforementioned 'New French Extremity'. Yet Tim Palmer's label 'cinema du corps' (2011: 57), French for 'cinema of the body', again emphasises French influence, while Austin states the country is the instigator of this new brutal aesthetic (2008: 92). Crucially, when scholars recognise comparable productions outside of France, they still return to a francocentric axis, with Palmer claiming 'the methodologies of this new French cinema have also informed a number of projects made by filmmakers of different nationalities' (2011: 65). Horeck and Kendall assume a similar stance by entitling their collection *The New Extremism: From France to Europe*. While the editors give equal weighting to the likes of Lars von Trier, Michael Haneke and Lukas Moodysson, the prevailing argument centralises French extremity as the instigator of the aesthetic (Horeck and Kendall 2011: 10).

Despite the validity of these assumptions (there is little doubt that France produced a notable amount of significant texts), they collectively understate the importance of non-French production in both a historical and contemporary context, negating the way cinematic extremity drifts through different filmic cultures simultaneously. To address this, my work will showcase examples such as *The Virgin Spring* from Sweden, *Salò, Or the 120 Days of Sodom* from Italy, and *Peeping Tom* (Powell 1960) from Britain, and place them as principal instances of extreme art film production. More recent products will also be examined, with Belgium's *Man Bites Dog* (Belvaux, Bonzel and Poelvoorde 1992), Spain's *Tesis* (Amenábar 1996), Austria's *Funny Games*, Denmark's *The Idiots* (von Trier 1998), Sweden's *A Hole in My Heart*, Britain's *9 Songs*, and the Greek text *Dogtooth* (Lanthimos 2009) being positioned as texts that run independently from the much-discussed French examples, which include the likes of *Romance*, *Baise Moi* (Despentes and Trinh Thi 2000), *Irreversible*, *Trouble Every Day*, and *Twentynine Palms*. I therefore believe it is far more worthwhile to suggest that extreme cinematic transgression is a trans-European mode of address, maintained through a series of adjacently produced narratives, rather than a localised aesthetic model which was subsequently adopted by other nations.

A transnational lens also allows for a more rigorous exploration of exploitation cinema. An industry reliant on co-productions between European nations, exploitation cinema's key figures, including the likes of Dario

Argento, Ruggero Deodato and Fulci (Italy), Jean Rollin (France), and Franco (Spain), act as fundamental historical agents in the creation and consolidation of cinematic extremity. Nevertheless, the cinema of these auteurs has largely been marginalised within the histories of European cinema. Although Joan Hawkins (2000), Mark Betz (2003), and Ernest Mathijs and Xavier Mendik (2004) have worked to address this scholarly blind spot, the practice of supressing exploitation cinema's importance to national film histories is commonplace. Mathijs and Mendik have noticed this trend, noting the frequency in which the canonisation of national cinema often caters exclusively to 'highbrow' tastes (2004: 3).

Evidence of this 'high white tradition' (Mathijs and Mendik 2004: 3) can be found with a quick review of Gian Piero Brunetta's *The History of Italian Cinema: a Guide to Italian Film from its Origins to the Twenty-First Century* (2003). Within Brunetta's study, Federico Fellini – an established auteur preserved within a 'highbrow' taste economy – is mentioned on forty-eight pages, as well as having his *La Dolce Vita* (Fellini 1960) used as the book's cover art. In contrast, Argento is mentioned on only four pages, whereas Fulci is mentioned just once. Significantly, Brunetta's book is not a history of Italian art film, but rather a survey of Italian film, and therefore the lack of coverage relating to directors with such vast filmographies is a sign of the fierce taste bias which shapes the formation of European film canons. In truth, this predisposition is apparent across a range of studies concerned with 'national' cinema. Within *The Companion to Spanish Cinema* (Labanyi and Pavlović 2012), Jess Franco is mentioned on only twelve pages, while Pedro Almodóvar is mentioned on sixty-one. This could be read as a symptom of Franco's nomadic movements across Europe; however Luis Buñuel, a director who is as much part of French and Mexican film culture as he is Spanish, is mentioned on seventy pages. Furthermore, within *100 Years of Spanish Cinema* (Pavlović 2009), Franco is not mentioned at all, whilst Almodóvar and Buñuel are well covered (twenty-seven and forty pages respectively). The critical bias extends to France. Susan Hayward's *French National Cinema* (1993) mentions Georges Franju on only two pages, whilst Rollin remains entirely untouched. In contrast, the pillars of French art cinema – François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, and Jean Renoir – are well represented (twelve, seventeen and twenty-nine pages respectively). Once more, these books are not examinations of a particular country's art cinema tradition. Rather, they claim to map the general state of national production. Nonetheless, they clearly offer a selective view of national production by explicitly serving 'highbrow' tastes, and as a result create these unbalanced domestic canons that misrepresent the reality of these filmic cultures.

In response to this perceived reluctance to include exploitation cinema within wider European film traditions, the work of Argento, Fulci, Deodato, Franco and Rollin will be incorporated here to appropriately recognise the subversive and authorial nature of the exploitation industry. Importantly, in doing this, I am not claiming that all exploitation features are part of the tradition surveyed in this work, or develop as a result of cultural slippage and hybridisation. Certainly a larger number of exploitation narratives exist outside of this framework. Instead, what is being highlighted throughout this work is the collision point between art and exploitation, and of course the paratextual products that can at times encourage it.

As is perhaps clear, it is the combination of art and exploitation methods that fuels the claims of gimmickry. Quandt's work on the subject pioneers this specific approach:

> The drastic tactics of these directors could be an attempt to meet (and perchance defeat) Hollywood and Asian filmmaking on their own *Kill Bill* terms or to secure distributors and audiences in a market disinclined toward foreign films; and in fact many of these works have been bought in North America, while far worthier French films have gone wanting. (2004: 132)

Hagman echoes Quandt's ideas, claiming 'recent instances of French art cinema can be understood as strategies for seeking out alternative routes of circulation and exploring new channels of distribution within the global capitalist system' (2007: 32). Palmer adds to this discussion, declaring that the use of extremity offers the prospect of a raised artistic profile and increased visibility (2006: 23). While these readings fail to consider the complexities of the narratives, they more significantly comment upon the films as items of commerce without actually investigating the text's commercial presentation.

The paratextual methodology used throughout this work will confront this. As noted, I will use the DVD/Blu-ray object as an independently functioning bearer of meaning capable of altering the perception of the advertised text. Mapped in greater detail in Chapter 2, paratextual studies essentially moves discussion away from the cultural output itself (the 'text'; for example a novel or film) and focuses instead on the materials (for example covers, blurbs, and special features) that make it a receivable artefact in the mind and hands of the consumer. As Marie Maclean notes in her work on literary paratexts, the paratext involves a series of first-order illocutionary acts in which the author, the editor or the prefacer are informing, persuading, advising, or indeed commanding the reader to think a certain way about a certain text (1991: 274). When adapted

to consider film, the author, editor and prefacer become the director, producer and distributor; however the core concepts remain the same. As Jonathan Gray observes, viewing decisions are based on the consumption of a film's external entities, such as trailers, posters, cover-sleeves and special features (2010: 3). In fact, Gray insists that each paratext holds the potential to alter the meaning of the text (Gray 2010: 3) as they shape expectations, influence opinions, and direct consumption. By moving focus away from the text itself and onto the ways extreme art films are offered to the consumer, I can more thoroughly assess the role extremity plays in creating a commercial identity for these filmic products. This will enable me to investigate first hand the extent to which extremity becomes the main feature of the product, the enticing element that makes these films 'must-see' products. In essence, it allows me to see if extremity becomes a gimmick during a film's most important economic cycle. Simply put, if the DVD/Blu-ray cover, blurb or special features are characterised by an undiluted promotion of extreme material, then it can be suggested that extremity functions as a promotional tactic within the marketplace. However, if the designs used throughout the commercial field are more complex and measured in their usage of extremity, it suggests the prevailing arguments have been overblown, and oversimplified.

To achieve this, I will examine the extent to which particular signs and clues privilege certain generic identities, filmic memories and cultural affiliations. Markers of intent, such as the prominence of auteur branding; particular uses of national specificity; evidence of critical legitimisation; images of nudity; representations of violence or violent intent; and the employment of recognisable generic templates (such as specific typographies, colour schemes or compositions), will be examined to determine whether the commercial identity of extreme art films seeks to instigate a sense of curiosity and anticipation for extremity, or ensconces the films within the rubrics of art cinema by promoting validated signifiers of legitimacy. Importantly, in assessing these objects, I am not suggesting there is a right or wrong way to present extreme art film. My work does not take a stance, and I am certainly not looking to criticise the distributors' choices, or judge their designs. Furthermore, it does not offer solutions or propose different approaches to marketing these texts. If a distributor presents a particular film as a highly sexualised, scandalous commercial product, and actively seeks to cash in on the film's more transgressive elements, than that merely suggests that extremity does come to serve a commercial purpose in the market sphere. It does not make the distributor wrong. Alternatively, presenting an extreme art text in packaging that avoids sensationalist marketing techniques is not instantly more valuable

or righteous. Instead, it suggests that the actuality of marketing extreme art films is far more complex than certain scholarly discourses have suggested. Thus my work is concerned with finding evidence to address a particular scholarly tendency, rather than make suggestions – or worse, pass judgement – on the choices of distributors.

About this Book

Chapter 2 – Art and Exploitation: Crossover, Slippage and Fluidity – surveys the home video industry before outlining the traditional marketing practices that have come to define the promotion of art and exploitation cinema. In so doing, the chapter introduces a framework for the forthcoming case studies, and provides a lens through which the close primary analysis can take place. Thereafter, the book adopts a chronological structure which applies the historical approach stressed throughout this introduction. Chapter 3 – Early Extremity on DVD: History, Precursors and Exploitation Auteurs – will provide a snapshot of 'early' extremity, and explore the manner in which these landmark texts have been presented throughout the home entertainment sector. The chapter will examine art directors who are often underexplored within discussions of extreme art cinema, in turn highlighting the longstanding rejectionist stance of art cinema and the need for it to be recognised as part of the wider extreme art debate. Equally, the chapter draws attention to certain exploitation auteurs who have also been overlooked, highlighting their impact on extreme art cinema both aesthetically and paratextually. In essence, this historical overview provides a context for the more detailed paratextual case studies that follow.

Chapter 4 – *Weekend* and *Cannibal Holocaust* (Deodato 1980): Art, Ballyhoo and Remediation – is the first of four in-depth paratextual investigations. For this initial case study, two films that epitomise their respective production sites work as a synecdoche for the wider extreme art film tradition. The chapter starts with an evaluation of Jean-Luc Godard's cinematic status, before exploring *Weekend*'s relationship to extreme art cinema using the taxonomy outlined in this introduction. In order to expose the slippage that defines extreme art cinema, the chapter will then undertake an assessment of Ruggero Deodato and *Cannibal Holocaust*. Through this comparative structure, I will further highlight the ways extreme art cinema is informed by both 'high' and 'low' cultural traditions. Thereafter, the chapter will explore whether the similarities present within their textual compositions are reflected within the paratextual items that shape their commercial identities, and the extent to which extremity

informs their market personas. Chapter 5 – *Salò, Or the 120 Days of Sodom* and *Ilsa, the Wicked Warden* (Franco 1977): Fascism, Pornography and Disgust – follows a similar structure. Once more, Pier Paolo Pasolini and Jess Franco will be assessed as key extreme film directors, before undertaking a detailed exploration of their paratextual presentation. These films, unlike those selected in Chapter 4, have not been chosen due to their existing status (although their standing in the respective cultural sites is not to be ignored), rather due to the similarities present within their thematic registers. Therein the chapter will determine whether their mutual use of fascism and sexuality is reflected within the paratextual artefacts available, and the extent to which extremity informs their public face. These chapters begin to illustrate how extremity translates from the narrative text to the commercial paratext, and whether notions of infamy, controversy and notoriety overpower traditional markers of artistic worth.

Thereafter, Chapter 6 – Contemporary Extremity on DVD: Trends, Hard-core and Geographic Mobility – begins the assessment of contemporary examples of extreme art cinema. The chapter will further identify the most significant extreme art films, examining more closely the pan-European approach outlined earlier. Once more, the chapter is concerned with the films' paratextuality, and while it will highlight several important industrial shifts that shape the appearance and consumption of extreme art cinema within the present era, it will also return focus to the films' commercial identity. Herein the chapter constructs a suitable context to house the case studies that follow, while highlighting the importance of both 'high' and 'low' taste economies within the conceptualisation of extreme art film.

Chapter 7 – Michael Haneke: Glaciation, Legitimacy and Transgression – and Chapter 8 – Lars von Trier: Provocation, Condemnation and Confrontation – will investigate how paratextual entities filter authorship through a lens of extremity. Chapter 7 starts by putting forth the claim that Michael Haneke should be approached as a transnational extreme art auteur, then conducts a paratextual investigation of his most extreme works. Essentially, this chapter looks to explore how a modern auteur, ensconced within 'high' culture, has his employment of cinematic extremity portrayed within the market sphere. An important case study, Chapter 7 shows the ways paratextual representations of extremity fight for supremacy with more traditional 'highbrow' signifiers. Chapter 8 opens by exploring how Lars von Trier looks to add a transgressive, extra-textual capital to his films through his 'performances' at Cannes, while investigating his dualistic position within the critical and academic sphere. Moving on from this, the chapter undertakes a detailed paratextual study

of *Antichrist*, analysing two different DVD mediations of the film alongside its presentation on television. By looking at three different versions of the same film, this final chapter investigates the instability and elasticity of extreme cinema's commerciality, and the manner it changes over time and mediums.

Finally, the Conclusion will examine the shift of extreme cinema into the mainstream consciousness, question its commercial viability within modern film distribution, and interrogate the relevancy paratextual theory maintains within an increasingly digitised world.

CHAPTER 2

Art and Exploitation: Crossover, Slippage and Fluidity

Although society is relying increasingly on digitalised content, and the dominance of streaming sites such as Netflix and Amazon Prime are changing the ways in which audiences consume media, it would be premature to suggest that people have moved on from physicality completely. Certainly, the types of collections people maintain will change, becoming virtual as they move from shelves to hard drives and 'clouds'. However, media culture is in a transitional period, as film and television find themselves spread across multiple platforms, with audiences jumping between tangible consumption and streaming platforms at will. This changing landscape is influencing the types of media object produced, as some distributors are seemingly placing a higher value on the paratextual artefact and its innate tangibility. More than ever, distributors are releasing special editions with countless featurettes and new content, or offering bespoke packaging designs which increase the products' collectability. Granted, this may be short-lived, and as will be discussed later, could represent something of a 'last hurrah' for the DVD/Blu-ray market. Nonetheless, it is these special editions, these added extras – and their almost exclusive connection to the tangible format – that allows us to assess the 'lives' extreme art films lead in the public and market sphere.

My centralisation of the object is best framed through a discussion of material culture, which 'emphasises how apparently inanimate things within the environment act on people, and are acted upon by people, for the purposes of carrying out social functions, regulating social relations and giving symbolic meaning to human activity' (Woodward 2007: 3). For Ian Woodward, objects 'assist in forming or negating interpersonal and group attachments, mediating the formation of self-identity and esteem, and integrating and differentiating social groups, classes and tribes' (Woodward 2007: 4). Consequently, the object takes on additional meaning beyond its original purpose, either to a group or individual, and enjoys a 'social life' in which its meaning, relevance and status can change

(Woodward 2007: 29). The DVD/Blu-ray object leads several social lives, as it can inform a collector's sense of identity, establish and increase cultural capital, and alter an audience's relationship to the text. It is the latter that is important to my work and will remain a key focal point throughout the book. Depending on how the text is dressed, the object and its various embellishments – be it gatefold sleeves, additional booklets, free art-cards, fold-out posters, exclusive slip-cases, bespoke presentation boxes, or extra discs containing documentaries, commentaries, video essays, behind-the-scenes material, unseen deleted scenes, director's cuts, and historically restored versions – create new relationships with and between people. Ultimately, this can result in the text itself taking on new meanings and readings, giving the paratextual object a level of control over the text it represents.

Although we are currently witnessing the transition from disc-based consumption to digital forms of viewing and collecting, the DVD itself was responsible for a similar shift in the early 2000s. Its popularity at the time changed the viewing cultures of audiences, with James Bennett and Tom Brown going as far as to suggest that theatrical exhibition became a trailer for the more profitable DVD sales (2008: 1). During its rise to prominence, the DVD switched filmic consumption from renting, which was popular in the age of the VHS, to ownership (McDonald 2007: 69). The desire to own the product came from the technological superiority DVD, and ultimately Blu-ray, held over the preceding formats. Unsurprisingly, it was not just the added quality that was crucial to the rise of the DVD. The added control that came from being able to pause and skip, alongside extras such as interactive menus, director and cast commentaries and 'Making Of' documentaries, quickly became fundamental to the value of the DVD (McDonald 2007: 65). As Barbara Klinger suggests, these additions became an expected feature of the product, and appealed to both casual audiences and cinephiles (2006: 61).

Referenced heavily within scholarship concerning the collecting of cultural objects, Walter Benjamin's *Unpacking My Library* (1999) (originally published in 1931) surveys the relationship between the collector and their possessions, stressing the personal and private nature of the process. Claiming that ownership is the most intimate relationship one can have over objects (Benjamin 1999: 492), Benjamin's highly lyrical assessment was updated by Charles Tashiro in 'The Contradictions of Video Collecting' (1996–7). Tashiro's work again foregrounds the secular and personal nature of amassing a library, claiming that while collecting may seem random and irrational, it is informed by the taste of the collector (Benjamin 1999: 13). The study of the committed devotee, or what Jock

Given calls 'captors', 'chroniclers', 'crusaders' (saving doomed texts) and 'competitors' (wanting the largest collection) (Given 2015: 24), remains important. In fact, as tangible home video products become further marginalised, the dedicated fan's collection may come to represent a rare example of what was once a common and widespread cultural practice. Yet, the personal nature of both Benjamin and Tashiro's work neglects the impulses of the casual collector. Due to the mass production of DVDs and Blu-rays, the secular, elitist amasser exists alongside the average consumer, who can compile a modest private collection (McDonald 2007: 70). As Caroline Bainbridge and Candida Yates note, 'the consumption of DVD technologies is now very widespread and DVDs are so easily accessed that they feature in the lives of everyday consumers whose lives are not regimented by any fetishistic and/or ritualistic compulsion to collect' (2010: 4). Mentioning the 'ordinariness' of contemporary film collecting (2010: 4), Bainbridge and Yates, alongside McDonald, illustrate the diversity of the home entertainment market. A symptom of consumer culture (Belk 2001: 1), collecting is not necessarily just the province of those people who passionately acquire, but rather a social act that comes to define many relationships within contemporary society. Consequently, the manner in which paratextual material engages all audiences – the educated cinephile, the dedicated fan, and the more casual consumer – must be reviewed so as to appropriately assess the object's true role as a bearer of meaning.

Tashiro locates the collector as an independent individual isolated from the industry; 'thus the logic of collecting is built on the shifting sands of personal desire, and then justified through a rationalizing structure. The structure may remain invisible to the outsider' (1996–7: 13). However, this discounts the influence industrial practices have in actively shaping desire. As Klinger notes, while collecting can be both private and counter-establishment, it is reliant on a system of value managed by the industry (2006: 65–6). An example of this is the production and marketing of DVD special editions:

> Any film is potentially a collectible. But certain films are also explicitly designated as such through a host of labels, including special collector's editions, widescreen editions, director's cuts, restored or remastered classics, anniversary editions, and gold, silver, or platinum editions. (Klinger 2006: 60)

These strategies allow certain products to elevate themselves above the rest of the market and become more desirable to audiences. Thus consumption is directed through certain channels by exterior agents, forcing the collector – both casual and devoted – to be recognised as interdependent on a two-way process of communication. Indeed, within this process,

the paratextual object can become the reason for consumption, equal, and in some cases superior, to the actual text itself. A special edition may make a previously ignored film a 'must buy' product, or certain featurettes may include content that is actually more attractive than the primary text they are connected to. In this sense, seeing the collector as a self-governing figure ignores the manner in which they are guided towards certain products, influenced by packaging designs and additional features and directly catered for by the industry.

The Paratext

Paratextual studies provide a methodological framework through which this influence can be investigated. Originating in literature studies, Gérard Genette defines the paratext as any item attached to the novel which is not part of the main textual body, insisting that a text is rarely presented in an unaccompanied state (1997: 1). Genette explains how the surrounding items, including the author's name, the title, the preface, epitexts and illustrations, allow the book to become an artefact that can be handled within the cultural space (1997: 1), stating:

> A paratextual element can communicate a piece of sheer *information* – the name of the author, for example, or the date of publication. It can make known an *intention,* or an *interpretation* by the author and/or the publisher [. . .] and also of the genre indications on some covers or title pages [. . .] It can convey a genuine *decision* [. . .] Or a paratextual element can give a word of *advice* or, indeed, even issue a *command* (1997: 10–11). (emphasis in original)

Georg Stanitzek echoes this, proclaiming that the 'text' is not a 'book' until it is wrapped within the significance of the paratext (2005: 30).

Maria Lindgren Leavenworth usefully points out that while Genette's original definition only allowed for the text to be a book, subsequent studies have considered a broader range of topics (2015: 41). The work of Jonathan Gray, mentioned briefly in the Introduction, is one such study, and applies Genette's core ideas to film consumption. Gray suggests that interviews, reviews and posters are used by audiences to direct their film-viewing habits (2010: 4). Although Genette defines these items as epitexts due to their existence outside of the text (1997: 344), DVDs and Blu-rays actively collect these items, package them with the film and supply a single item that delivers an 'aesthetic of more' (Benzon 2013: 92). As outlined in Deborah Parker and Mark Parker's (2004) 'Directors and DVD Commentary: The Specifics of Intention' (2004), and echoed later in Paul Benzon's 'Bootleg Paratextuality and Digital Temporality:

Towards an Alternate Present of the DVD' (2013), the industry is reliant on the way DVDs and Blu-rays amass multiple elements of the film's wider identity. Therefore, with DVD and Blu-ray, these previously external items become internal and are offered to the viewer to enhance their appreciation, understanding, and enjoyment of the film (Parker and Parker 2004: 14–15).

In this sense, the paratext maintains a subordinate role, and exists simply to aid a better reception of the text itself (Genette 1997: 2). Cornelia Klecker agrees, noting that the paratext is there to create a relationship between the sender (author, publisher and distributor) and the receiver (audience) (2015: 401). Thus, the choices made on paratexts offer clues to an audience that requires guidance. Certain images, uses of typography, colour schemes, names, brands and iconographies tell the audience something about the experience enclosed within the wrapping, and prepare them accordingly. However, I believe paratextual objects can do more than just offer cues and pointers. As Gray suggests, each proliferation holds the potential to change the meaning of the text, even if only slightly (2010: 2). Therefore, beyond simply preparing the audience, the paratext could potentially change the individual's idea of what a particular text means. For example, paratextual dressings could re-position a previously 'lowbrow' text by using 'highbrow' signifiers to make it seem more culturally valid. Over time, this approach could encourage a revaluation of the text, allowing it to move into a different cultural space. Equally, an art film could use the traditional features of the 'lowbrow' to disguise the film as a scandalous product, therein changing the manner in which it is received, understood and approached by audiences. Therefore paratexts have the ability to restore and repair reputations, or offer completely new readings. It is not only about preparing audiences with cues and hints, but also about creating identities and personas and determining the type of 'life' the film will enjoy. This idea is central to the methodologies present within this book, as the forthcoming case studies explore the manner in which certain images and textual passages actively encourage placement within particular taste economies, potentially altering filmic personas to suit differing commercial desires.

John Ellis's concept of the narrative image helps to further understand the impact commercial decisions have upon the cultural comprehension of a filmic text. Ellis states that a film's narrative image is a process of characterisation consisting of direct publicity and the public's knowledge of the film's ingredients (1992: 30–1). Hence, the narrative image offers a publicly agreed definition of a particular film created through a series of signifiers such as taglines, images, titles, star histories and filmic memories (Ellis

1992: 30). These ingredients often converge on the jacket designs of a DVD or Blu-ray, which extend, transform and repurpose the narrative world, making it attractive to as wide an audience as possible (Smith 2008: 139).

In order to make this filmic world coherent to new audiences, the paratextual material must balance familiarity and difference. Jacket sleeves must present both a recognisable reference point and generate a curiosity which stimulates fresh consumption (Ellis 1992: 30). Jacques Derrida's theory of trace allows for a greater understanding of this process. In Derrida's work, trace is the mark of absence, a memory bestowed with past meaning or significance (Spivak 1976: xvii). In a broad sense, everything leaves a trace, as each action or image is understood by an individual through a personal process of recollection. When read through a framework of Ellis's narrative image, each feature of the product's design – be it a particular style of typography, colour scheme, image, or tagline – evokes a memory within the mind of the audience. Therefore audiences understand the new product by recounting the ways in which the various paratextual ingredients have been used before. For example, the marketing material used to promote horror films has historically used blacks and dark reds to advertise the horrifying nature of the narrative. When this colour scheme is recycled by newer horror films, the audience instantly draws from their experience of seeing it elsewhere, and can thus quickly establish the type of experience being offered. Additionally, the marketing material often centralises the implement of the murder – be it a knife, metal hook, axe, or chainsaw. Over time, this becomes a recognisable signifier of the genre, establishing a tradition that later films can draw from. Thus Freddy Kruger's bladed glove in *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (Craven 1984) utilises the trace memory of Norman Bates' kitchen knife in order to locate the film within the 'slasher' sub-category. This allows Craven's film to recall, and perhaps even adopt, part of *Psycho*'s (Hitchcock 1960) identity, and provide the potential consumer with a foothold through which a greater understanding of the text can be achieved. Thus, trace memories act as shortcuts, allowing distributors and designers to evoke a series of meanings which result in a better reception of their product. This is a key concept within this work, as companies can opt to use the trace of the opposing taste site and thus bestow their films with new meanings by recalling a past that was not previously available.

Marketing: Taste and Capital

Yet in order to fully comprehend the significance of these symbols and patterns, one must understand the intricacies of cultural capital and the

role it performs within both 'high' and 'low' taste economies. Evidently, certain signifiers appeal to certain demographics, and distributors carefully produce cover art, blurbs and special featurettes that communicate directly with the demographic they are trying to attract. Often, the comprehension of these signs – be it a particular use of phrasing in a tagline, a representation of violence in a thumbnail image, or a recommendation from a noteworthy critic – are dependent on the audience retaining the correct cultural code in which the particular element is encoded. The terminology, image or critic must mean something to the potential consumer; its presence must spark a memory, or evoke a feeling which inspires them to buy the product and add it to their collection. Naturally, certain signs and symbols relate to particular taste communities, as 'high' and 'low' culture retains their own frames of reference and modes of representation.

In order to understand and find value within these paratextual codes, one must have the requisite knowledge, or capital. Pierre Bourdieu, a key figure in the areas of cultural taste and capital, suggests 'cultural needs are the product of upbringing and education: surveys establish that all cultural practices [. . .] and preferences in literature, painting or music, are closely linked to educational level [. . .] and secondarily to social origin' (1984: 1). In Bourdieu's terms, 'high' cultural taste comes from educational superiority and social upbringing, and is thus the most desirable of tastes. If an individual retains this 'high' cultural capital, they will be able to decode elements others may miss, or deem unimportant. For example, 'high' cultural capital may allow the audience member to see the value within a particular award or film tradition. Equally, a certain director may mean little to mainstream audiences, but their branding may make a certain text invaluable to a 'highbrow' aficionado. This links to the work of Herbert Gans, who notes that there is an ongoing 'cultural war' between 'high' and popular culture. Insisting that each site is fighting for certain objects, outputs and activities to be valued over others (1999: 3), Gans shows the manner in which certain sectors of the populace can assert superiority over others by valuing certain activities, pastimes and products over others. Therefore, 'highbrow' products, even when presented on mainstream formats such as DVD and Blu-ray, seek to advertise their superiority by using certain marketing tactics and approaches. By centralising the comments of a particular critic or scholar, a product can mark itself as 'valuable', 'worthy', and 'exclusive' – but only to an individual who retains the necessary codes.

Notably, Bourdieu's definition of 'high' taste and Gans's ideas concerning a 'cultural war' reflect many scholars' positioning of art film. As Jill

Forbes and Sarah Street state, 'art films [. . .] deliberately sought out the fraction that was more middle-class, better educated and more receptive to narrative experimentation' (2000: 38). Forbes and Street are not alone in their assessment, as the consumption of art cinema has often been characterised as a process rich in 'high' cultural capital. Bourdieu hints at this in this work:

> Consumption is [. . .] a stage in a process of communication, that is, an act of deciphering, decoding, which presupposes practical or explicit mastery of a cipher or code [. . .] a work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded. (1984: 2)

Due to the complexity of art cinema, a viewer who possesses the cipher is able to move beyond primary readings, realising a more developed understanding of the film. As a result, this 'educated' viewer is able to both express their heightened cultural capital and obtain further endorsement within the surrounding community. Unsurprisingly, DVDs and Blu-rays of these 'highbrow' films seek to promote the complexities of the narrative, in order to mark them as different to what Bourdieu terms the 'popular aesthetic', a mode unable to bestow cultural capital due to its lack of formal experimentation (1984: 4–5). In other words, the 'meaning' of the text – which is so important to Bourdieu – is obvious to all, and therefore the audience does not need a code to understand it. Therefore there is a clear historic narrative concerning the binary between art and mainstream culture. In regard to my examination of paratextual material, the divide created between these forms, while certainly not fixed or stable, does make it easier to isolate and classify certain 'high' cultural symbols.

It is clear however that while Bourdieu's work remains important, it fails to account for the numerous taste communities that define contemporary media culture and consumption. As a counter to Bourdieu's class-based assessment of cultural capital, Sarah Thornton introduces sub-cultural capital, a form of capital less bound by social positioning. Instead, Thornton insists that a person's taste in fashion, popular music, niche film genres, or collection of films or music albums, can empower them, and help them express their personal taste and knowledge (1995: 12–13). It is of little surprise that sub-cultural capital has defined the study of fandom, with the likes of John Fiske noting 'fan cultural capital, like the official, lies in the appreciation and knowledge of texts, performers, and events, yet the fan's objects of fandom are, by definition, excluded from the official cultural capital' (2008: 452). It is here, in the margins of 'official' culture, that the link between sub-cultural capital and exploitation cinema can be made.

Jeffery Sconce's work concerning the paracinematic community helps to further comprehend this synthesis. According to Sconce, the paracinematic community champions marginal film cultures and trash cinema, and is militant in its rejection of the 'popular aesthetic'. Like 'highbrow' appreciation, the paracinematic community validates its artefacts by employing a complex reading protocol which allows it to reassess these much-maligned texts, and find meaning where others thought there was none (Sconce 1995: 372). In essence, this creates an equally elitist subculture to that of the art film scene, as the processes of re-reading these 'lowbrow' films are so heavily dependent on individuals retaining the right codes that in fact it is inaccessible for many. Through recognising the intricacy of this process – whereby a dedicated community of knowledgeable devotees recast 'lowbrow' cinema as a site of rebellion – one can expose the permeability of 'high/low' taste barriers, and recognise that the processes of accrual, utilisation and affirmation present within 'high' and 'low' culture operate in similar ways.

As will be made clear throughout this book, signifiers from both 'high' and 'low' taste cultures can co-exist upon the same artefact, hybridising it while maximising its potential appeal. Indeed, this act of cultural straddling, which Gans suggests can work both upward (from the 'low' to the 'high') and downward (1999: 136), is fundamental to understanding the paratextuality of extreme art cinema. Mark Betz's idea of cultural triangulation illuminates this idea further, as he claims that the customary construction of the taste continuum – which places art at one pole, exploitation at the other, with popular culture residing in the middle – does not sufficiently account for the various similarities between the cultural sites (2013: 507). As we have already seen, activities and objects rarely fit comfortably within a single taste site, and most commonly draw from various areas of culture. In response, Betz proposes a triangular arrangement, in which one aspect or taste economy can be situated at the apex of the triangle while still being connected to the others (2013: 507). In Betz's model, a film can predominantly utilise art features, but also contain both exploitive and populist aspects. Similarly, a 'lowbrow' film could promote its transgressive and artistic nature simultaneously. Betz's reconfiguration of taste proves crucial to my work's exploration of hybridity, as it provides a more fluent explanation of the slippage present in both extreme art film and their paratextual counterparts. Throughout my investigation I will employ and refer back to this more flexible arrangement, showcasing its relevance to the commerciality of extreme cinema.

The Marketing of Art Film

While the parameters of taste are in a constant state of flux, and the boundaries of what constitutes as 'high', 'low' or 'middle' are continually being reassessed by those within the given communities, certain signifiers remain consistent. The following section provides a taxonomy of reoccurring marketing approaches – a stable set of loyal signifiers so established within their respective taste culture that they clearly advertise the nature of the text to an audience who retain the relevant codes. By itemising them here, I hope to create a framework which can inform the rest of the study. Nonetheless, by accrediting these factors to a particular taste culture I am not looking to close them off, or suggest they belong exclusively to a certain tradition. In truth, as the study progresses, these modes of address become increasingly interchangeable. Rather, I am proposing the following as recognisable customs through which objects have traditionally advertised their taste affiliations.

The Auteur as a Brand

The figure of the auteur is central to the cultural comprehension of art cinema. David Bordwell notes that the auteur makes up for a lack of identifiable stars and familiar genres (2002: 95–7). Steve Neale confirms this, stating 'the name of the author can function as a "brand name", a means of labelling and selling a film and of orienting expectation and channelling meaning and pleasure' (1981: 36). Robert Marich echoes Neale's sentiments, claiming 'art-house is a segment where directors are almost like brand names that transfer across all their films and attract loyal audiences' (2005: 277). Genette's work on the paratext further comments on this, stating the name 'is no longer a straightforward statement of identity ("The author's name is So-and-So"); it is, instead, the way to put an identity, or rather a "personality" [onto the text]' (1997: 40). Catherine Grant contemporises this concept, noting that DVDs can 'produce' auteurs through special features that provide opportunities for insight and intimacy with the director (2008: 106). As such, it can be concluded that the figure of the auteur represents more than just a theoretical approach. Rather, it has become thoroughly intertwined with the industrial, economic and cultural interests of the European film system (Maule 2008: 31).

When placed on the art film paratext, the director's name becomes a loaded signifier, harbouring a series of different memories and traces, and symbolising various connotative meanings which guide and influence the opinions of the audience. In the first instance, it suggests the director

is an artist – a controlling influence with a distinct vision, who is able to manage their collaborators in order to produce a cinematic work of considerable value. In essence, the auteur figure – be it represented via a particular 'collection' of DVDs, a box set, or simply the size of their name on the box – is a sign of artistic presence and quality, ensuring the audience that the film will provide a worthwhile experience. In a more individualised sense, a certain director, through an explicit branding of their name, could carry a thematic trace, an aesthetic trace and a national trace; presenting several marketable features instantly, while additionally carrying the capability to legitimise a text due to the concept's academic and cinephilic origins. Moreover, because their name is charged with commercial promise or status, some auteurs are more 'valuable' than others. Throughout this study, the branding of the auteur name will prove a crucial site of consideration, due to the polygonal nature of the signifier.

Notably, I have chosen to discuss and frame the auteur as a product of art cinema's broader cultural image, and a symbol of 'highbrow' artistry. This is not to claim a sense of exclusivity over the concept or suggest 'lowbrow' cinema does not have auteurs. In fact, the opposite is true. However, what is clear is the manner in which the auteur figure has been repeatedly used as a signifier for 'quality' in the art film sector. The concept originated as a way to justify the filmic medium itself as an artistic mode of address, on par with the more 'traditional' arts, literature and music. In this sense, when discussions of the auteur occur, I am largely referring to its prevalence as a marketing tactic, embedded within ideas of excellence and merit. Of course, as the study progresses, it will become clear that the auteur figure becomes a point of reference for 'lowbrow' cinema, and a conduit through which previously condemned texts can be validated.

European-ness as a Brand

In a similar manner, national identity – or more particularly European-ness – retains a trace memory that can ensure a level of quality and worth. As Rosalind Galt summarises:

> Many European films circulate in a global art film market, in which European-ness asserts specific (although not constant) levels of both cultural and economic capital [. . .] where French, British and Italian mean quite different things to audiences than do, say, Czech, Swedish and Portuguese. (2006: 6)

Even as levels of capital differ across territories, each country has an aggregate of prestige, or a trace based on past successes. Consequently,

European countries can become linked to a certain type of production, generic convention, or directorial legacy, which in turn shapes desirability and cultural value. This is perhaps most evident when cinematic waves and movements become associated with the particular country and its filmic culture. In most cases, the legacy of these past successes has an impact on the reception climates of later national productions, boosting their levels of prestige before they have even reached audiences.

Within this framework, the nation becomes a brand akin to that of the auteur. As Thomas Elsaesser comments, 'for a country's film culture, national provenance is important in much the same way as the label stitched on my sweater or trainers: I show my brand loyalty and advertise my taste' (2005: 38). Elsaesser recognises the two-way process of capital that is essential to the consumption of art cinema: the audiences' recognition of quality, and the external projection of that knowledge through consumption and ownership. Thus, the national brand identity – a pooled memory of a country's previous accomplishments – has the capacity to legitimise a text within certain taste communities when placed on a cover, or mentioned within a blurb.

Critical Legitimisation

The main thrust of 'highbrow' cinema's marketing message is often critical praise. Without external validation, wider releases or distribution deals may prove difficult to achieve (Marich 2005: 259). Consequently, art film distributors will adorn their paratextual entities – such as jacket sleeves, posters and trailers – with quotations and passages which advance and advertise the products' cultural 'worth'. The passages used often arise from sources that retain their own 'high' cultural trace, and accordingly graft additional capital to the object while assuring the audience that the information is trustworthy. An example of this process within DVD image making can be seen upon the Artificial Eye release of Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker* (1979), wherein a quote from the *Monthly Film Bulletin* states 'never less than epic . . . the most impressive of Tarkovsky's films'. In this instance, both the quote itself, and the cultural capital of the *Monthly Film Bulletin* – which has links to the BFI; itself a pillar within the 'highbrow' film community – legitimise *Stalker*, validating it as an essential piece of auteur filmmaking.

Through the isolation and repetition of critical validation, the term 'art cinema' has itself become an essential component of 'high' culture. Recalling certain ideas covered in the Introduction, the label of 'art cinema' has been bestowed with the power to legitimise and authenticate a series of

narratives from a variety of national and temporal contexts. Accordingly, the term acts as both a generic signifier and a self-functioning, continually perpetuating 'brand', entrenched within ideas of cultural value and worth. Naturally, this brand finds application throughout the critical discourse – where the description of a film as an 'art film' instantly raises its cultural standing. Furthermore, it can become officially placed on the paratext itself. A key example of a commercial artefact using the 'art cinema' label as a brand can be seen upon The Criterion Collection's 'Essential Art-house: 50 Years of Janus Films' box set. The box set, which contains fifty seminal art films, clearly utilises the cultural and commercial value attached to the 'art-house' term in order to endorse the legitimacy of the product, and advertise the contents' superiority.

The Festival Circuit

Film festivals perform a central role within the commercial presentation of art cinema. Started in order to counteract the hegemony of mainstream exhibition, international festivals have become a space in which films can be bestowed 'highbrow' status (de Valck 2005: 106). In the first instance, this is achieved by winning awards and creating festival buzz through critical acclaim and audience appreciation. However, over time, the festival itself accumulates a level of capital, and thus maintains the ability to legitimise films regardless of their actual success in the various competitions on offer. Additionally, Rosanna Maule states that festivals act as a meeting point for international sales agents and film distributors (2008: 168). Within this environment, awards and critical coverage can be directly translated into commercial success through the procurement of lucrative distribution deals. Moreover, Lucy Mazdon's survey of French television's coverage of Cannes film festival highlights another role the exhibition site performs within shaping the paratextual identity of art cinema. Mazdon notes that between 1995 and 1999, 800 programmes or extracts devoted to the Cannes film festival were shown on French programming (2006: 28). While Mazdon argues that the focus on glamour within these TV spots undermines the artistic integrity of the films, the level of exposure allows art cinema to enjoy rarely attainable mainstream coverage. This once again shows the importance of the festival space to the cultural construction of art cinema, and therefore it is of little surprise to see these associations carried through to the home video sphere. Extensive festival coverage, award wins and critical 'buzz' are often formalised and positioned centrally upon covers – frequently in the form of a 'festival crest'. Additionally, special features such as recordings of Q&As or other festival-based events

act as vessels through which the audience can gain assurances of the films' artistic credence, and enjoy a sample of the festival 'experience'.

While there are other reoccurring traits that populate art film marketing materials, these four areas – authorial branding, national branding, critical legitimisation and the significance of the festival circuit – sufficiently characterise art film paratextuality. Throughout the remainder of the book, these four areas will act as touchpoints, a method through which I can gauge how the audience is being informed of the content of the primary text. Centrally, the frequency in which art film tactics are appropriated on extreme art film paratexts will tell us much about the extent to which extremity is used as a commercial gimmick. Yet it is not enough to simply note their appearance. What is important is their proximity to exploitation marketing modes, as it is the slippage created by sharing a common space that is so important to understanding the ways extremity is paratextually represented.

Exploitation Marketing

Akin to art cinema, the exploitation industry exists on the margins of mainstream film culture, targeting a niche demographic in order to gain a measure of commercial success, and a small portion of the 'mass' audience. However, in recent times:

> [Home entertainment] technologies have made cult movie fandom much less dependent on place, and have allowed the distribution and diffusion of cult materials across space. This has made possible the creation of large niche audiences that may be spatially diffuse but can constitute a powerful market force. (Jancovich et al. 2003: 4)

As such, the proliferation of home viewing formats has made accessing marginal cinema a far easier endeavour and important part of the broader industry. While this could arguably alter the marketing traditions of exploitation cinema, many of the traits that have historically defined the field remain in place, as the exploitation industry continues to rely upon a series of unique strategies which enable it to find a growing, yet still marginal, audience.

Ballyhoo and Hyperbole

Ballyhoo marketing, pioneered by touring freak shows and circuses, easily lent itself to the marketing of exploitation film. Beth Kattelman provides a neat summary:

> Throughout the ages, pitchmen have known that some good, effective ballyhoo could help them sell almost anything. Phrases such as [we dare you to see this!, you won't believe your eyes!, you've never seen anything like this!] have long been a part of sales campaigns promising to deliver an original, unique, bizarre and/or terrifying product to expectant audiences. (2011: 61)

This type of advertising involved the talking up of a film's content in order to make it visible amongst its peers and desirable to the audience. As Kattelman states, this process of elaboration, sometimes half-truths and occasionally complete lies, became an art within itself (2011: 63), as the best 'talkers', regardless of the quality of the film, would be able to generate the most interest in their feature.

Kattelman claims that exploitation filmmaker William Castle is best remembered for his promotional work which turned below average films into box office sensations (2011: 64). This is supported by David Sanjek (2003) and Murray Leeder (2011), who write about the ways Castle's cinematic experience was supported – and often surpassed – by the unique and bespoke marketing practices that enveloped them. Even when exploitation film shifted into more violent forms, ballyhoo marketing tactics still typified the paratextual identity of the features. For example, the tagline of *The Last House on the Left* (Craven 1972) – 'To avoid fainting, keep repeating: It's only a movie, it's only a movie, it's only a movie' – presents the feature as a daring test of endurance that could potentially harm the audience's health. By presenting themselves in this way, these films mark themselves as 'unseen experiences' and speak directly to a demographic that seeks something new and exciting. Lisa Kernan discusses the appearance of ballyhoo in trailers, claiming that there are two definitive modes of address: the vaudeville and the circus (2004: 18–23). While the vaudeville mode generalises the feature in order to make it as attractive as possible to an array of people, the circus mode utilises the 'see/hear/feel' rhetoric common within circus barking (2004: 19–21). The circus mode, in Kernan's terms, '[singles] out the film's attractions as the phenomenon or event that will draw audiences to the theatre' (2004: 18), emphasising a visual oddity or unusual sight over a more general outline of the narrative (2004: 21).

For the most part, these practices have been framed as a historical custom. Kettelman's work focuses on the early incarnations of exploitation cinema, while Kernan's book utilises classic Hollywood as its fundamental case study. However, it is easy to see how little these delivery methods have changed, as the exploitation industry continues to be a competitive, over-crowded field. With DVD and Blu-ray vastly increasing the number of titles available, Glyn Davis claims that exploitation titles 'need a hook,

an original take, an otherness, an ineffable "something else" to draw them to the attention of the audience' (2008: 50). This 'something else' often manifests itself within paratextual zones as ballyhoo dares and hyperbolic promises – as the feature is presented as a spectacle of extreme violence or graphic sex, the likes of which have rarely been seen. The images and taglines peak the curiosity of the audience by daring them to consume, promising them an unmatched sensorial experience. The Vipco DVD release of *Cannibal Ferox* (Lenzi 1981) embodies this approach, displaying not one but three ballyhoo taglines: 'the most violent film ever made', 'watch this movie and you won't sleep for a week!', and 'if the representation of violent and repulsive subject matter upsets you please do not view this film'. Presenting the film as an unparalleled cinematic event, Vipco builds anticipation for their feature, eclipsing similar promises from competing products. As these techniques proliferate throughout contemporary exploitation paratexts, it will be of considerable focus within this book.

The Currency of Disgust

Disgust performs an important role in the marketing of exploitation cinema. Relating to notions of hyperbole and ballyhoo, it is clear that certain jacket designs actively repel particular demographics in order to strengthen ties to others. This proves that there is a value to marginalising oneself and promoting the limited appeal of the product. Termed here the currency of disgust, the idea recognises the extent to which exploitation films offer a deliberately offensive and unpleasant narrative world in order to express the artefact's specialist nature. Within this approach, products are not marked by their complexity or artistic qualities as in the 'highbrow'. Nor do they use broad brushstrokes to make them appealing to all. Rather they employ controversial images of violence and sex in a hope it will cast them as forbidden and rebellious. Thus distributors invite controversy as it validates their counter-cultural attitude and allows their products to be cast as exclusive, different and outrageous.

In fact, disgust is not only manifested through images. Certain uses of language, either located in taglines or blurbs, help to create a polygonal narrative image. For example, lists of words – which de-contextualise the violence and present moments of extremity in a short, digestible format – effectively promote the film's major selling points quickly and efficiently. This tactic is evident upon the Shameless Screen Entertainment release of Giulio Berruti's *Killer Nun* (Berruti 1979), which not only features the tagline 'at last the slut is uncut', but also proclaims 'if you ever watched *La Dolce Vita* wishing that Swedish sex sire **Antia Ekberg** would get

out of the Trevi fountain, turn junkie, torture some pensioners and stalk innocent young nuns for kinky sex in a convent then *Killer Nun* is the film for you!' (emphasis in original). Consequently, the distributors deploy a linguistic form of disgust which complements the images of nudity and violence. Collectively, this creates a sub-culturally rich product which is unfit for the mainstream consumption and too 'trashy' for the 'highbrow'.

Market Trends

The term exploitation relates both to the use of transgressive imagery and the ways the industry responds to market trends and crazes. Indeed, the exploitation industry is famed for its ability to capitalise on filmic fashions and imitate commercially proven fads while they still have market value. Exploitation narratives will commonly draw on the trace memory of a particular property in order to successfully code a new film under a pre-established visual template, rather than strive for originality. Herein, textual and paratextual artefacts adopt surrogate narrative images – often ones which have demonstrated their commercial appeal elsewhere before becoming appropriated by a secondary product. These co-opted brands frequently arise from the mainstream, but also within the infrastructure of exploitation cinema and the 'highbrow'.

Lucio Fulci's *Zombie Flesh Eaters* (Fulci 1979) is a striking example of this process. The film was released in the wake of George A. Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* (Romero 1978), which had proved hugely successful in the Italian market. Romero's film established the zombie movie as a commercially viable sub-genre, allowing the likes of Fulci and his producers to milk the concept and flood the market with similar films. However, the distributors of Fulci's film were more explicit in their attempts to capitalise on the success of Romero's text, christening it *Zombi 2*. Through using a title which suggested it was the sequel to Romero's narrative – which was released as *Zombi* in the Italian market – *Zombie Flesh Eaters* directly assumed a pre-circulating brand identity with a proven track record and piggybacked on the success of its American counterpart. This concept, in which a later film adopts a publicly recognised and pre-proven narrative image in order to capitalise on its predecessor's accomplishments – regardless of its accuracy – is also evident within the contemporary market. Found footage horror narrative *Paranormal Activity* (Peli 2007) was a box office sensation, and enjoyed further success in the sell-through market. The DVD artwork features static lines and the time in the bottom corner, and is flanked by two large black borders to make it look like a still from a home video camera. The straight-to-DVD film *Paranormal Entity*

(Van Dyke 2009), a similar found footage narrative, echoes this layout by again featuring a grainy image bordered by black panels. The latter film clearly attempts to associate itself with the success of *Paranormal Activity*, using both its title and paratextual persona to access a pre-existing demographic. As the study of extreme cinema's paratextuality advances, this process becomes increasingly complex and widespread, as taste barriers collapse under the strain of cross-cultural borrowing.

Paracinematic Legitimisation

For many exploitation films, critical legitimisation is often unattainable, as they are largely seen as gratuitous and unappealing within mainstream outlets. However, there is value to be found in this lack of critical approval. Much like the currency of disgust, condemnation from mainstream vendors is worn like a badge of honour by certain texts, and becomes an appealing addition to certain sectors of a marginal audience. Therefore, widespread critical denunciation is inverted by a knowing audience, and rather than damning the film and condemning it to financial ruin, actually enhances its desirability by confirming its oppositional credentials.

A clear example of this boomerang effect took place in Britain following the introduction of VHS in the late 1970s. The new format brought the filmic experience into the home like never before, yet a lack of censorship resulted in an influx of previously banned material. These texts were given new life on cassette, yet they quickly became the focus of a rapidly developing moral panic. Due to the absence of age restrictions and certification, moral campaigners and the press became convinced that any child exposed to these 'sadistic' images would themselves turn into a violent and depraved citizen. In fact, it was the sleeves of these objects that fuelled much of the anxiety (Petley 1984: 68), as the lurid artwork was in some ways too successful in promoting the film's transgressive nature. Eventually, the swirling moral panic saw the implementation of the 1984 Video Recordings Act, which not only led to more strictly enforced age certificates, but also the prohibition of certain texts. Forever labelled as the 'video nasties', films such as *SS Experiment Camp* (Garrone 1976), *Driller Killer* (Ferrara 1979) and *Cannibal Holocaust* were widely reviled and strictly reprimanded, yet also enjoyed masses of free coverage (Egan 2007: 59). This exposure inadvertently endorsed the films, validating their transgressive appeal and forbidden quality to a certain audience sector. The legal action taken towards the films verified the promises of the cover artwork, confirming that these texts delivered an extreme experience. Predictably, in many cases, the films failed to live up to the hype, yet this

did not matter, as they became forever enshrined simply because they were rejected by the mainstream. In this sense, widespread revulsion came to inform certain consumption practices, as the seventy-two films that appeared on the Director of Public Prosecutions List became a shopping guide for the growing fan community (Egan 2007: 158). In the current market, whereby many of these previously banned films enjoy elaborate remediation, this period has been converted into an official motif, a formalised marker of the films' transgressive nature (Egan 2007: 65).

Hence, akin to art cinema, exploitation film has been presented to audiences in ways which oppose the mainstream and mark certain texts as appealing for a particular, dedicated demographic. Just as before, these four traits – ballyhoo, the currency of disgust, the exploitation of market trends, and paracinematic legitimatisation – will be referred to during the case studies, with their proximity to art film marketing conventions being of particular interest.

Crossover and Fluidity: Merging Marketing

Earlier I highlighted the similarities between paracinematic communities and 'highbrow' art audiences, drawing attention to the sophistication of certain exploitation demographics and the extremity of specific art films. As a consequence, art and exploitation audiences were noted as sharing particular customs, including certain forms of identification, critique and valorisation. However, the crossover goes further, as the physical exhibition site – itself a paratextual zone capable of influencing an audience's understanding of the film being projected – has, at times, become a shared space. Alongside grindhouses – which were seen as dens of menace by respectable citizens (Stevenson 2010: 131) – drive-in theatres came to characterise exploitation projection. Drive-ins became very popular across America, and up until the mid-1970s, there were around 3,500 active sites (Thrower 2007: 19). Deliberately courting the youth market through a promise of privacy, drive-in theatres become so synonymous with exploitation cinema that narratives would look to place the on-screen action in cars or car lots (Thrower 2007: 19). Over time, the drive-in space became known as a purveyor of extremity, instantly casting any film projected within its walls as marginal and potentially forbidden. Naturally, exploitation cinema enjoyed this reputation and benefitted from these associations. However, the growing dominance of mainstream cinema forced certain art films to migrate to the drive-in space in order to find projection. Ingmar Bergman's *The Virgin Spring* was one such film. In order to make the previously 'highbrow' film appealing to the typical drive-in audience,

Janus Films – an important art film distributor of the era – stressed the theme of rape and violent revenge (Heffernan 2004: 119). Although the film was transformed in order to gain entry to the space, its projection within it alters it in more profound ways. Through its placement within the 'lowbrow' space, *The Virgin Spring* was forced to temporally embrace the site's trace memory, which is characterised by ideas of violence and disgust. In this setting, the images of sex and violence that characterise the narrative potentially take on different meanings and readings, as the audience do not approach the film as another auteuristic 'masterpiece' from Bergman, but as a transgressive, exploitative extravaganza of sex and violence. In this sense, the projection space alters the reception culture and the manner in which certain images will be received and understood.

In essence, this process temporally homogenised any art film exhibited within the space under the pre-circulating understanding of exploitation cinema. Significantly, this crossover was not uncommon during the 1960 and 1970s, as many distributors of the era retained release schedules which would contain both art films and exploitation narratives (Heffernan 2004: 114). Kevin Heffernan again refers to Janus Films, discussing their distribution of nudie-cutie films to low-end art cinemas, and their decision to release Ingmar Bergman's *The Magician* (1958) over his *Wild Strawberries* (1957) due to the former's use of horror iconography (Heffernan 2004: 119). Janus Films knowingly collapsed the distinctions between art and exploitation in order to stay viable within a shrinking market. This begins to suggest that the practice of using extremity as a commercial lure is not, in fact, a symptom of contemporary economic circumstance, but rather part of a longer history of hybridisation which continues to prove practical in the modern day.

Yet this process was two-way, as exploitation, and more particularly sexploitation, narratives began to find exhibition within art-house cinemas. Jack Stevenson notes that in the early 1970s, many failing art cinemas began to book porn in order to increase revenue (2010: 130). Mark Betz echoes this, detailing frequent cross-programming of art and sexploitation within the 1960s and 1970s (2003: 220). Once again this was a symptom of Hollywood dominance, as block booking meant smaller cinematic venues could no longer compete with mainstream theatres (Thrower 2007: 45). Akin to the ways in which art cinema assumed the cultural heritage of exploitation when it appeared in the drive-in space, exploitation's involvement within the 'highbrow' site allowed it to temporally adopt the dressings of prestige, quality and worth. This process has been amplified in recent times, as paracinematic films increasingly find exhibition in art-house cinemas and universities, and make stronger

inroads into the avant-garde and the academy (Sconce 1995: 373). This allows exploitation cinema to subsidise its own capital through the co-option of particular trace memories and associations, adding cultural value to previously ignored productions.

As charted earlier in this chapter, the coming of DVD changed audience consumption patterns. However, as we will see, these new technologies have also eroded the boundaries between the 'highbrow' and the 'lowbrow' even further. Crucially, the coming of disc-based home video vastly increased the exhibition windows through which exploitation cinema could be shown, resulting in what Klinger refers to as a cult 'boom' (2010: 2). In a similar sense, art film found greater penetration and visibility, as a greater array of products, directors and national cinemas have flooded the market. Hawkins' work unveils the early stages of this process, exploring how the VCR unmoored both 'low' culture and 'high' art (2000: 34). Hawkins observes the ways in which mail-order catalogues found in the back of horror fanzines challenged the binary between prestige and trash by failing to differentiate between 'high' and 'low' cultural artefacts (2000: 3–4). Therefore, certain art films would become rebranded during their tenure within these publications, as the lack of segregation forced them to masquerade under the guises that defined the rest of the catalogue. Ultimately, this coated them with additional levels of transgressive appeal and extreme credibility, and allowed them to be consumed alongside 'lowbrow' productions.

Hawkins moves on from deconstructing mail-order catalogues to consider the home video market in a more specific sense. Looking at laserdiscs, and more precisely The Criterion Collection, Hawkins notes that the company utilises auteur branding whilst offering an array of high-quality features (2000: 41–3). In contrast, Hawkins describes the paracinematic video culture at that time as a black market based on the trading of bootlegs and pirate tapes (2000: 45–6). Concluding that paracinematic companies and their attached fan communities care little for the technological side of film consumption (2000: 47), Hawkins' work exposes the vast changes that have occurred within the 'lowbrow' home video sector. With the proliferation of DVD and Blu-ray technologies, and a changing consumption mentality within the paracinematic community, the industrial divide Hawkins maps is becoming increasingly diminished. Consumers of 'low' cultural products now command the same exacting treatment be given to the texts they cherish as those common in 'highbrow' taste communities. For the most part, distributors are keen to cater to these growing demands, delivering bespoke and lavish releases of previously underrepresented exploitation texts.

The cross-fertilisation of these cinematic spaces was further aided by the paratextual offerings that often accompanied the films. Mark Betz's article 'Art, Exploitation, Underground' (2003) is key to surveying this particular trend, as he examines several tendencies that assisted the convergence of exploitation and art cinema marketing tactics. Firstly, he discusses the marketing of Italian Neo-realist texts, claiming that advertising material frequently focused on scantily clad women in ragged clothes rather than the 'highbrow' tactics art-house cinema had become synonymous with (2003: 206). Of course, the 'pink vamp' (Betz 2013: 499) rarely related to the content of the film, yet were responsible for expressing the public persona of the texts, and in the most part guaranteed the success of these imports. Secondly, Betz highlights instances in which the national identity of a film was subverted to connote a transgressive image rather than the artistic legacy outlined earlier in this chapter. Betz states that 'films from France from the mid-1950s to the late 1960s often refer explicitly in their ads to their status as national products; thereby stating their potential raciness' (2003: 212). Hawkins notes a similar trend, claiming 'throughout the 1960s, the advertisements for Jean-Luc Godard's films tended to feature scantily-clad women, images that were – American distributors felt – in keeping with the impression most Americans had of French cinema' (2000: 21). Herein France becomes both a producer of prestigious art cinema and purveyor of sexually explicit material, offering a flexible set of connotations that can be altered according to the intentions of the distributor.

Interestingly, this inversion of national trace by art distributors meant exploitation filmmakers were able to use the growing reputation of French art cinema to add transgressive capital to their films. The character Lucky Pierre – itself a euphemism for the central participant within a threesome – in *The Adventures of Lucky Pierre* (Lewis 1961) used the stereotypically French name, and the existing sexual overtones, to heighten the perceived sexual content of the film (Betz 2003: 208). In a more general sense, the growth of the nudie-cutie films in the American market has been accredited to the arrival of increasingly transgressive art films. While certain audiences enjoyed the sexual nature of the 'highbrow' European films, the appeal of seeing images of nudity and sex without having to read subtitles or decipher complex narratives was evident. The American nudie-cutie offered a more simplistic vision of sexuality, and allowed audiences to voyeuristically enjoy the female form without having to deal with the intricacies of the art film tradition (Briggs and Meyer 2005: 23). The dual meaning of European-ness is still present within the current market, and defines the marketing approach of *The Ordeal* (Du Welz 2004), a Belgian

horror film released by Tartan Video in 2006. Its DVD jacket, which uses deep reds and blacks to code the films as horror, features the sentence '*The Ordeal* (aka *Calvaire*) delivers a terrifying and darkly comic tale of obsession, kidnap, and borderline psychosis that brings to mind films such as *Deliverance, Straw Dogs* and *Texas Chainsaw Massacre,* but that has a continental flavour very much its own'. Clearly, the product evokes the trace of American horror narratives; however it also places the film within a European, or 'continental', framework. By adopting the fertile trace of European cinema and its past transgressions, the paratext is able to exploit both the familiarity of American horror and the exoticness of more complex versions of extremity.

In summary, it is clear that the typical marketing mores of 'high' and 'low' culture can become interchangeable, exposing a rich history of convergence between cultural sectors. While certain traditions remain stable, the following chapters provide evidence that these processes are ongoing, and strongly influence the paratextuality of extreme art cinema.

CHAPTER 3

Early Extremity on DVD: History, Precursors and Exploitation Auteurs

As expressed in the Introduction, exploring extreme art cinema through a historical lens is central to understanding its development both textually and paratextually. Surveying the remediation of a series of films that can be loosely labelled 'early extremity' (as their production occurred prior to the 'boom period' in the mid- to late-1990s), this chapter will extend existing conversations surrounding the marketing traditions of art and exploitation cinema while offering a more historically expansive extreme art film category. When looking into the ways transgressive art films are packaged for contemporary audiences, I draw attention to instances wherein the art tradition prevails; cases whereby distributors borrow the 'mask' of exploitation cinema; texts that forego their art lineage completely; and those films that are welcomed back into the art film fold and repaired within its customs. Comparatively, I look at the paratextual presentation of noteworthy exploitation films, examining how the exploitation tradition is both revitalised on DVD and Blu-ray, and suppressed in favour of more complex and culturally ambiguous paratextual presentations.

The aim of this chapter is not to provide an extensive history of extreme art film production. Rather, I want to explore how the forerunners to the current extreme art film trend have been paratextualy represented. In doing so I can determine whether historical examples of extremity become 'gimmicked', and the frequency with which the commercial persona of these films are manipulated to fit contemporary standards and expectations. In this sense, the paratextuality of the film, and the manner in which it utilises either 'high' or 'low' cultural signifiers, is the focus. It is my hope that this method will allow for better insight into how extremity becomes a commercial signifier, a displayable and relatable symbol of textual transgression. However, though this is the case, there is a secondary outcome to the methodology employed throughout this chapter. Through the selection process, this chapter exposes art cinema's historical preoccupation with extremity as well as exploitation cinema's adoption of

'highbrow' techniques. As such, this chapter offers a revaluation of both art and exploitation traditions, providing a snapshot of particular points of slippage both textually and paratextually.

Extreme Art Precursors

The Art Tradition: Extreme Art as Art

While this book will highlight the importance of the paratext's transformative ability, not every release seeks to engineer change. Many commercial objects, regardless of the presence of textual extremity, simply stabilise a film's public image, opting to dress the release within the visual and linguistic codes of its 'natural' cultural setting, as opposed to using the artefact as a launching pad for an alternative reputation. In other words, distributors sometimes opt not to 'cash in' on the extremity of the text, but rather use conventions more typical within the 'highbrow' such as auteurism, critical praise or festival prestige. This process is fundamental to understanding the paratextuality of extreme art film, and is far more common than one might assume. However, it remains a largely ignored occurrence due to the focus critics have placed on ideas of gimmickry and the supposed ease in which extremity can be commodified. BFI Distribution's *Un Chien Andalou* and Tartan Video's handling of 'the Bergman Collection' exist as key examples of this process, as they both refrain from promoting the more transgressive aspects of the product in favour of more traditionally 'highbrow' frames of reference.

Luis Buñuel's cinema challenged and critiqued the moral framework of the bourgeoisie through a combination of visual transgression, sexual explicitness and surrealism. Demanding an active audience, Buñuel's meandering narratives frustrate the spectator, and include images that defied and violated the mores of the era. He can therefore be interpreted as a precursor to the extreme art film boom of the late 1990s, which continues to make use of similarly difficult modes of address. The challenging nature of his cinema was established in his debut film *Un Chien Andalou*, and more particularly the infamous 'eye slicing' scene. The most obvious sequence of visual transgression found within Buñuel's filmography, the scene's unflinching depiction of violence has influenced the likes of *Irreversible* and *Antichrist*. Interestingly, the manner in which the audience is forced to watch the spectacle of violence remains one of the most enduring traits of extreme cinema, and thus the film's importance to establishing an extreme mode of address cannot be underestimated.

The permanence of the scene potentially overwhelms the rest of the

film's visuals. For some, it defines the narrative, becoming isolated from the body of the text and functioning as its own extreme set piece. Reading the film in this way gifts the text a 'cult' appeal, which, depending on the distributor, could be commodified throughout the paratextual plains. Importantly, due to the notoriety of the scene, exploiting its reputation could be warranted, and would provide evidence of the commercial potential textual extremity preserves. However, BFI's two-disc special edition box set, which sees *Un Chien Andalou* released alongside *L'Âge d'Or* (Buñuel 1930), ignores these more sensationalist overtones. The BFI itself is steeped in 'high' cultural capital (a concept explored in far greater detail in Chapter 5's investigation of *Salò, Or the 120 Days of Sodom*), yet they do not merely rely on the cleansing nature of their branding. Rather, the company uses the physical construction of the object and the bespoke nature of the packaging to further frame the film as prestigious. The discs are encased within a large box, instantly separating it from and elevating it above the standard fair offered by the rest of the sell-through market. Once the lid is lifted, the consumer is presented with a twenty-eight-page booklet and a gatefold cardboard CD case. This elaborate case allows the films to be bestowed upon the consumer, in a manner perhaps more commonly seen at high-end jewellers. In line with Barbara Klinger's ideas concerning special edition releases (2006), this extravagant casing casts the films as esteemed texts 'worthy' of being elevated above the rest of the home entertainment sector. The gold and white colour scheme – itself an indicator of fineness – and the booklet's continued testimonies regarding the artistic status and historical importance of Buñuel (and his co-creator Salvador Dalí) continue to mark the object as prestigious. Thus, the object refuses to promote *Un Chien Andalou*'s potential hybridity, or capitalise on its claims to infamy. Instead, it casts the extreme art film squarely within the remit of 'high' culture, as the modes of representation appease a 'highbrow' demographic who value indications of excellence, superiority and refinement. In so doing, the external object further validates the internal text, creating a reciprocal bond between interior and exterior meaning.

Tartan Video's 'the Bergman Collection' sees the company approach the extreme art text in a similar manner. Ingmar Bergman's overpowering status and 'high' cultural pedigree (Blake 1975: 30) has often seen him overlooked in discussions of extreme cinema. Positioned by Darragh O'Donoghue as the 'high priest' of art-house cinema (2014: 11), the filmmaker also challenged the mores of the art cinema tradition. Discussed at length by Erik Hedling (2006) in 'Breaking the Swedish Sex Barrier: Painful Lustfulness in Ingmar Bergman's *The Silence*', the depiction of casual sex and masturbation in *The Silence* (Bergman 1963) forced changes

within the Swedish Certification Board (Hedling 2006: 17–22). In addition, *The Virgin Spring* remains a landmark text within extreme art film history, as it popularised the rape-revenge narrative structure. A template that has gone on to inform so many extreme art narratives, including *Irreversible* and *Twentynine Palms*, the rape-revenge model perhaps more obviously influenced the exploitation tradition. Most famously, Wes Craven explicitly used Bergman's film as a basis for *The Last House on the Left* – a narrative that proved fundamental in the development of the American exploitation tradition. While Bergman's discussion of Christianity and Paganism (Steene 1975: 217) is replaced in Craven's film by a discussion of urban decay, his ability to influence both 'high' and 'low' cultural traditions is central to recognising his significance to extreme art film history. Of course, recognising Bergman as part of extreme art film's historical progression does not discount his relevance to the more traditional models of art cinema. Rather, it draws attention to the ways he can be read as a transgressive director capable of cultural fluidity, using and reframing 'low' cultural forms within the parameters of the 'highbrow'.

Nonetheless, the 2002 Tartan Video release of *The Virgin Spring* downplays this association to cinematic extremity. While the blurb draws attention to the film's more transgressive qualities by making direct reference to Craven's remake and stating the rape is 'brutal', hyperbole is shunned in the most part in favour of a more traditional, art cinema rhetoric. In the first instance, the product is presented as part of 'the Bergman Collection', a separate catalogue within the larger Tartan Video library. Made up of seventeen films, the collection as a whole renders each individual text as auteur driven and an artistically legitimate prestige feature, as every cover is stamped with the 'Bergman Collection' banner (which is equal in size to the title) and an image of Bergman himself. This is further supported by the listing of three festival wins (Winner, Best Foreign Film – Academy Awards, 1961; Winner, Special Mention – Cannes Film Festival, 1960; and Winner, Best Foreign Film – Golden Globe Awards, 1961) and a quotation, credited to *Variety*, which reads 'an extraordinarily powerful film . . . Bergman's strongest'. Tartan Video's decision not to engage with the film's more sensationalist attributes is significant as it allows the object, and therefore the film, to fit more comfortably within the 'high' cultural art sector. Certainly it could be suggested that Bergman's positioning within this field is of little surprise. However, if extremity is a commercial gimmick used to attract an audience to features they would usually ignore, then its absence here is telling. Tartan Video could have commodified the rape or violent retribution in the cover art or blurb, and hyperbolically sold the film as an unseen experience. Instead, they opted to present the

film as an auteuristic, critically lauded narrative. In itself this illustrates an early counter-argument to the calls that extremity within the art sector serves a uniformly commercial purpose. Despite the fact these narratives pre-date those accusations, their remediations do not, and therefore the distributors could have repurposed retrospectively the narrative image to fit current trends and zeitgeists. This practice, as will be explored, is relatively common.

Hybridity: The Act of Borrowing

The act of borrowing is vital to understanding the role paratextual material plays in shaping the cultural identity of extreme art cinema, and will be revisited in far greater detail throughout the case studies. Most commonly, it occurs when a paratextual product that has previously been positioned within one taste economy adopts the features of the contrasting cultural site. This transpires in varying degrees, until, potentially, the paratextual item is no longer merely borrowing an approach, but also presenting a completely altered identity. More excessive examples will be investigated in later case studies (in particular during Chapters 5, 7, and 8), however the instance of mild borrowing explored here is no less important to charting the paratextuality of extreme art cinema.

Buñuel's *Belle de Jour*, with its illustration of sexual fetish, rests alongside *Un Chien Andalou* as evidence of the director's extreme credentials. Although Studio Canal has released the film both individually as a '40th Anniversary' special edition, and as part of 'The Luis Buñuel Collection', it is the latter that is of interest here due to the object's use of auteur branding (although it must be noted that the special edition also borrows from 'low' cultural traditions in a similar manner). Released in a box set containing *The Young One* (Buñuel 1960), *The Diary of a Chambermaid* (Buñuel 1964), *The Milky Way* (Buñuel 1969), *Tristana* (Buñuel 1970), *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* (Buñuel 1972), *The Phantom of Liberty* (Buñuel 1974), and *That Obscure Object of Desire* (Buñuel 1977), the grouping of multiple films instantly confirms the director's status as an auteur and affixes additional cultural capital to their commercial image. The quotations contained on the outer casing continue to strengthen this sense of authority, as Studio Canal use external agents to help further endorse the films, filmmaker and product. The first quote, provided by esteemed critic Roger Elbert, reads 'one of the greatest of all directors', while the other, supplied by *The Times,* states 'Buñuel's career is unparalleled in the history of cinema'. Notably, Elbert's name carries additional legitimacy all of its own and further assures a 'highbrow' audience of the quality of the artefact.

However, Buñuel's auteur identity is forced to compete with another brand identity: that of Catherine Deneuve. It is this conflict that hybridises the texts within and bestows unto them the potential to drift, even if only slightly, between taste cultures. The outer cardboard sleeve which houses the eight individual slim-line cases features an image of Deneuve as *Belle de Jour*'s Severine, the bourgeois wife-turned-escort. The image trades off Deneuve's reputation as a sexual icon and through her uncontested centralisation, homogenises the other films contained within the box set under the trace memory of Severine's sexual potency. The pervasiveness of Deneuve's trace is boosted by the pink and white colour scheme and her sustained presence throughout the additional booklet. Present both visually and linguistically, Deneuve pulls double duty as the cover star and the focus of Ginette Vincendeau's essay *Catherine Deneuve: From Ice Maiden to Living Divinity* (this essay, along with the colour scheme, is repeated in the '40th Anniversary' edition). Outlining the duality of Deneuve's filmic image, the essay insists that the actress simultaneously evokes French 'chic' and 'perverse' sexuality. It is, not surprisingly, the latter which is channelled throughout this paratext as the image's reliance on the semi-nude body encourages a sexually active gaze rather than one which respects the elegance of the actress. Significantly, Deneuve's reputation as a sex icon was not exclusively constructed by Buñuel. Without doubt, films such as *Repulsion* (Polanski 1965) and *The Hunger* (Scott 1983) helped to fortify her cultural standing as a sex symbol. Clearly, Studio Canal pillage this reputation and subsequently exploit a very specific, yet somewhat misleading, cultural trace.

The conflict created between the 'high' of auteur branding and the 'low' of soft-core sexuality illustrates the manner in which remediated items can selectively manipulate a film's commercial identity to usher in and promote alternative readings. In this instance, Studio Canal's exaggeration of the box set's sexual content continues the habits of bygone eras, whereby art distributors would overstate the transgressive nature of the films in order to heighten their commercial appeal. Within this modern incarnation, the company can potentially target an audience not familiar, or even interested, in the authorial lineage of Buñuel by focusing on the sexualised female body.

Hyperbole: Pirating and Appropriation

The forthcoming case studies, especially those explored in Chapters 5, 7, and 8, expose some of the furthest ends of the borrowing spectrum, and show the true extent of this process. Yet were we to ignore the different

degrees to which this process occurs, we run the risk of over simplifying the complexity of paratextual design. Therefore the following seeks not only to draw further attention to the history of extreme art cinema under examination here, but also to look more effectively at the gradations in which paratextual masking occurs.

Roman Polanski's cinema has, as Ewa Mazierska maintains, rarely been separated from his biography (2005: 28). Mazierska suggests that this is a symptom of three key moments in Polanski's life: his survival of the Holocaust; the murder of his pregnant wife Sharon Tate by the Manson Family; and his sexual abuse of a 13-year-old girl (2005: 29–30). Stanka Radovic goes on to propose that Polanski represents both a master of psychological distortions and a strange and disturbed individual (2011: 7). These are significant readings and in no way should they be discounted. Yet their centralisation of auteurism ignores Polanski's, and most notably *Repulsion*'s, importance to the extreme art film continuum. *Repulsion*, which is described by Tarja Laine as a masterpiece of psychological horror (2011: 37–43), fuses genre imagery with misanthropic attitudes and artistic flourishes, and thus defies traditional taste structures in a way similar to that of *The Virgin Spring* and *Belle de Jour*.

Repulsion was released as part of Anchor Bay's 'Roman Polanski Collection' in 2003. Predominately a distributor of horror cinema (an aspect covered in greater detail in Chapter 5), Anchor Bay's box set annexes Polanski's early career, packaging *Repulsion* alongside *Knife in the Water* (1962), *Cul-de-Sac* (1966), and '8 Short Films'. Akin to the other collections discussed so far, the object invites an auteur reading through the grouping of multiple works. Yet the prestige offered by this is offset by the use of hyperbolic language. More typical of Anchor Bay's horror fair, the outer sleeve – which further indulges in the processes that defined 'The Luis Buñuel Collection' by featuring an image of Deneuve in a sheer nightgown – claims 'Polanski arrived on the English-Language film scene with the force of a thunderbolt'. This populist tone trivialises Polanski's claim to artistry, making him seem aggressive rather than thoughtful. While perhaps not a big deal in isolation, this rendering is supported within the blurb for *Repulsion*, which uses ballyhoo to exaggerate the potential extremity of the film. For example, the line 'this classic of insanity and sexual repression shows the controversial Polish director's unflinching obsession with shocking subject-matter and masterful use of disturbing imagery' employs terms like 'unflinching', 'obsession', 'shocking', 'controversial' and 'disturbing' to transition the object closer to the horror market, where these catchphrases are both common and cherished. This is continued during the slightly longer blurb found on the

inner gatefold. The text here states that within *Repulsion*, 'purity is defiled by the warped powers of sensual desire', before highlighting the 'flawlessly beautiful' Deneuve's obsession with and eventual slaughter of men. Evidently, the sexual trace of Deneuve is placed as a selling point, as the hyperbolic language combines with images of Deneuve to overwhelm the more prestigious reading one could take from the figure of Polanski. Even though representing *Repulsion* as a horror text is not a radical departure, it is evident here that Anchor Bay borrow readily from the traditions of exploitation cinema, affording their object more substance within a 'lowbrow' demographic.

This process of appropriating 'lowbrow' marketing traditions is even more apparent upon MGM DVD's release of Bernardo Bertolucci's *Last Tango in Paris* (1972). Released in 2000, the artefact underplays the film's European heritage and instead provides an uncomplicated, and potentially more commercially prosperous, image of extremity. As claimed in Chapter 2, the promotion of a film's European-ness has a twofold purpose, either allowing a paratext to trade off the trace memory of multiple filmic traditions and movements – thus marking it as complex, challenging and 'highbrow' – or casting it as raunchy, sleazy and potentially taboo. Yet here a suppression of European-ness is favoured, exposing the commerciality of non-intellectually challenging transgression. The back cover of *Last Tango in Paris* features an isolated textual passage: 'the most powerfully erotic movie ever made!'. Framed as a quotation, even though no source is given, the affirmation dares the consumer to test themselves against the sexual extremity of the narrative. This is continued during the blurb, which opens with the word 'penetrate' before stating the film contains 'sexual energy unlike any film before or after'. Further ballyhoo declarations – such as the assertion that it 'shocked a nation' – build towards the final sentence, which proudly states 'these unlikely lovers take their passion to erotic new heights – and depths – beyond anything they could ever have imagined'. Clearly courting an audience outside of the traditional art film sector, MGM DVD feigns the patterns of exploitation cinema to offer a non-threatening representation of cinematic extremity that can be consumed by all.

Remediation: Restoral and Recovery

At this stage, it is perhaps easy to over advocate the frequency with which these paratexts borrow from the exploitation tradition, and certainly the remainder of the book will give appropriate time to this important discourse. However, the process of remediation is equally significant. Raiford

Guins' 'Blood and Black Gloves on Shiny Discs: New Media, Old Tastes, and the Remediation of Italian Horror Films in the United States' (2005) uses the term in relation to exploitation cinema, stating that 'new media can be said to "repair" or "correct" a presumed deficiency found in existing media' (Guins 2005: 17). Guins observes the manner in which the introduction of DVD allowed Italian horror films to move from 'gore' objects to 'art' objects (2005: 27) – a finding that will prove useful throughout my investigation. However, there is room to extend Guins' ideas beyond his initial scope of Italian horror films, as certain art texts go through a process of correction as they (re-)enter the home. While the films considered so far all correspond with definitions of art cinema (some may contend the inclusion of *Repulsion*), the two case studies taken here – Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* and Georges Franju's *Eyes Without a Face* (1960) – fit more easily into Joan Hawkins ideas of 'art-horror' (2000) and David Andrews' 'cult-art' category (2013). Concerned with films that slip between and straddle cultural spaces, it is perhaps obvious that paratextual items can rapidly advance hybridisation, mixing together 'high' and 'low' signifiers at will to create multifaceted cultural artefacts. Yet the paratexts for these films snub further hybridisation in favour of renewal within the art sphere.

Studio Canal's 2007 Special Edition of *Peeping Tom* heals and refurbishes a film on the cross-section between 'high' and 'low' culture. Hugely controversial when it was first released, *Peeping Tom* was labelled as 'trash – a lurid, deviant work' (Fuller 2010). However it has now achieved masterpiece status, becoming a canonical text for academics (Fuller 2010) and one of the towering achievements of British cinema (Lowenstein 2005: 56). The DVD blurb both refers to and further aids this change in status, centralising an auteur trace (the opening sentence reads 'From Michael Powell, the acclaimed director of *A Matter of Life and Death* and *The Red Shoes*') before discussing the film's critical reception. The blurb carefully states that *The Spectator* claimed it was 'the sickest and filthiest film I can remember seeing' before noting that *Tribune* stated they 'wanted it "flushed swiftly down the nearest sewer"'. Traditionally, the discussion of public scandal spearheads a hyperbolic marketing directive, as it casts the film as a forbidden product too dangerous for public consumption. Yet on this release of *Peeping Tom*, there is a deliberate shift in tone which alters this reading. The blurb's structure instigates a narrative of redemption, noting the film is a 'misunderstood masterpiece' which has 'wit and beauty' and offers an 'insight into the voyeurism of cinema'. The shift between exploitation and art registers allows the paratext to more successfully repair the film, as Studio Canal publicise *Peeping Tom*'s past in order to present their artefact as one of change and rectification. This process

is supported by the special features, as a new introduction by Martin Scorsese illustrates the substantial impact Powell's film has had on film culture, and two documentaries (*The Eye of the Beholder* and *The Strange Gaze of Mark Lewis*) provide the viewer with a rich and well-informed reading of both film and filmmaker. The additional booklet partakes in the same discourse, with an essay by Ryan Gilbey once more exploring the depth of the film beyond its horror trappings.

What transpires across this object is a process of retrospective rehabilitation. While the film's history as a controversial text is rightly broadcast, the special edition presentation – including the numerous featurettes and exclusive booklet – allows this release to capture a portion of the scholarly activity occurring within the often closed space of academia. By collecting documentaries, historical reviews and new essays, Studio Canal chart the film's transition from condemned horror text to legitimised 'masterpiece' in an accessible and straightforward manner. Here, the commercial object's ability to attract a mainstream audience in the way academic writing cannot makes it a vital part of the restoration process, and an important addition to the ever-changing scholarly discourse.

The BFI's release of Franju's *Eyes Without a Face* also adopts a redemptive narrative successfully. In the earlier stages of his career, Franju found himself praised by both François Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard in *Cahiers du cinema*, yet *Eyes Without a Face*'s graphic depiction of surgery owed too much to the traditions of the Théâtre du Grand Guignol, and was not admired by the *Cahiers* critics (Lowenstien 2005: 32–46). Nonetheless, like many horror narratives of the time, the genre elements obscured social commentaries. In the case of *Eyes Without a Face*, Franju's film is concerned with the history of French Occupation during World War II, and the country's role in the Holocaust (Lowenstein 2005: 43). It is this reading that allows the likes of Adam Lowenstein (2005: 53), Joan Hawkins (2000: 65) and Reynold Humphries (2002) to claim that the film should be acknowledged alongside *Psycho* and *Peeping Tom* as a canonical art-horror text. Therefore, Franju inhabits the marginal space between exploitation and art cinema, and fuses allegorical messages with violence in a manner similar to that of his more widely celebrated 'highbrow' peers.

The film's presence within the BFI's catalogue continues this dualistic existence, as the imprint's pre-circulating cultural capital and its commitment to educating its audience about film culture (Bennett and Brown 2008: 118) have the strength to legitimise any film released under its mandate. This is fundamental to a film such as *Eyes Without a Face*, as it begins to redeem the text and welcome it into a cultural sector which

was previously out of reach. Notably, a similar process occurs in America, where distribution is handled by The Criterion Collection. Celebrated as the 'gold standard' of DVD/Blu-ray distribution, the company is said to position their potential customers as 'explorers', who through the consumption of supplementary materials, discover the cultural value and worth of the text (Lyne 2016). Franju's film ultimately benefits from its associations with these two companies, as their reputations help to establish its status as an art film across geographic borders.

The transition from largely misunderstood horror text to a film of worth and value is aided further by the object itself. The blurb eagerly foregrounds the film's hybridity ('at once cruel and tender'), and the influence it has had on other filmmakers, citing Jesús Franco and Pedro Almodóvar as examples. These surrogates are crucial in understanding the ways in which the release refashions and 'corrects' the film's past. Undoubtedly, Almodóvar populates art circles and is an established auteur who carries a trace capable of bestowing further value on Franju. In essence, the BFI are underscoring the importance of Franju's work, noting his influence on a much celebrated and renowned director. Yet, it is perhaps Jesús Franco, or more commonly Jess Franco, and his status as an exploitation filmmaker, which is of more interest here. Evidently, the BFI evade the potential lowbrow associations Franco could bring to the object by using his lesser publicised, yet more exotic, first name. Here, the BFI are able to encourage consumers to understand Franco as part of the 'world cinema' or 'foreign language film' circuit, as opposed to the exploitation one he is more commonly, or even exclusively, placed within. While this change of name is subtle, the use of 'Jesús' over 'Jess' is key in shifting the expectations of the film and positioning it within the culturally validated space of European cinema rather than the much-maligned exploitation sector. The release's additional paratextual items further motivate this shift, as special features, including two short films, establish Franju as an auteur (*Monsieur et Madame Curie* [1956] and *La Première Nuit* [1958]). In essence, the object amasses a share of the ongoing scholarship which surrounds the film, effectively rewriting, or at least realigning, the film's history – positioning it as a text worthy of academic consideration. In fact, it is the combination of textual hybridity, historical misunderstanding and scholarly engagement which permits the paratextual object more scope to alter the film's cultural complexion.

In a larger sense, this snapshot has illustrated the way these early extreme films and filmmakers lay aesthetic and thematic foundations for the extreme art films that follow, while highlighting the variety of approaches taken to the paratextual presentation of extreme art material.

What is already clear, and will become even more pronounced throughout the case studies, is the problematic simplicity of the scholarly claims that surround the category. Suggesting that extremity is merely a promotional gimmick ignores the evidence that we have already seen. So far, extremity has been suppressed and made secondary to more traditional art film signifiers, or diluted alongside other marketing approaches. Rarely has it been the main focus of the marketing approach. However, this is perhaps to be expected. The majority of the texts listed here have strong links to art cinema and therefore can be comfortably positioned within a 'highbrow' framework. However, the paratextual treatment of a select number of subversive and slippery exploitation films provides interesting findings, as it is clear that 'lowbrow' paratexts are beginning to become more complex and multifaceted. This is significant as these 'lowbrow' texts circulate within a market sector wherein extremity has proven to be the most successful and enduring commercial signifier, and thus any move away from this established register further complicates the prevailing claims of gimmickry.

Exploitation Auteurs

Exploitation auteurs is a potentially problematic phrase. I am aware, as is David Andrews in his work (2013: 113), that I will not be able to completely absolve these exploitation filmmakers, due to their longstanding and continued association with the 'lowbrow'. However, I do not need to. It is clear that auteurism is not a foreign concept within the 'low' cultural space of exploitation cinema. While it has long been a marker of artistic intent and cinematic quality – and remains a key marketing tactic for those distributing 'highbrow' cinema – auteur theory's prevailing ideas of control and style are evident throughout 'lowbrow' features. To return briefly to discussions held in the Introduction, the rebellious nature of the industry, and the presence of a counter-aesthetic audiences must 'learn', suggests the strength of 'lowbrow' auteurism (Hawkins 2000: 112). Indeed, the films of these exploitation auteurs become examples of art-horror or cult-art and occupy the intersections between traditional taste categories. The grouping also responds to the growing 'auteurification' of exploitation filmmakers within the home entertainment market, whereby the traditional markers of the 'highbrow' have become embraced by distributors of previously 'low' cultural products. In essence, grouping exploitation auteurs together is an effective way to recognise how a particular group of non-art filmmakers have influenced the aesthetic and thematic composition of extreme art cinema, while

acknowledging changes in the exploitation sell-through market and its associated demographics.

The filmmakers assembled for my purpose in this chapter include Dario Argento, Lucio Fulci and Jean Rollin. As the book progresses, the category will grow, and the likes of Ruggero Deodato and Jess Franco will be added. This grouping does not claim to be an extensive category, nor an impenetrable assemblage. Rather, it is once more a snapshot of exploitation directors who, akin to the filmmakers explored so far, hybridise art and exploitation, creating narratives that problematise traditional cultural distinctions. An additional motivation for the inclusion of these particular directors is the interesting and important paratextual discourses that envelope their work. Klinger observes the importance of these new cult objects, exploring the way they allow new identities to blossom (Klinger 2010: 13). Therefore, 'exploitation auteurs' is as much an industrial category as it is an academic one, suggesting the concept is, and should be, open to change and variation. What must be avoided is an over-simplified argument which completely conflates the boundaries between art and exploitation. Instead, what needs to be recognised is the manner in which certain texts from these filmmakers (and others not explored within the scope of this work) show signs of artistic engagement and experimentation, and therefore should no longer be overlooked within the histories of extreme art cinema, or European cinema more generally.

The Exploitation Tradition: Exploitation Art as Exploitation

Naturally, promoting the artistic potential of an exploitation product is still in its infancy within the sell-through market. Just as Tartan Video's 'the Bergman Collection' and the BFI's *Un Chien Andalou* rejected the opportunity to capitalise on the extremity of their products, certain exploitation auteurs have seen their work continually framed as 'lowbrow' entertainment. The paratextual treatment of Euro-Horror icon Lucio Fulci (Thonen 1998: 56) serves as a useful starting point. Although at times celebrated, John Thonen remarks that the director's films engendered the most polar of reactions (1998: 56), with the critical discourse commonly condemning his excessive use of gore. *The New York Ripper* (Fulci 1982) is often cited as Fulci's worst offender, but like many exploitation directors, he was also commercially successful, most notably with *Zombie Flesh Eaters*. Yet it was not only the excess of gore that was disliked by the critical discourse. Fulci was often accused of producing unsteady narratives that collapsed under the strain of the violent set pieces. This unevenness was a result of Fulci's visual style, wherein he drew inspiration from

a range of sources and combined them with extreme imagery. Michael Grant (2004: 35) remarks negatively on this during his discussion of *The Beyond* (Fulci 1980), and while this cannot be discounted, the filmmaker's erratic approach exemplifies Sconce's counter-aesthetic. In his work on paracinema and the political nature of 'lowbrow' taste, Sconce suggested that the systematic distortion of conventional cinematic styles by directors working within the impoverished conditions of exploitation cinema creates a cinematic language that although not as refined as art cinema, is as subversive and valuable (1995: 385). Fulci's *The Beyond* – and by extension the rest of the 'Gates of Hell' Trilogy, which included *City of the Living Dead* (1980) and *The House by the Cemetery* (1981) – embodies this distortion as it refuses to refine its aesthetic.

Regardless of this possibly redemptive reading, certain paratexts refute any claim the film may have to 'highbrow' value or mainstream subversion. *The Beyond*, which is perhaps Fulci's most acclaimed critical success, has been released in the UK on DVD by both Vipco and Arrow Video (Arrow Video have also released it on Blu-ray). While the Arrow Video version will be looked at towards the end of this chapter, the Vipco release exposes the enduring prevalence of exploitation marketing in the contemporary era. Vipco itself is an important distributor in any discussion of British exploitation film distribution, as they were responsible for releasing a series of European horror films during the heyday of the video nasty scandal (including *Driller Killer* and Fulci's own *Zombie Flesh Eaters*). A classic exploitation distributor, Vipco cared little for providing uncut versions of a given film, special features, or additional paratexts, and unashamedly operated as a commercial entity. However, due to their activity during the 1980s, the company carries a level of cultural baggage and nostalgia unmatched throughout British exploitation distribution. Therefore Vipco's branding invokes a particular era of British film history, and lavishes *The Beyond* with a certain level of marginality.

Vipco has released two versions of *The Beyond*: a 'Vaults of Horror' version that features cover artwork; and a 'Screamtime Collection' version. The latter – a budget DVD line defined by uniform covers composed of simple gold titles, the iconic row of 'Vipco skulls', and the heading 'Vipco's Screamtime Collection' – came to dominate the paratextual presentation of Vipco's catalogue. The gold colouring was an attempt to bring a sense of prestige to the collection, however the naivety of the design aesthetic, coupled with the low price point, cast the films, and the company itself, at the lower end of the home entertainment spectrum. *The Beyond* was released as part of this collection in 2003, yet the earlier 2001 release, with its increased collectability and potential rarity, is more useful to analyse.

Like many Vipco releases, the object's cover proudly advertises the film's status as a banned text, through the presentation of the 'previously banned' logo. Simply composed of a red cross with the word 'banned' scrawled through the middle, this logo, as Kate Egan states, acts as a badge of honour, attesting to the transgressive nature of the film's content (2007: 194). The blurb supports this initial reading, hyperbolically vowing to 'present Lucio Fulci's *The Beyond* in its face-melting, blood-oozing, zombie-crumbling, gory-glory!'. In short, ballyhoo typifies Vipco's handling of Fulci, with the paratext of *Zombie Flesh Eaters* claiming it has 'footage that will shock' as well as containing 'more gore than allowed before!', while *City of the Living Dead* is labelled as 'gory, stomach-churning'. Essentially, Vipco indulges in the violence of these texts, ghettoising the films and framing Fulci exclusively as a 'lowbrow' genre filmmaker. Here, as in most traditional exploitation models, violence is the core commercial draw, presented to entice a certain demographic and repel others.

This approach to the commercialisation of Fulci's identity is continued in more recent releases by other distributors. Fulci's more violent Giallos have been handled by British distributor Shameless Screen Entertainment. Shameless Screen Entertainment will be looked at in greater detail in Chapter 4; however it is sufficient to state here that they openly adopt the hyperbolic rhetoric that has historically defined traditional exploitation practices. Their releases of Fulci's most disliked film, *The New York Ripper* (released as a standard edition in 2007, a 'Fan Edition' with additional booklet in 2010 and a Blu-ray in 2011), revels in its extremity, using the tagline 'the sickest movie ever made!' before asking 'do you like your horror films nice 'n' nasty?'. The jacket sleeve moves on to call the film a 'gem of depravity that is every bit as vile and stylish as you have been led to believe', before bestowing Fulci with the moniker 'old scalp-ripper'. Of the ten thumbnails on the back, all bar one show nudity or women in peril. Notably, the approach proliferates through other Shameless Screen Entertainment releases, as the blurb on *Manhattan Baby* (Fulci 1982) rejects any artistic credence the film could claim to have by stating 'we're still struggling to understand what the hell goes on in this movie!', while *The Black Cat* (Fulci 1981) has the tagline 'when pussy goes bad!'. Of course, presenting these films as cult-art hybrids could be equally problematic, and I am not suggesting that these objects do not rightfully capture the nature of the texts. What I am interested in is the long-term impact of this type of marketing. It is undeniable that exploitation cinema is entering an era of transition and change. Ever increasing academic interaction from fan-scholars, retrospective critical appraisal, and changing marketing methods have seen these previously

'lowbrow' texts rehabilitated and 'corrected'. However, the continued presence of marketing directives such as this can potentially alter the aura of the director or film to such an extent that it makes later refurbishment harder to achieve.

DVD releases of French exploitation director Rollin's work follow a similar pattern. Labelled by Tim Lucas as 'the finest French genre poet of his generation' (2011: 14), Rollin used the horror genre as a template to explore personal projects and ideas (Tohill and Tombs 1994: 143), infusing his highly sexual films with allegorical depth. This level of authorial control often led to a complete disregard of the film's commercial prospects, as tangents and meandering narratives subtracted from the gore and nudity so important to parts of the exploitation demographic. Despite pockets of acclaim, critical discussion of his work has been minimal and prior to the DVD revolution, Rollin's films had been largely unavailable (Cherry 2002). However, as with so many exploitation filmmakers, Rollin's work became more widely accessible on the new format, with Salvation Films – and more particularly their Redemption DVD imprint – handling distribution.

The biographical history on Redemption DVD's website calculatingly casts the company as restorers and archivists rather than profit-focused opportunists. The passage maintains that Redemption DVD – a significant name – was the first film label to recognise the 'potential in releasing European exploitation films at a time when Euro horror was dismissed and ignored by most critics and the wider film community' (Salvation Films n.d.). The biography further states that the company has battled censors to get exploitation films released, simultaneously asserting a counter-cultural stance that aligns them with the paracinematic community they serve and an authoritative voice which sees them as fighting for the right for 'lowbrow' cinema to be recognised as art. By utilising the rhetoric of art cinema, Redemption DVD is able to internally supplement its own capital and endorse its own brand identity. The design aesthetic of the films released under the Redemption DVD imprint are strongly informed by this canny sense of self-promotion. Typically composed of stock images of vampires, the sleeves pay little attention to the actual film being sold and seem more concerned with establishing uniformity between releases. For example, *Requiem for a Vampire* (Rollin 1971) shows a generic black and white photo of two female vampires biting each other, while both *The Shiver of the Vampires* (1971) and *Lips of Blood* (1975) feature female vampires in various poses. The fact that these images are not taken from the films themselves effectively positions the director and his filmography as subservient to the Redemption DVD brand. In many ways, the DVDs

become a vessel through which the visibility of the company itself can be increased.

When images from the films themselves are used, they rely heavily on the traditions of exploitation marketing. Half of the images on the back sleeve of *Requiem of a Vampire* focus on chained, semi-nude women. *Lips of Blood* and *The Shiver of the Vampires* go further still, featuring exposed breasts within the thumbnail images (one and two out of four respectively, although women are shown in sheer tops, making it two and three). The Salvation Films and DVD World version of *The Grapes of Death* (Rollin 1978) is even more explicit. The sleeve features an illustration of a nude woman on her knees in front of a clothed man, who is grabbing her hair and pulling it back while holding an axe. This troubling mix of sex and violence, wherein it looks as if the female is being forced to fellate the male, is enhanced by the drawing style, which calls attention to a pair of voluptuous buttocks obscured by a banner stating 'Jean Rollin's Erotic Zombie Movie Classic'. This visual extremity, which is clearly more powerful than the textual passages cited throughout the discussion of Fulci, shows how Redemption DVD (and Salvation Film by extension) keep alive the traditions that have historically defined exploitation cinema marketing. Interestingly, in the case of Redemption DVD, the overall approach they take to paratextual image making opposes the biographical description offered on their website. Rather than presenting these films as forgotten works of art which should be fought for, they are presented in a manner with stifles any claim they could have towards cultural legitimacy. Undoubtedly, suggesting that the films are deserving of a paratextual treatment that encourages readings outside of the exploitation realm is open to debate; however, what is notable is the manner in which these releases ignore the experimentation present within the cinema of Rollin and the swell of academic attention enveloping his work.

Remediation: Restoral and Recovery

As Guins so usefully suggests, the presentation of exploitation cinema on DVD does not always rely on the traditions of the past and is increasingly borrowing from the conventions of art cinema. This effectively creates a hybrid commercial object capable of repairing potentially destructive historical readings and associations. This practice has become an industry unto itself, termed 'retrosploitation' by David Church in his *Grindhouse Nostalgia: Memory, Home Video and Exploitation Film Fandom* (2015: 122). The size of the industry, which is an example of what Rebecca Williams calls 'post-object fandom' (a type of fandom that keeps dormant

properties alive by continued consumption of new merchandise) (2015: 3–4), would make it too difficult to survey in full here. Instead, I look to one of the industry leaders: Arrow Films. While having several sub-branches, including an art film imprint named Arrow Academy, I am concerned here with Arrow Video, the company's exploitation label. Known in the industry for their extensive and carefully designed paratexts, Arrow Video has established itself as a leading force within British exploitation distribution (it has, more recently, expanded to America). Although their competitors – including 88 Films and Second Sight – have adopted their release strategy by offering increasingly extravagant products, Arrow Video's sustained success means it is capable of elevating the status of any film held within its library. Naturally, comparisons can be made to The Criterion Collection, who have developed into influential archivers of film culture due to their elaborate releases (Egan 2017: 68). Whilst Arrow Video operates at the other end of the market, their continued commitment to producing lavish objects allows previously lowly products to adopt the dressings of the 'highbrow'. Whilst evident throughout their catalogue, this is perhaps clearest in their recent handling of *Pieces* (Simón 1982), a Spanish 'slasher' film that is yet to achieve the level of critical success of many of its contemporaries. Nonetheless, the release features a 4K transfer of both the US theatrical version and the director's cut, alongside new commentaries, interviews, featurettes, a soundtrack CD and vinyl, a collector's booklet, a poster, and replica puzzle prop. Herein, Arrow Video's extra labour furnishes the film as 'worthy', making it seem important to the exploitation tradition, and perhaps beyond. In this sense, Arrow Video curates an archive of 'low' cultural products, whereby their releases alter and influence alterative cinematic canons.

Dario Argento is a key figure within both these new home video canons, and this book's effort to establish certain exploitation filmmakers as precursors to the extreme art film tradition. Argento is arguably the most widely celebrated director working within a European exploitation context, being described as the maestro of the Giallo by Alan Jones (2001: 18). Additionally, Maitland McDonagh notes 'the world of Dario Argento is one of twisted logic, rhapsodic violence, [and] stylised excess' (1991: 8), heaping further praise on the 'lowbrow' auteur. Although McDonagh (1991) and Andrew Cooper (2005: 63) assert that the director is mainly celebrated within the paracinematic community, there is critical evidence to suggest that he has achieved a level of official legitimisation afforded to few European exploitation directors. Indeed, Chris Gallant's work is illustrative of this, as he muses about the manner in which the director has surpassed the trappings of his particular production context:

> Perhaps more than anything else, what seems to invite analysis is the placement of this body of work on an overlap between European art cinema and a genre labelled 'Exploitation'. These films disrupt what is so often perceived as an inflexible divide between the artistic and the commercial, high art and low art, forcing a surprisingly easy cohesion between the two. (2001: 7)

This two-way dialogue defines his cinema, as narrative progression becomes secondary to a spectacle of experimental imagery, highly saturated colours, jarring sound and non-conformal editing techniques (Manders 2010).

This status has seen Argento's films distributed in special editions prior to their acquisition by Arrow Video. Notable releases include Anchor Bay's treatment of *Suspiria* (Argento 1977) and *Tenebrae* (Argento 1982). These artefacts borrow the tendencies of art cinema by offering auteur readings and restoral narratives, and lay the foundation for the work continued by Arrow Video. While some Arrow Video releases adopt a traditional hyperbolic tone (for example, the 2015 two-disc Blu-ray of *Tenebrae* promising the film 'returns in all its depraved glory', before claiming the film will '[drench] the viewer in crimson arterial spray'), others implement a far more restrained rhetoric steeped in traditional approaches to cultural validation. The three-disc limited edition Blu-ray release of *Deep Red* (Argento 1975) falls into this latter category. A film often hailed as a Giallo masterpiece, Arrow Video's release of *Deep Red* strives to offer the consumer a historical record of the film. It presents both the original and exported versions of the film, as well as the soundtrack and a thirty-one page hardcover book, while borrowing the academic voice of art cinema throughout its range of exclusive features – particularly the video essay *Profondo Giallo*, which is said to contain 'an in-depth appreciation of *Deep Red*, its themes and its legacy'. Evidently, Arrow Video go to great lengths to discuss the importance of this film to the Giallo sub-genre, and the general legacy of Argento's work. Here, the overall package positions *Deep Red* alongside the art texts so often the focus of elaborate special editions, while encapsulating the growing academic discourse surrounding exploitation cinema in a similar manner to the paratexts of *Peeping Tom* and *Eyes Without a Face*.

The individual importance of a release such as *Deep Red* is clear, as it circulates a new identity for both the film and the director. However, when considering the large-scale impact paratexts can have on the exploitation industry more generally, we must look towards the sheer volume of newly remediated texts. Once more looking at Arrow Video as an example of a larger tradition, the company has released a total of nine Argento films, including the likes of *Inferno* (1980) and *Phenomena* (1985). The

latter was itself given the 'Arrow Video treatment' in May 2017, as it was released as a limited edition box set which featured three different cuts of the film, a sixty-page booklet, soundtracks, a new feature-length documentary, and new audio commentary. Arrow Video have also taken the same approach to certain Fulci films, including the aforementioned 'Gates of Hell' trilogy. Using extensive special features, academic conventions and alternative artwork to frame these films as historically important genre films, Arrow Video's treatment of these exploitation auteurs repairs some of the 'damage' done elsewhere. This creates what Klinger claims is a new system of value, whereby directors are judged via their DVDs (in terms of technical quality and extras), as opposed to their previous status (2006: 31). The emergence of this new hierarchical system suggests the home entertainment industry can be responsible for producing new reputations and is just as adept at bestowing acclamation and capital as traditional channels of authentication (such as critical and scholarly writing).

This process of revaluing the exploitation director within the paratextual domain reaches new heights with Rollin's appearance on the BFI Player. The BFI Player is a video-on-demand service which, according to the digital platform itself, 'enables you to watch great films without subscription [. . .] it contains classic and contemporary films, hand-picked from our festivals, cultural programme and the BFI National Archive' (BFI Player 2014). Within this short introduction, the BFI confirms the quality of the films included on the platform by suggesting they are 'hand-picked'. Tying the service's selection processes to the growing range of hand-selected and hand-finished items available in today's market, the BFI adopt the aura of quality that comes from this more personalised approach. By claiming the films come from their festivals, cultural programming and national archive, the BFI further guarantees the excellence of their product.

The atmosphere of prestige that comes through this introduction impacts the identity of Rollin. In total, nine of his films are available on the streaming platform, including: *The Nude Vampire* (1970); *Requiem for a Vampire*; *The Shiver of the Vampires*; *The Iron Rose* (1973); *Lips of Blood*; *The Grapes of Death*; *Fascination* (1979); *The Night of the Hunted* (1980); and *The Living Dead Girl* (1982). While the BFI Player has a large range of content – certainly larger than their physical distribution profile – Rollin is the best-represented exploitation director on the platform, with his contemporaries receiving far less coverage (Argento and Fulci have two films each on the platform, while Mario Bava has one; and Jess Franco and Ruggero Deodato are not present at all). Predominantly categorised within the 'Classic Horror Collection', which includes the

likes of *Nosferatu* (Murnau 1922), *House of Usher* (Corman 1960) and *Dead Ringers* (Cronenberg 1988), Rollin's films are able to exchange capital not only with the other films included within this collection, but also those across the entire platform. This allows him greater traction in his movements between taste cultures, as his cinema is embalmed in the cultural validity of the BFI label. This is continued on the individual pages of the films, which for the most part avoid hyperbole in favour of more sensitive readings. For example, the blurb for *Requiem for a Vampire* states that 'Jean Rollin had now fully finalised the iconography at the core of his unique vampire mythos' before calling the film 'pure cinema'. This continues as *The Shiver of the Vampires* is called a 'sensory delight', *Lips of Blood* is labelled as 'one of the most sublime works of poetic horror', and *The Iron Rose* is considered 'his most entrancingly poetic [film]' (BFI Player 2014). Although streaming platforms are more subject to flux and change than physical distribution, Rollin's positioning here, even if only temporary, sees a re-appreciation of his filmography. In a larger sense, his appearance on the site is evidence of a widespread reappraisal of certain parts of the exploitation canon, and inadvertently supports this work's recasting of exploitation within the lineage of extreme art cinema and prevailing European film traditions.

This overview could continue indefinitely, as the processes in which DVD and Blu-ray distributors use collector's editions, special editions and director's cuts to turn once marginal and ephemeral horror movies into 'art' (Bernard 2015: 50) is, as stated, a booming industry. However, what is perhaps most important within the examples cited here is the manner in which many of these releases, which have been previously cast as violent and forbidden by distributors and critics, reject – or at least dilute – these reputations in favour more traditional forms of cultural validation. By casting 'lowbrow' directors as auteurs rather than amoral hacks, providing well-researched and detailed contextual frameworks, and making use of the academic voice (through essays and audio commentaries), these modern exploitation distributors adopt modes of presentation that mirror those of the most respected art distributors. Kate Egan labels this method the 'Criterion Treatment', and states that over time it has developed a legitimising function that allows it to affirm which films should be deemed 'important' (2017: 68). Now a major factor in 'low' cultural film distribution, the continued presence of this method helps films escape the horror-film ghetto, and facilitates their inclusion within new cinematic histories. In regard to this study's exploration of extreme art films' home video presence, this move away from hyperbole within the very market sector in which it proved most successful proposes that the

commercial potential of extremity has been overstated and oversimplified. What is actually occurring within these paratextual sites is a complex process of exchange, crossover and hybridisation. These extreme texts, and their paratextual manifestations, are influenced by both the art and exploitation traditions, and are thus part of a multifaceted practice of cultural and commercial representation.

CHAPTER 4

Weekend and *Cannibal Holocaust*: Art, Ballyhoo and Remediation

Jean-Luc Godard's *Weekend* and Ruggero Deodato's *Cannibal Holocaust* have been firmly located within the traditions of 'highbrow' art cinema (*Weekend*) and 'lowbrow' exploitation film (*Cannibal Holocaust*). While these distinctions are useful, this chapter will look to highlight the slippage present between the narratives, in particular the manner in which they use and display the human body. Through this, I will showcase how both films exist as part of the historical trajectory mapped in Chapter 3 and come to inform later portrayals of extremity. Thereafter I will investigate how these two films are commercially presented, paying particular attention to any shared tactics that may cut across traditional marketing customs and extend their textual affinity.

Jean-Luc Godard and *Weekend*

When assessing the career of Godard, links to the French New Wave are unavoidable, due to both the status of the movement and the director's role within it (Marie 2003: 1). As can be investigated elsewhere in more detailed accounts (examples of which include *French Cinema: The A–Z Guide to the 'New Wave'* [Durgnat 1963], *A History of the French New Wave Cinema* [Neupert 2002], *The French New Wave: An Artistic School* [Marie 2003], and *Reading the French New Wave: Critics, Writers and Art Cinema in France* [Ostrowska 2008]), the French New Wave was typified by its rebellion against the mainstream and remains a bastion of the art film tradition. Equally, Godard himself is widely considered as an indispensable component of 'highbrow' film culture. Roundly celebrated within critical and scholarly discourses, the level of 'high' cultural legitimisation afforded Godard's cinema is confirmed in part within the writing of David Nicholls, who introduces the term 'Godardinism' (1979: 22). The quasi-religious nature of the term provides evidence of Godard's enduring legacy, whereby he is repeatedly cast as one of the fundamental

pillars of the art-house scene. Notably I am not going to try to challenge this placement, or lavish further praise on the filmmaker. Rather I am interested in examining the ways this unyielding reputation is presented to the consumer, and how it behaves upon a commercial artefact that has the potential to evoke 'lowbrow' associations.

Weekend is a complex text and has been traditionally understood within the parameters of the art film tradition. Representing the director's move into a more radical type of filmmaking (Morrey 2005: 71) and social critique (Loshitzky 1995: 145), the narrative follows the bourgeois Durands (played by Jean Yanne and Mireille Darc) as they travel across the French countryside in order to murder their respective parents and claim a lucrative inheritance. Throughout their journey, they encounter countless dead bodies, non-fictional and fictional historical characters, and a band of hippie revolutionaries. In keeping with the formal experimentation that dominated Godard's career prior to *Weekend,* both Jan Dawson (1968) and Brian Henderson (1970–1) find a relationship between form and content. Herein, the visual extremity – which will be explored below – is matched by a formal extremity, in which narrative is at times utterly abandoned in favour of historical digressions or political statements (Westbrook 2005: 135). This has led certain scholars to conclude that the film pushed the cinematic medium to its limits (Macbean 1968–9: 35), proving its importance to the culture of art cinema and the significance it places on forms of experimentation.

Although these aspects confirm Godard's place within the 'high' cultural sphere, they do not explicitly express his importance to the historical development of extreme art cinema, or the manner in which the film could evoke the 'lowbrow'. In order to do that, *Weekend*'s portrayal of the body must be explored in line with the discussion held throughout this book. Taking Corrine Durand's story of sexual fetish and the climactic act of cannibalism as examples of cultural slippage, it can be suggested that Godard's film co-opts and reframes the customs of exploitation cinema within the conventions of the French art film tradition. Firstly, even though Corrine's anecdotal tale of her involvement within a bizarre orgy rejects eroticism due to the darkness of the sequence (Morrey 2005: 74), it still shocks the audience due to the content of the story. Although somewhat tame when compared to the sexual transgression seen in contemporary cinema, Godard inescapably dips into the lexicon of the exploitation tradition, using the tale to astound and challenge the audience in ways unavailable to the mainstream.

Perhaps more obvious examples of crossover and inversion can be evidenced during the sequences in which Corrine is raped, the multiple

bloodied corpses encountered by the couple as they undertake their road trip, and the sequence of genuine animal slaughter (explored in more detail in my chapter 'Animal Snuff' [Hobbs 2016] in *Snuff: Real Death and Screen Media* [Jackson et al. 2016]), which sees a goose and pig slain on-screen. Although the rape is obscured by scenery, the dead bodies become interchangeable with the smashed automobiles, and the unsimulated slaughter of animals is amalgamated with political statements, the slippage between 'high' and 'low' visual registers remains clear. Yet the most recognisable moment of cultural hybridity comes during the film's finale, wherein a trope entrenched within the mores of exploitation cinema penetrates the 'high' cultural space of art film. As Corrine converses with her hippie captor, she eats a piece of meat which is said to be a mixture of animal flesh and her deceased husband. Through the ingestion of Roland, she becomes the ultimate consumer; being a cannibal not only in the sense of eating human meat, but also the bourgeois life she had previously led. Evidently, *Weekend* uses and reframes certain images and motifs that have defined exploitation cinema and its counter-cultural approach. Of course this is not to exile Godard's film from its position within 'highbrow', or to suggest that its portrayal of extremity is on the level of later films. There are differing degrees of extremity present within a category such as extreme art cinema and we must view acts of cinematic transgression in line with the moral frameworks and cinematic standards of the time during which they were produced. In this sense, *Weekend*'s hybridity exists as a significant moment in the formation of an extreme art film aesthetic. By using the human body as a canvas for rape, sex and cannibalism, *Weekend* not only builds on the extreme art film lineage established by directors such as Luis Buñuel and Ingmar Bergman, but also provides moments of transgression that can potentially be decontextualised on entrance to the market. The latter part of this chapter will explore whether *Weekend*'s paratextual presentation reflects this cultural duality and capitalises on its prospective commerciality, or becomes more directly funnelled into the art space Godard traditionally inhabits.

Ruggero Deodato and *Cannibal Holocaust*

Deodato's *Cannibal Holocaust* serves as a suitable counterpoint to Godard's narrative, as it is widely regarded as one of the most violent exploitation films ever made. Professor Harold Monroe (played by Robert Kerman) is searching for a lost group of documentary filmmakers, whom he soon discovers have been killed by an indigenous jungle tribe. He is able to recover their footage and the narrative then shifts into a screening of their

rushes. The 'real' footage illustrates how the group of young filmmakers provoked several events to gain more sensationalist material, including the burning of the natives' huts, raping female tribeswomen and encouraging brutal abortions. Within this split narrative structure the film employs the now common premise of 'found' footage, an aesthetic and thematic construct that Julian Petley neatly summarises:

> The 'found' footage itself is an absolute compendium of visual devices which one associates with the documentary mode [. . .] shaky, hand-held camerawork, accidental compositions, crash zooms, blurred images, lens flare, inaudible or intermittent sound, direct address to camera, scratches and lab marks on the print. (2005: 178)

Crucially, the 'reality' of the images was enhanced by the actual slaughter of several animals, whose indexical bodies break through the layers of fictional meaning (Van Ooijen 2011: 10). Unlike *Weekend*, these images were placed far less obviously within a political framework, meaning their deaths, and the 'found' footage aesthetics, made the film an easy target for censorship. Within Britain, the film became embroiled within the video nasty scandal and quickly became a symbol of the type of 'sadism' the moral campaigners were protesting against. To this day it remains difficult to detach the film from this history and therefore the title *Cannibal Holocaust* carries certain cultural implications, synonymous with ideas surrounding extreme violence, marginalisation, controversy, exclusivity, legality, illegitimacy and disgust.

Winston Wheeler Dixon's claim that the film is 'inherently inhumane and senselessly cruel' (2010: 138) can be approached as a singular instance of a much larger scholarly impression whereby the film is condemned and demonised. Additionally, the narrative, due to its jungle setting, has been accused of containing colonial undertones (Jauregui 2004) which mirror the troubling representations common within mondo cinema. Together these readings seem to relegate the film to the ghetto of 'lowbrow' cinema, whereby it can have little impact on the hybridised tradition that this work seeks to highlight. However, other scholars have approached the film differently, offering less sensationalist readings. For example, the film's sophisticated use of realism, which borrows heavily from the traditions of the Italian Neo-realists, has been said to make profound statements about media violence (Morgan 2006: 557). This of course is a concern which defines the work of extreme art filmmakers such as Pier Paulo Pasolini and Michael Haneke and pervades through 'highbrow' art cinema. Once again I am not seeking to challenge or support either reading; however the existence of a counter-argument offers a secondary channel through which *Cannibal Holocaust* can be represented. Rather than being merely

an excessive and sensationalist exploitation film, Deodato's narrative is becoming a site of academic debate and has, in many ways, started to be redeemed in certain sectors of the academic field. This additional reading – while not any 'better' than one that suggests the film is gratuitous – is of real interest to the broader paratextuality of extreme art cinema, and it suggests exploitation films, regardless of previous standings, can adopt the traditions of the 'highbrow'.

In order to strengthen this claim, *Cannibal Holocaust* can be assessed in relation to the transgressions apparent within *Weekend*. By undertaking this examination, I am not seeking to apologise for Deodato's film, or suggest it is an art film. What I am looking to underscore is the manner in which extreme art cinema is informed by a series of films which hybridise 'highbrow' and 'lowbrow', and the frequency with which films from different ends of the cultural spectrum draw from a communal pool of aesthetic and thematic trappings. Naturally, certain films remain 'lower' than others, but my work is not so much about redemption as it is about recognising the ways in which cinematic extremity is a result of taste slippage. It was noted earlier that the eroticism within *Weekend* was obscured, allowing Godard to question the viewer's objectification of the female form (Loshitzky 1995: 146). Within *Cannibal Holocaust*, there are numerous images of the naked body, exposing a basic aesthetic difference between exploitation and art cinema. However, it is wrong to assume that the depiction of nudity within Deodato's narrative simply seeks to provide sexual stimulation. The majority of nude images work in conjunction with the realist register to present indexical symbols of reality. Alongside these images are several sequences of rape, which although complying with the brutality expected within the exploitation field, illustrate a desexualisation of the female body akin to that present within *Weekend*. The female form is often concealed by the found footage style (instances of lens flair and shaky camera cloak the bodies) or mud, while if the audience chooses to adopt the allegory of western savagery, the scenes are sanctioned by an active political message – or in the least become less gratuitous.

Associations can be again drawn between the uses of cannibalism. Whereas the cannibalism within Deodato's film is more in keeping with the spectacle expected from the exploitation genre, it still supports the prevailing metaphor. Monroe voyeuristically watches the eroticised 'other' and their indigenous practices, before consuming the human flesh of the lost documentarians. Consequently Monroe's cannibalism operates as an act of ultimate consumption akin to that of Corrine, as he eats the film's most obvious consumers – the documentary crew. Therefore, rather than merely approach *Cannibal Holocaust* as a sensationalist piece of

filmmaking, it is useful to recognise the way it comments upon the dangers of violent imagery and the fragility of truth. Importantly, doing so does not discount its power to shock and disgust, but, as Julian Petley insists, *Cannibal Holocaust* is 'a kind of art movie, it does so many things art movies do. It's very self-reflective. If it wasn't for the nature of the subject [. . .] I think people would have taken it rather more seriously' (interview with author, London, 21 January 2013). While clearly the film enjoys the cache of being the ultimate extreme film, some of the scholarship addressing it also allows it to be framed in more political terms. The question then is: how do distributors market the film?

The Paratext

Weekend*: DVD Aesthetic, Marketing and Paratextual Identity*

Weekend was released by Artificial Eye in 2005. As established in Chapter 3, the first point of discussion should be directed towards the distributor handling the release, as their cultural trace influences the film's paratextual life. Artificial Eye is Britain's prevailing art cinema distributor, responsible for releasing the works of Andrei Tarkovsky, Krzysztof Kieslowski, Michael Haneke, and the Dardenne brothers, as well as films such as *Russian Ark* (Sokurov 2002) and *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* (Mungiu 2007). With the likes of BFI Distribution, The Criterion Collection and Eureka! Masters of Cinema focusing their distribution programmes on historical art films, Artificial Eye are free to obtain and distribute the majority of contemporary 'highbrow' productions and festival films. Consequently, Artificial Eye is able to preserve a 'high' cultural status, as it carefully maintains and oversees a constantly self-updating process of legitimisation: the films released under their imprint help to position the company as a proprietor of 'worthy' cinema, while simultaneously any title carrying their branding instantly assumes the label's pre-circulating identity. In the first instance, the capital of the film – amassed independently through the traditional channels of accumulation (auteur status, national branding, festival involvement, and critical acclaim) – becomes fused to the company when they take on the release. Over time, these past associations build, bestowing the logo, branding and cover designs employed by the company with an aura of prestige and esteem. This process of capital exchange relates to Jacques Derrida's theory of trace, as any new film released under the company's umbrella benefits from these earlier successes. Herein the name 'Artificial Eye' harbours a readymade level of cultural recognition, powerful enough to vindicate a film's entry into the 'high' cultural sphere.

Fundamental to this process is the construction and repeated promotion of a recognisable brand identity. By repeatedly using a uniform design aesthetic, Artificial Eye has been able to produce an unbroken link between their branding and the films they release. While the company has recently shifted to a freer-flowing narrative image, the standardisation of their early paratexts helped to establish the imprint's position within the 'high' cultural space. The early, or traditional design – which is no longer used by the company – was comprised of a horizontally split cover. The top half was filled with a relevant film still, and featured a vertical dark green strip along the spine which contained the Artificial Eye logo. The grey bottom half displayed the film's title, presented in a uniform typeface in large white letters; the director's name, again in white typography but smaller and framed within a red rectangular box; a quotation from a publication which carried its own 'highbrow' association; and any additional information regarding noteworthy festival activities. While small differences occurred from title to title (sometimes the director's name appeared in the top half, above the film still), this model remained largely consistent.

The contemporary design, unsurprisingly used on modern releases (both in regard to the production date of the film and release date of the product, therefore some older films that are awarded re-releases are presented under this newer model), allows for a greater sense of individuality whilst making use of marketing attributes more palatable to a mainstream home entertainment culture. The spine detail is still present, allowing these new releases to fit comfortably into an existing collection, yet the body of the cover is less disciplined. The sleeve is constructed around a montage of relevant images, or features a reproduction of the film's poster. Furthermore, the uniform typeface is replaced by the film's specific typography, as the award credentials are more sporadically positioned alongside actors' names, multiple quotes and taglines. Hence the covers more readily adopt a film's pre-established narrative image, allowing the DVD/Blu-ray release to more readily commodify any prestige accrued during theatrical runs or festival involvement. This change ushers in a larger break with tradition, as the minimalism of the early design aesthetic – with its greys and blacks – came to represent the sophistication of the filmic product, and the exclusivity of the demographic. The object did not present itself as exciting or eye-catching; rather the films were sold on the strength of the narrative's reputation, the name of the director, or the branding of Artificial Eye itself. In essence, the traditional model saw an inversion of the hyperbolic image-making seen throughout mainstream and 'lowbrow' markets, wherein products are made as noticeable as possible through the adoption of bright colours, star branding, transgressive

imagery, or bespoke packaging. Although the shift to a less regimented mode of representation is perhaps illustrative of a broadening of art cinema's demographic, it also underlines the importance of the paratext to understanding contemporary art film culture, and its potential struggles within a diminishing market sector.

The Cover

The cover that adorns the 2005 release of *Weekend* provides an intriguing case study in relation to the differing designs described above. *Weekend*'s cover is black, with the graphic motif 'WEEKEND' repeated in a staggered pattern across the top half of the sleeve (see Figure 4.1). The bottom half contains Godard's name and a quotation from *Time Out*. Although this is not an archetypal traditional design due to the bottom half being black rather than grey, its release date and overall composition – which relies on a strict horizontal division – is reminiscent of the traditionalist design.

The 'WEEKEND' motif is a key feature of the design, and influences the consumer's understanding of the paratextual artefact. Firstly, the word, although repeated twenty-four times in full, is individually smaller than Godard's name. The 'Jean-Luc Godard' heading dominates the bottom of the sleeve, being as long as a whole line of the repeated pattern, while using larger letters (the upper-case letters within the 'Jean-Luc Godard' banner are 1.4cm tall, while the lower-case letters are 1cm tall, contrasting against the letters within the 'WEEKEND' motif, which are 0.7cm tall). The size of an author's name on a cover relates directly to their cultural reputation (Genette 1997: 38–39) and tells us much about the way they are regarded by the distributor and the wider market. In this case, the scale of Godard's name suggests he is a figure of real eminence and allows him to overpower the cover in ways not seen upon other Artificial Eye releases. This codes the object under his established brand identity, while additionally allowing the distributor to borrow a portion of his cultural renown. This is an example of the types of capital exchange which commonly occur upon the paratextual object, as all three participants – film, director and distributor – benefit from being in close proximity to each other. It also shows that Godard is a key commercial draw for the object, suggesting his legacy is more significant than the sum of its parts, while allowing Artificial Eye to use this association in later releases.

The 'WEEKEND' motif is also significant due to its French colour palette and the national reading the tricolour engenders. Daniel Hickin and Martin Barker discuss the significance of French-ness, with Hickin

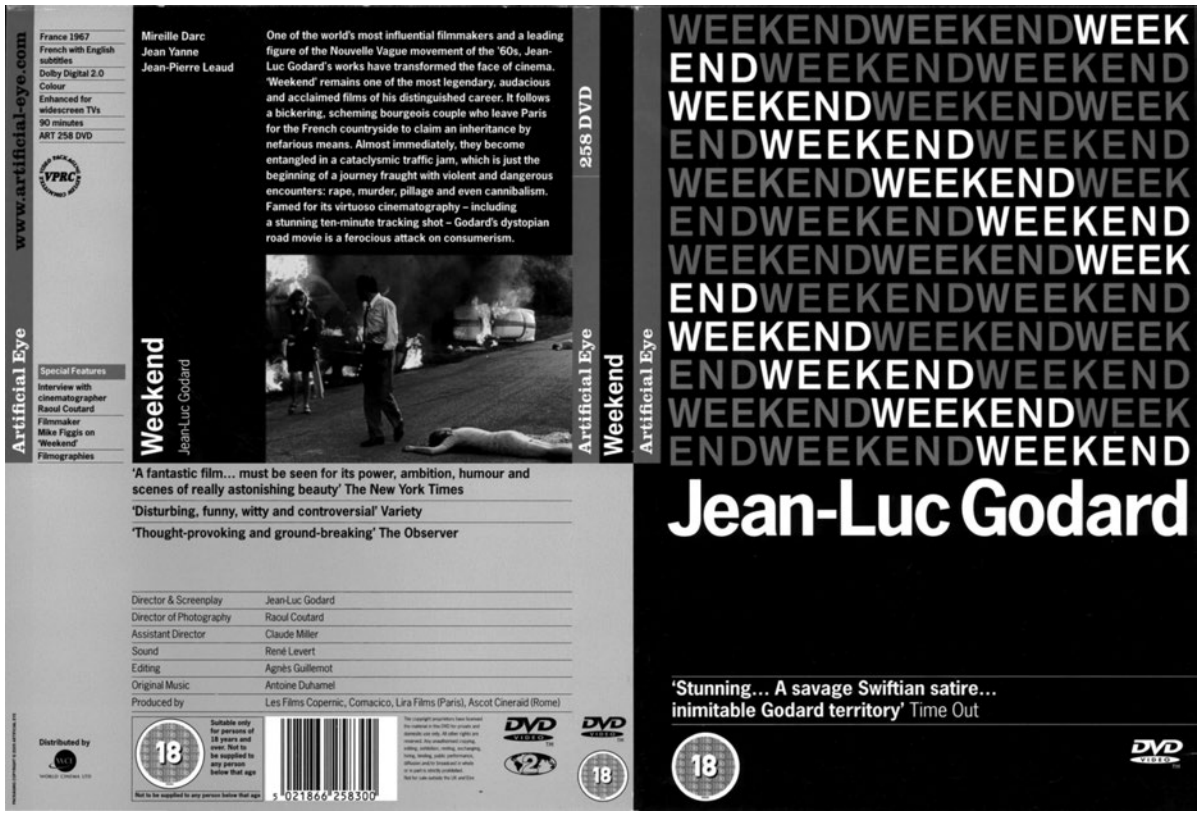

Figure 4.1 *Weekend* DVD artwork. (Source: © Curzon Artificial Eye.)

insisting that it harbours preconceptions regarding levels of intellectualism (2011: 125) and Barker stating it signifies seriousness (2011: 110). Artificial Eye trade off these associations, combining it with their existing reputation and the heavy branding of Godard to confirm the quality of their product and secure it within the 'highbrow' space. However, it is important not to ignore the potential of a secondary reading of the tricolour. As stated, French cinema has become associated with sleaze due to the heightened sexual explicitness of certain national productions. Over time this has developed and by 2005, French film culture had become firmly established as the leading producer of cinematic extremity. Progressing French cinema's pre-existing risqué status to new levels, French filmmakers such as Gaspar Noé, Catherine Breillat and Bruno Dumont had been placed in francocentric movements such as the 'New French Extremity' (Quandt 2004: 127), 'cinema du corps' (Palmer 2011: 57) and 'French Extreme' (Beugnet and Ezra 2010: 33). Furthermore, French horror was undergoing a resurgence, with excessive narratives such as *Switchblade Romance* (Aja 2003) becoming infamous for depicting gory visions of bodily destruction. Even though Godard's film pre-dates these associations by decades, the DVD release comes at the height of their production, distribution and cultural circulation. In this sense, the paratextual object collects, borrows and represents implications that were not available during its initial release – potentially broadening its commercial appeal by trading off the newly established reputation of the country.

The revision of the film in light of the changing status of French cinema is further prevalent within the choices made on the back of the sleeve. The selected image shows the blood-covered Durands walking on a road, flanked by burning cars and dead bodies. The image hyperbolically represents one of the most visually arresting moments in the film and relies heavily on stereotypical images of post-apocalyptic worlds so often seen within mainstream cinema. Most importantly, it is the only visual representation of the text offered by the object, and therefore wields considerable power in shaping expectations of the narrative world. In this example, the image alludes to a grand visual spectacle, somewhat underplaying the complexities of Godard's message. The description of the film, which opens with the statement 'one of the world's most influential filmmakers and a leading figure of the Nouvelle Vague movement of the 60s, Jean-Luc Godard's works have transformed the face of cinema', begins to quell the rather fantastical nature of this image. By bestowing further capital onto the already celebrated director, the declaration confirms his position in upper echelons of 'legitimate' culture, suggesting there is more to the image than simple spectacle. This authorial validation is then

used to confirm the importance of *Weekend*: '[*Weekend*] remains one of the most legendary, audacious and acclaimed films of his distinguished career'. The reliance on terminology that alludes to previous legitimisation ('acclaimed', 'legendary', 'influential' and 'distinguished') promotes the film's 'high' cultural credentials, contemporising its importance to a new audience.

However, the blurb also supports the film's identity as the scandalous other, as it moves on to describe the narrative as a 'journey fraught with violent and dangerous encounters: rape[s], murder[s], pillage[s] and even cannibalism'. This short list selects the most sensationalist, and therein exploitative, moments within the film's narrative, isolating them in order to exaggerate their prominence. Consequently they operate as a commercially generated dare, analogous to the ballyhoo rhetoric used by circus barkers, carnival showmen and exploitation filmmakers. Exploitation narrative *I Spit on Your Grave* (Zarchi 1978) used a similar list-based approach:

> Briggs then reads the original copy from the poster [. . .] 'This woman has just cut, chopped, broken and burned five men beyond recognition . . . and no jury in America would convict her' [. . .] Briggs adds with glee, 'But they don't call 'em exploitation movies for nothing; do they?' These comments demonstrate Briggs' delight in the details and trappings of the exploitation genre; in the way a film like *I Spit On Your Grave* is sold to an audience, emphasising the violence and drama. (Fidler 2009: 44–5)

Weekend's narrative is therefore restructured into a series of digestible, exploitative incidents. The dramatic nature of this list-based marketing technique is supported by one of the accompanying quotations. Although the other statements from *The New York Times* and *The Observer* foreground the film's art-house credence ('a fantastic film . . . must be seen for its power, ambition, humour and scenes of really astonishing beauty' and 'thought-provoking and ground-breaking'), the quotation accredited to *Variety* sustains and strengthens the film's relationship to exploitation cinema. The quotation, which reads 'disturbing, funny, witty and controversial', undoubtedly uses words such as 'disturbing' and 'controversial' to capitalise on the commerciality of disgust and marginalisation rather than artistic authentication and auteurism.

Consequently, the cover drifts between an endorsement of Godard and France's art film heritage and a promotion of the film's latent extremity. Undeniably, the cover's distortion of the film's violence is an exemplar of the ways cinematic extremity can be used on paratextual material to alter – even if only slightly – a film's identity. To return to

the triangulated taste model introduced in Chapter 2, this paratextual object, while clearly placing art cinema at its apex, actively courts a more scandalous image. Yet in order to fully explore how the product shapes the cultural understanding of *Weekend*, it is vital to consider whether this convergence of art and exploitation carries through onto the special features.

The Disc

The disc contains three extras – two documentaries; *Interview with Cinematographer Raoul Coutard* and *Mike Figgis on 'Weekend'*, and a selection of digitalised filmographies. By no means an extensive array of featurettes, they still perform a key role in shaping the audience's understanding of the text. *Interview with Cinematographer Raoul Coutard* is, as expected, an interview with Raoul Coutard. However, the manner in which the cinematographer's cultural status is assembled is central to understanding the motivations of Artificial Eye and the way they want the audience to understand the product. Notably, the interview quickly makes the viewer aware that Coutard worked on *À Bout De Souffle* (Godard 1960), Godard's most accessible and well-loved film. In so doing, the interview uses the film as a shorthand for quality, allowing *Weekend* to claim some of the prestige accrued by the seminal text. Moreover, it increases the status of Coutard, proving that he is a significant subject worthy of viewers' attention. Finally, it validates Artificial Eye, as his status – which they are at pains to advertise – proves they are able to attract figures of note and prominence. While this may be the case, the interview is ultimately about Coutard's relationship to Godard, rather than his own career. Despite the fact that Coutard explains the construction of certain shots, the focus always returns to the director and his vision, with the interviewer Colin MacCabe describing Godard as a leading figure in international cinema. As such the feature is an extension of the auteur branding seen on the cover and simply uses Coutard as a vessel through which the legitimisation of director can be validated. This is echoed in Coutard's biography, which although positioning him as 'one of the world's most respected cinematographers', summarises his career outside of his collaborations with Godard within a single sentence.

However, alongside the authentication of Godard is the underlying notion that he was difficult to work with. Coutard cites Godard's poor treatment of Darc, claiming he enjoyed humiliating her, continuing that 'he would hurt people on the team'. These statements cast the director as a dislikeable rouge, challenging the widespread celebration of Godard and his general omnipotence. Alongside this is the aesthetic composition

of the interview footage itself, which is littered with unsteady zooms and characterised by a sub-quality stock. This contradicts the 'high' cultural image the feature is endeavouring to promote whilst opposing the established view that the DVD, especially that under the care of a well-respected art film distributor, is an item of superior quality. Indeed, a similar aesthetic defines the second featurette. Although the content confirms Godard's position as an auteur – with Figgis vocalising his admiration for the director throughout – the sub-standard image once more channels the aesthetic more familiar to the bootlegged releases that defined early exploitation film distribution. While the latter observation does not necessarily advance the object's extremity – or speak of the film's themes – it does recall the work of Joan Hawkins (2000), who claimed the 'lowbrow' industry cared little for the manner in which their content was delivered. The pirated aesthetic gives the feature an edge that is not often seen in the pristine and perfect featurettes that define the likes of The Criterion Collection and the BFI, altering the cultural perception of Artificial Eye.

Thus the thematic slippage present within the narrative of *Weekend* bleeds a little onto the film's paratextual presentation. Apparent mostly upon the DVD cover, exploitation tactics – such as hyperbolic phrases and sensationalist images – are employed in order to scandalise the artefact. While it would be too much to suggest that these factors have a sustained impact on the status of *Weekend*, it does underscore the extent to which distributors of extreme art films continue to adopt multi-layered narrative images to further the commercial visibility of their products.

Cannibal Holocaust*: DVD Aesthetic, Marketing and Paratextual Identity*

Shameless Screen Entertainment (hereafter Shameless), a sizeable cult cinema distributor specialising in Italian exploitation films from the 1970s and 1980s, released *Cannibal Holocaust* on both DVD and Blu-ray in 2011. Their transfer represents the least cut version of the film legally available within Britain and therefore something of an event in the history of the text. The company has released other Deodato films, including Deodato's *House on the Edge of the Park* (1980), as well as violent 'classics' such as Lucio Fulci's aforementioned *The New York Ripper*. Shameless, like many exploitation distribution companies, are reliant on forming a strong relationship with their demographic in order bestow their releases with an appropriate level of sub-cultural capital. In order to generate this feeling of good will, Shameless actively engage with their consumer base through

their official forum (Shameless Screen Entertainment Official Forum n.d). The website, which has passed its heyday due to the diminishing output of the company, has several main threads, including: 'Current and Upcoming Shameless Titles', 'The Shameless Collection', 'Why Don't Shameless Release . . .?', and 'Shamelessly Creative'. While interactivity on the site has lessened, its existence is crucial in identifying Shameless's demographic as a fan community, as fans have increasingly congregated on the internet (Cherry 2010: 69). Moreover, the threads, especially 'Why Don't Shameless Release . . .?' or 'Shamelessly Creative', encourage the consumer to actively engage with the company, an important aspect of modern fandom:

> This ability to transform personal reaction into social interaction, spectatorial culture into participatory culture, is one of the central characteristics of fandom. One becomes a 'fan' not by being a regular viewer of a particular program but by translating that viewing into some kind of cultural activity. (Jenkins 2006: 41)

In the same manner as Artificial Eye, Shameless maintains a strong market presence by relying upon a uniform design aesthetic. Inspired by the Italian Giallo tradition – which is typically made up of inexpensive crime, horror and murder mystery novels – Giallos (the Italian for 'yellow' is *giallo*) got their name from the yellow covers they were commonly presented in. Shameless appropriates this colour scheme, using yellow covers and boxes throughout their catalogue (even on Blu-ray, where coloured boxes are considerably rarer). Essential to the accumulation of sub-cultural capital, the colour palette instigates a complex process of communication in which both distributor and consumer must understand the importance of the reference and receive pleasure in decoding its meaning. The sense of exclusivity garnered from understanding this reference, and being 'in' the elite club the company is speaking to, is enhanced by both the company's name – which clearly champions its own 'low' cultural status – and the taglines and images used throughout their sleeve designs. For example, the release of Joe D'Amato's *Love Goddess of the Cannibals* (D'Amato 1978) features the taglines 'You'll die of pleasure!' and 'Hold on to your manhood, the Love Goddess is hungry!' alongside multiple images of female nudity. Herein, the cultish status of the Shameless brand is both confirmed and advertised, allowing it to operate outside the mainstream and cultivate a niche demographic of dedicated consumers. As such, the brand identity of Shameless is split between a ballyhoo marketing tactic entrenched within 'lowbrow' cultural practices and a sophisticated understanding of generic codes, fan desires, national contexts and historical conventions.

The Cover

This release of *Cannibal Holocaust* offers two different cuts of the film: an almost uncut version, which is missing fourteen seconds of excessive animal suffering (which, in line with BBFC guidelines, remains illegal) – and a new Deodato re-edit, which removes the animal slaughter entirely. Both of these cuts alter the perception of the previously banned product and shape the expectations of the audience. The near uncut version is almost oxymoronic as it offers two competing readings. Firstly, it shares an inescapable relationship to the hyperbolic, as it promises the most violent version of the narrative to a viewer who wants to see as much as possible. By including previously unavailable footage, the cut undoubtedly offers the most extreme version of an already extreme text, thus upping the ante even further. Alternatively, it encourages viewers to perceive the release as 'authentic' – presumably coming as close as one can to the 'original' film. This is essential, as previous releases of this – and many other European horror titles of this era – were positioned as objects of low quality due to the numerous cuts they received (Guins 2005: 21). Ultimately, the restoral of the narrative to its most authentic and complete form returns authority to the director – enabling Deodato to reclaim ownership over his film. This is a concept supported by the newly commissioned Deodato cut, which addresses both the film's previous censorial issues and the director's feelings of remorse and guilt. Combined, the two cuts propose an auteur reading of the film, a type of branding Stephen Thrower claims is rare within the exploitation industry (2007: 18). Yet, as is increasingly common in the exploitation field, the previously 'lowbrow' product is draped in the familiar furnishings of cultural worth, promoting the film as an artistically led piece of filmmaking deserving reappraisal, reconsideration and revision.

The DVD has a 'collector's reversible sleeve', which through its phrasing shows the nature of the targeted demographic. The product is aiming to attract an audience who cares about these additions and the 'cult' object in a more general sense. The covers themselves balance familiarity and originality, historical authenticity and newness, as they provide both a newly commissioned piece of artwork and a carefully recreated reproduction. The first cover (see Figure 4.2) – which offers a new narrative image for the film – features an artistically stylised version of the film's iconic 'impaled woman' scene and contains the key ingredients of extreme horror marketing. The silhouetted image combines sex and violence, as the cascading red blood flows down the nude female body. Of course, this externally facing representation of extremity points towards the transgressions of the internal text, promising the consumer a violent

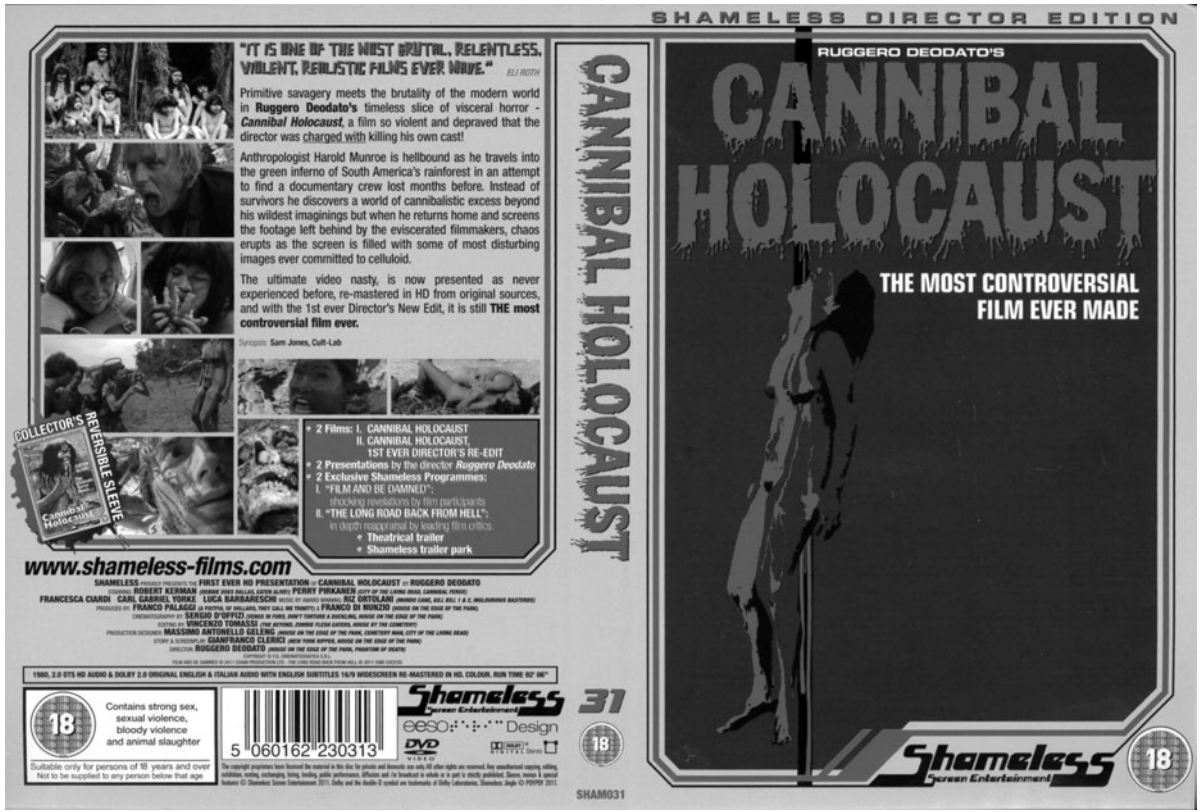

Figure 4.2 The newly commissioned *Cannibal Holocaust* DVD artwork. (Source: © Shameless Screen Entertainment.)

spectacle and preparing them for a particular narrative experience. This visual extremity is supported by linguistic ballyhoo, as the tagline reads 'the most controversial film ever made'. This declaration further entices the potential consumer, daring them to test themselves against the controversies within. The packaging continues to challenge and goad the audience, as the blurb on the back of the box insists that the film was 'so violent and depraved that the director was charged with killing his own cast!' (emphasis in original) before restating its earlier claim: 'still **THE most controversial film ever**' (emphasis in original). The repetition of the tagline strengthens the assertion, while the addition of the word 'still' alongside the capitalisation of 'the' contemporises the proclamation. Through this statement, Shameless play with the historicity of the film. They acknowledge its past before advising that the film should not be considered a nostalgic piece of extremity, rather a relevant text within the current horror climate. This places the film alongside, and in competition with, contemporary productions – ensuring a present-day audience that the transgressions will match their modern standards.

The trend of contemporising the film continues with the sole quotation on the back cover: 'it is one of the most brutal, relentless, violent, realistic films ever made'. Though drawing neat parallels to the *Variety* quote used on the *Weekend* release, this particular statement is more important due to its source: Eli Roth. A key figure in modern horror cinema and well-known *Cannibal Holocaust* fan, the mention of Roth allows the artefact to borrow his valuable sub-cultural trace. Working in the same manner to those sources that adorned the *Weekend* release, Roth's name legitimises the film within a specific community – in this case the horror film community – while making it relatable to a modern audience more accustomed to the 'torture porn' films of Roth and his contemporaries. Thus the first cover retains a balance between historical reputation and contemporary relevance, enabling the paratext to transcend the type of temporal limitations the narrative cannot.

The second cover – which is an exact replica of the original 1982 Go Video release – is more forthcoming in its engagement with the history of the text. The cover actively fosters a nostalgic response to the video nasty scandal, and proudly embraces any potential cultural baggage that comes with that reading. Featuring a drawn 'savage' eating flesh (see Figure 4.3), the image shows what Kate Egan refers to as the forbidden spectacle of violence (2007: 52) and is steeped in national memories relating to extreme cinema, moral campaigning and video censorship. By reproducing this traditional video nasty design aesthetic, the object classifies itself as marginal, yet increases its desirability within an existing fan base.

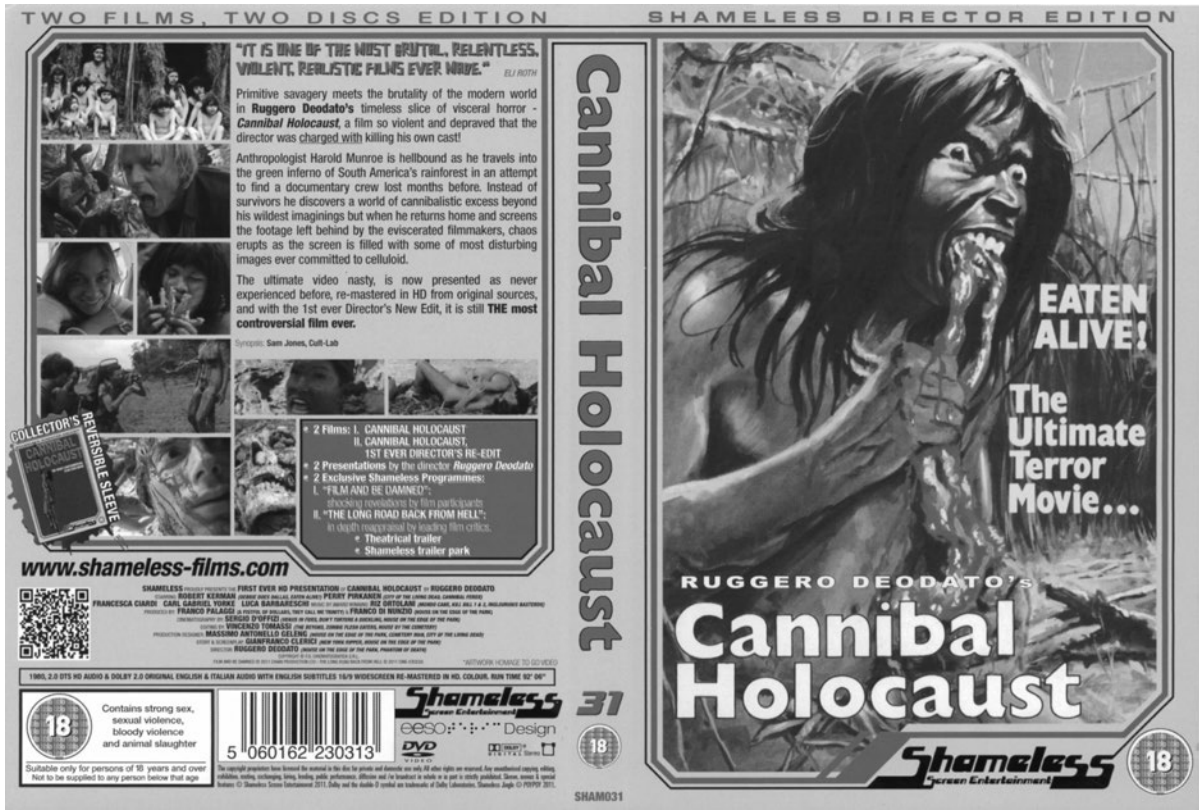

Figure 4.3 The reproduced Go Video cover. (Source: © Shameless Screen Entertainment.)

Mapped in detail in Egan's *Trash or Treasure? Censorship and the Changing Meanings of the Video Nasties* (Egan 2007), the video nasty fandom exists 'as a marked example of how past nationally-specific commercial and political circumstance can inform [. . .] present day video collections, and the hierarchies of selection, value and categorisation through which such collections are constructed' (Egan 2007: 157–8). As Lincoln Geraghty claims, the appropriation and duplication of nostalgia is imperative to the consumption cultures of fan communities (2014: 61–4), and therefore this replica artwork partakes in a longstanding dialogue between the industry and the consumer. In fact, nostalgia within contemporary exploitation distribution has become increasingly important to a fan base which draws value from the historicity of a text (Church 2015: 3).

The importance of this image to the surrounding fan community becomes clear when the dedicated Go Video website is considered. Set up by fans for 'fellow collectors', the site allows enthusiasts to measure the significance of their pre-certificated video nasties by viewing the artwork of past Go Video releases, collating their desirability and authenticating the value of their objects. On the *Cannibal Holocaust* page (Cannibal Holocaust Go 121 n.d.), the film's rarity as a pre-certificated VHS sporting this cover artwork is rated at two stars (out of a possible five), while its desirability gets the full five stars. Evidently, Shameless look to capitalise on this 'desirability', as they are keenly aware of the continued importance of the text within these dedicated fan bases. Yet the cover is not mere exploitation on the part of Shameless. The website's grading system exposes the level of engagement present within the Go Video fan community, while illustrating the importance of authenticity to their activities, consumption practices and collecting habits. In this sense, while Shameless 'cash in' on the value the image retains within a pre-existing fandom, they also need the image to authenticate themselves to that same community. Petley advances this discussion by stating:

> You couldn't really not have that cover could you? In our country that became so iconic of the movie, you know it's in fairly bad taste and is fairly shocking, but I think [. . .] not having it, one would have wondered why it was not there. It seems to me at least in the UK, not perhaps in other countries, it has become [. . .] part of the movie text. (interview with author, London, 21 January 2013)

Essentially Petley and the work of Egan indicate that an exclusion of this artwork would affect the product's credibility within a knowing and sub-culturally rich fandom. Though this is a commercial decision in the most part, and allows the product to be accepted by the very audience most likely to consume it, it does also serve a function beyond the closed

space of video nasty fandom. As the image seeks to accurately replicate the original object, it forces the new artefact to adopt the role of a modernised archival article. By bringing the past into the present, the product maintains a level of historical, cultural and national importance within the British market, not only as a signifier for the film, but also the nationally based controversy.

It would be wrong to ignore the hyperbolic nature of the cover and the widely recognised cultural stigma it retains. Petley has mentioned that the use of the cover can be seen as existing within inverted commas, a joke entrenched within a communal knowledge of the film's censorial history (interview with author, London, 21 January 2013). Egan supports these claims, stating that re-released versions of the video nasties trade off the visual humour of the replicated covers rather than trying to rekindle the controversy (2007: 205–11). However, due to the purposeful application of exploitation marketing techniques apparent throughout the rest of the cover, wherein eight of the nine small images on the jacket's reverse focus on violent or sexual themes, the image's commitment to originality can be framed, in part, as a provocative gesture. While less 'successful' in invoking a widespread disavowal of the film, the cover's previous associations and marginality do not represent a 'joke' for all, and can only be understood in those terms by an audience familiar with the video nasty scandal and its modes of marketing. Thus, for those outside of the dedicated community, the image can further the film's entrenchment within the exploitation realm, existing as another example of sensationalist marketing.

The Disc

The product's complex relationship to history is also pivotal to the release's extra features. However, before the audience can gain access to these supplementary materials, they are shown three trailers. These trailers, which are included on disc one of this two-disc set, are vital to understanding how Shameless want viewers to approach this film, and the product as a whole. Alongside the more traditional paratextual features, these trailers extend the narrative world of the film, locating *Cannibal Holocaust* within particular frames of reference and building certain expectations of the narrative experience. The first trailer, which is for Deodato's *House on the Edge of the Park*, strengthens the auteur brand of the director, showing a glimpse of his wider filmography. The second trailer strays from this auteurist notion, advertising *Don't Torture a Duckling* (Fulci 1972). Mirroring the approach of the first trailer, the advertisement relies on images of nudity and brutality. The final trailer is for another Italian film: *The New York Ripper*. Another Lucio Fulci film famed for its violent

content, the trailer centralises a particular line of dialogue – 'a very sharp knife, rammed in her vagina' – in order to confirm its transgressive nature. Though sharing a geographic parity, it is the collective violence of these films which draws them together, suggesting that Shameless is positioning *Cannibal Holocaust* as a centrepiece of an extreme catalogue.

The trailers also imply that the distributor use the widespread reputation of Deodato's *Cannibal Holocaust* to promote equally brutal, yet less well known, narratives. In truth, Shameless treat *Cannibal Holocaust* as a type of exploitation shorthand and use its standing to instantly access a series of meanings surrounding extreme violence, controversy and marginality. While used sparingly throughout their catalogue, the name proves to be a prised asset and is carefully applied to key releases at crucial moments. The film is referenced in the 2011 release of *The House on the Edge of the Park*, which is noted to be from the director of the 'uber-controversial' *Cannibal Holocaust*. It is used again on the company's release of *Phantom of Death* (Deodato 1988), wherein the film is said to be by the director of 'the hunger-inducing *Cannibal Holocaust*', whilst the 'Cinema of Death' box set (which contains all three films) describes Deodato as '"Mr Cannibal"'. Certainly there is an auteurist notion to all these applications, however the role *Cannibal Holocaust* plays as a byword for extremity within the Shameless catalogue is clear.

In spite of this, the exploitive marketing directive is diluted by a short introduction by Deodato himself. Providing the director with a platform for performative self-fashioning, an increasingly common tactic in contemporary exploitation distribution (Kooyman 2010: 198–9), Deodato is given the scope to inform and educate the audience. The introduction itself, regardless of the actual content of the speech, is an auteur tactic steeped in the prestige of art cinema. Its very inclusion allows this particular release to re-write the history of the film, which in previous incarnations would not have included such heavy references to the director or his artistry. This is furthered when the viewer watches Deodato's re-edited version, which is again preceded by an introduction from the director. However, this time the appearance of a mock warning label exposes the instability of *Cannibal Holocaust*'s historic lineage. The superficial nature of this warning – which portrays a red outer circle with a diagonal line crossing through a cartoon turtle and axe – undermines Deodato's strong sense of regret, and obstructs the product's own effort to create and bestow value unto the auteur figure. This self-sabotaging discourse is continued throughout Deodato's monologue, as the lithe motif that characterises the film's most extreme sequences is played over de-contextualised sequences of animal slaughter. As such, Deodato's guilt and artistic integrity are

overwhelmed by images of extremity and blood-letting. Therefore while the new cut represents the efforts of a director to go back and address the film's taboo history, the composition of the feature exploits that same historical infamy through isolation and repetition.

Disc two contains two special features, less than the array offered by the likes of Arrow Video, but certainly more than had been previously afforded the film within Britain (due partly to its status as a 'low' cultural text, and its handling by Vipco). The first, *Film and Be Damned*, is an interview with Deodato and Carl G. Yorke, who starred as Alan Yates, the director of the film's fictional documentary *Green Inferno*. Similar to the brief introduction, Deodato treats the featurette as a platform to establish a more critical reading of his film, discussing its associations to satire, and insisting the narrative is a comment on the violent journalism of the period. By offering this analysis, Deodato lends a greater sense of the legitimacy to a film so often discussed in terms of extremity and controversy. Deodato continues this self-fashioning by associating himself and his work with a series of established auteurs – most obviously Roberto Rossellini, who he states 'I learnt to improvise from Rossellini, who taught me everything'. Here, Deodato uses Rossellini as a surrogate, borrowing part of his reputation in order to instigate a more measured reconsideration of his film (other directors mentioned by Deodato include Sergio Leone, Oliver Stone and Quentin Tarantino). Yorke continues in a similar vein, heaping praise on Deodato in ways not dissimilar to the comments that defined *Weekend*'s special features. However, rather than adding to a pre-existing consensus, Yorke's statements help to overturn previous condemnations and offer new ways of approaching the film and filmmaker.

The second feature, directed by film academic Xavier Mendik, is significantly entitled *The Long Road Back From Hell with Kim Newman, Prof. Julian Petley, Prof. Mary Wood. Featuring Carl G. Yorke, Ruggero Deodato and Francesca Ciardi*. The subtitle earnestly acknowledges the increasing level of academic intervention afforded the text, instantly bestowing it with greater importance. Unsurprisingly, this sense of academic intervention was absent when the film first entered the market, and thus both featurettes build a redemptive platform, which introduces new readings, meanings and viewpoints. Moreover, the involvement of two professors validates the interviewee's responses, *Cannibal Holocaust* as a film and this edition as a cultural artefact. It also exposes a level of commitment and labour on the part of Shameless, and shows them to be far more than a mere purveyor of 'lowbrow' cinema. Here, they seem galvanised by an educational responsibility, inspired to teach their audience about the product they are consuming rather than simply allowing it to remain

a titillating and disgusting experience. This mirrors the efforts of many 'highbrow' distributors, and as mentioned before, is explicitly part of the BFI's cultural makeup. This aids not only a better reception of the film, but also a better reception of the company as a whole.

Although the documentary foregrounds the film's more transgressive moments – intercutting interview footage with some of the film's most scandalous set pieces, while having actors Yorke and Francesca Ciardi talk about their distrust of Deodato – the continued presence of this academic voice ultimately reappraises the narrative. Mendik's voiceover narration continually foregrounds *Cannibal Holocaust*'s significance to modern horror – assertions supported by both Wood and Petley, who see their academic credentials reiterated during their on-screen introductions. Wood adds that the film is an allegory for the Italian man's loss of power, actively positioning it as a product of its socio-political climate. In doing so, Wood moves the discussion of *Cannibal Holocaust* away from the dialogues of violence and exploitation that have long characterised its cultural and critical identity. Petley's comments operate in the same manner, as he claims the film should be approached as a piece of meta-cinema. Here, *Cannibal Holocaust*'s ongoing scholarly reappraisal, which was touched upon at the start of this chapter, is grafted more directly to the narrative itself. Offered to a wider audience sector than it is when it is locked inside academic books and journals, the result of this process can be sizeable and eases the film's movement into previously impenetrable cultural spaces. In line with the assessment of DVD extras offered by Alan Brookley and Robert Westerfelhaus (2002), Shameless selects and offers a particular reading of the primary text more aligned with prestige and academic revisionism than exploitation and hyperbole.

Academic intervention in this release does not end with talking head roles in special features. In fact, the release as a whole may not have been possible without the commitment of Mendik and Petley, with the latter in particular serving as a consultant for Shameless during the film's advice screening. Within his role as advisor, Petley completed the paperwork which supported the film's resubmission to the BBFC, ensuring that it was framed in an appropriate manner, insisting 'the main point I made [was] that this was not to be exploitative or sensationalised [. . .], it was an attempt to present what I think is generally regarded by many people now as an important film in a way that did it justice' (interview with author, 21 January 2013, London). Through his advisory role, Petley was able to endorse the film, enabling others to see its value, or at least approach it in less censorial ways. Ultimately his authority furnished this particular release with a previously unseen level of acceptability, transforming the

film from trashy exploitation unworthy of public exhibition to important object of amendment. Petley added to this, noting that it was not just his position as an academic that resulted in the BBFC's leniency:

> I think a long long period of time had passed since *Cannibal Holocaust* was so badly demonised and trashed and I think the writing of people like me, but obviously there are others, [. . .] have helped to give the film a kind of [. . .] 'respectability' that it hadn't had before. (interview with author, 21 January 2013, London)

What Petley alludes to is the importance of history and scholarly interaction. Seen in Chapter 3's discussions of *Peeping Tom*, *Eyes Without a Face*, and parts of Argento's filmography, traditional academic scholarship has resulted in *Cannibal Holocaust*'s partial removal from its limiting critical quarantine. Brookley and Westerfelhaus state that this convergence is the ultimate example of media synergy, in which interrelated and intertextual items come to share an intratextual relationship on DVD (2002: 23). Of course, the primary text of *Cannibal Holocaust* benefits from this synergy, as it becomes a composite of several external interventions, including ongoing scholarly engagement and the general 'artifaction' of the DVD/Blu-ray product. Raiford Guins has observed this shift, insisting that 'the voice articulating the Italian horror film now has a historical tone, one that is educational and premised in informative criticism and genre knowledge' (2005: 27–8). Ultimately, the Shameless release created what Egan has termed a historical portrait of the film (2007: 186), in which its exploitative past is contextualised within an academic present.

Aside from historical distance and critical legitimisation, Petley noted that a central factor within the BBFC's less censorial approach was the identity of the distributor. Petley notes 'Shameless are not, you know Vipco [. . .] Vipco were pretty roguish people and Shameless, in spite of the title, is serious about what they do' (2013). Although Shameless clearly seeks to exploit the controversy of their films through a deployment of hyperbolic visuals and linguistics, Petley underscored the importance of their catalogue and its commitment to distributing a series of previously overlooked Italian films (interview with author, 21 January 2013, London). Placing them as archivers, Petley's comments importantly expose the impact time has had not only on exploitation films, but also on the distribution companies that handle them. Unlike their predecessors, Shameless's brand identity is not drenched in the stigma of an era marred by the video nasty scandal. This allows their releases to avoid the negative connotations that plagued exploitation cinema throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. Moreover, alongside companies such as Arrow Video, Redemption DVD and 88 Films, exploitation film distribution has

become a legitimate business, safely ensconced within the broader framework of the home entertainment market and its values of prestige and quality. The special editions, bespoke packaging designs and extensive paratextual featurettes have collectively sanitised the exploitation product, revealed its commercial desirability and changed consumption from a marginal practice acting in the shadows and thus open to condemnation, to a booming marketplace all of its own.

Conclusion

These initial case studies illustrate that the history of slippage and crossover mapped by the likes of Joan Hawkins (2000), Mark Betz (2003) and Kevin Heffernan (2004) is still prevalent within the contemporary climate. Distributors are still influencing the canonisation system by utilising certain tactics in order to alter the cultural spaces particular films inhabit. However, what is perhaps most interesting within the comparison of these two releases is the manner in which *Cannibal Holocaust* adopts an art film marketing directive, dressing Deodato's narrative within the customs of 'high' culture and somewhat negating the commercial imperatives of extremity. It is clear that the *Weekend* release hinted at the film's thematic transgressions, and employed ballyhoo techniques to promote and exaggerate them. Yet it would be wrong to suggest that Godard's film leaves the art realm in any significant manner, as it is constantly anchored by signifiers of cultural validity. Yet in the case of *Cannibal Holocaust*, the process of transformation is clearer. Due to the overwhelming condemnation of the film prior to the Shameless release, the academic tone that underpins the special features has a large impact on the film's cultural reception. Although the film still proudly promotes its infamy, the extra content on the discs creates what Geraghty calls an archive capable of transitioning the film into new histories (2014: 57). In this case, the new history is one of an allegorical and influential horror narrative worthily of academic consideration. It is clear therefore that the Shameless release of *Cannibal Holocaust* 'repairs' the film through restoring it to a nearly uncut state and 'refashions' it within the discourse of artistic and historical importance. This, in line with my exploration of the commercialisation of extremity, complicates the simplistic view that extreme content instantly ensures commercial security. What has perhaps been overlooked is the sophistication of extreme cinema consumers, and the distributors who serve them.

CHAPTER 5

Salò, Or the 120 Days of Sodom and *Ilsa, the Wicked Warden*: Fascism, Pornography and Disgust

This second case study will examine the paratextual presentation of Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Salò, Or the 120 Days of Sodom*, and Jess Franco's *Ilsa, the Wicked Warden.* In a general sense, these two directors partake in the history of taste slippage mapped thus far, with both displaying extreme imagery, experimental visuals and counter-cultural attitudes. More specifically, the films selected for analysis here express a more direct relationship, with both tackling issues of fascism and political exploitation. With this affiliation forming a basis for the films' comparison here, the chapter will investigate the way they borrow from art and exploitation traditions, and the impact this has upon their paratextual identities.

Pier Paolo Pasolini and *Salò, Or the 120 Days of Sodom*

Pasolini, like Jean-Luc Godard, Luis Buñuel and Ingmar Bergman, is an essential filmmaker within the framework of extreme art cinema. Described by Robert Gordon as a restlessly experimental artist (1996: 1), Pasolini's combination of artistry and provocation has seen him condemned by the Pope (Greene 1990: 134) – and hailed as an auteur:

> Pasolini's belief in his capacity to impose his voice on any medium, despite its constraints, was reaffirmed [. . .] by his experience with film. He repeatedly asserted his autonomy and authority as an 'auteur', confidently declaring his control over every aspect of the film-making process. (Gordon 1996: 191)

Maurizio Viano describes the director as the 'black' filmmaker of the bourgeoisie (1993: 296), an outcast operating externally to the parameters of 'high' culture yet still able to penetrate its barriers. This semi-marginality arose from Pasolini's efforts to challenge his primary art-house demographic with a mixture of extremity and intellectualism. In essence, his films encapsulate the traditions of the extreme art canon, as they combine

extremity, critical condemnation, artistic experimentation, intellectual engagement and cultural authentication.

This amalgamation is clearest within *Salò, Or the 120 Days of Sodom* (hereafter, *Salò*), the director's final feature. Naomi Greene insists *Salò* is not only Pasolini's most scandalous and chilling film, but also one of the most disturbing and radical films in the history of cinema (1990: 196). Although based on Marquis de Sade's *120 Days of Sodom* (2009) (originally published in 1785), Pasolini moved the action to Benito Mussolini's Republic of Salò. The last incarnation of the Italian Fascist state, the change of location is vital to the political message of the film and allows Pasolini to be more critical of the power structures he seeks to denounce. This is supported by the narrative itself, which details the sexual torture of eighteen teenagers by four male characters, known as The Duke (Paolo Bonacelli), The Bishop (Giorgio Cataldi), The Magistrate (Umberto Paolo Quintavalle) and The President (Aldo Valletti). By showing these characters, who embody key social roles, engaging in acts of depravity (including rape and forcing their hostages to consume faeces), Pasolini finalises his comment on the corrupting nature of power. Herein, the literacy 'highbrow' of the film's source material and the clear political activism of the narrative is placed in close proximity to what Robert Gordon claims is a lexicon of absolute horror borrowed from several 'lowbrow' filmic genres (Gordon 1996: 259).

This conflict between 'high' and 'low' has characterised the critical discourses that envelope the film. It is valuable to briefly explore these, as they invariably merge and shape the home video product. To start, Pasolini summarises *Salò*'s message as follows: 'the body becomes merchandise. My film is planned as a sexual metaphor, which symbolises [. . .] the relationship between exploiter and exploited. In sadism and in power politics human beings become objects' (Bachmann 1975–76: 40). In order for the film's explicitness to be sanctioned within the 'highbrow', Pasolini's allegorical explanation must be accepted as a justification for the images on screen. Unsurprisingly, like many extreme art narratives, the metaphorical qualities of the message remain a point of contention. Viano states that the representation of fascism merely operates as a signifier of a political idea that is never actually explored, while the narrative's brutality makes it impossible to decode (1993: 299–300). Greene comments further on this, noting that the extremity of the image threatens to exceed the bounds of the symbolic (1990: 205), and thus lose sight of its original intentions. The inability to move beyond what many critics saw as an exploitation of historical authenticity led to the film being framed as 'pornography' by the likes of Gideon Bachmann (1975) and Danny Georgakas

(1978). In general, *Salò* experiences a critical reception culture which either denounces the political allegory – and thus renders it redundant – or defends its legitimacy robustly. Consequently, *Salò*'s employment of transgression became, and remains, isolated and reproduced across all scholarly interactions, regardless whether they adopt an accusatorial stance or look to defend the film. This led Christopher Roberts to claim that the film exists within a 'critical quarantine' (Roberts 2010: 30), whereby it is unable to move beyond the at times limiting ghetto of extreme cinema.

Ultimately, the sustained segregation of the film's most transgressive characteristics has morphed into a hyperbolic promotion of its disgusting qualities. This is acknowledged by David Church, who states that *Salò* has become an example of the 'sickest film ever made' to certain audience sectors (2009: 342). A key example of the currency of disgust in action, this process is evident across popular film site IMDb (Internet Movie Database), wherein *Salò* features on Yogesh-Odyssey-Opera's popular list 'Very Very Disturbing/Sick movies' (2012) (the list has received over 105,000 views as of November 2017). The number of views the list has received is suggestive of the lack of resistance *Salò* faces within these cultural spaces, and is evidence of the 'second life' it leads within an alternative consumption site. When placed on these lists, Pasolini's film is uprooted from its contestable position within the 'highbrow' and relocated firmly within the 'lowbrow', wherein these documents inform and guide viewing strategies based on testing yourself against the 'sickest' and most 'vile' materials. What is of interest later in this chapter is the extent to which this secondary existence is catered for on the official paratext of the film.

Consequently, *Salò*, perhaps more than any other extreme art film of this era, exists in a suspended space between 'highbrow' intellectual symbolism and 'lowbrow' sequences of provocation and disgust. With several contradictory dialogues operating both within the film's narrative and the surrounding reception cultures, *Salò* is able to move between art and exploitation traditions depending on which features are highlighted within its cultural triangulation. This intermediate cultural site, where it is both actively excluded and included within both art and exploitation models, introduces interesting questions regarding how the film is presented within the market sphere, and which set of social and cinematic signifiers shape its public face.

Jess Franco and *Ilsa, the Wicked Warden*

Franco's *Ilsa, the Wicked Warden* operates as a neat cultural counterpoint to Pasolini's text. Famed for his prolific if a little uneven filmography,

Franco's career can be broken into six phases: the First Period (1959–64); the Second Period (1965–7); the Harry Alan Towers Period (1968–70); the Peak Years (1970–8); the Porno Holocaust Years (1976–81); and the Homecoming Years (1981 onwards) (Lucas 2010: 17). The director – akin to the other exploitation auteurs discussed thus far – is held in high esteem within the paracinematic community and heralded as an important director (Hawkins 2000: 88–9). However, regardless of this paracinematic praise, Franco's work has received little attention outside of 'low' cultural publications (Hawkins 2000: 88), with both Joan Hawkins (2000: 95) and Tim Lucas (2010: 17) claiming his career was only beginning to be debated in English in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

The lack of sustained critical attention has encouraged certain scholars to reappraise and re-examine the work of Franco in much the same way as his 'lowbrow' contemporaries. During her influential study *Cutting Edge: Art Horror and the Horrific Avant Garde* (2000), Hawkins discusses the director's films as part of an antifascist Spanish aesthetic that refused to conform to the standards of the mainstream. The rawness of Franco's image – a consequence of his budgetary constraints – embalmed his cinema with artistic and politically important characteristics, with Hawkins insisting 'viewers have to learn to like Franco's style, have to learn how to watch his movies, [which] removes the director's work from the arena of what Adorno would call true "mass culture"' (2000: 112). Subsequently, Hawkins claims that Franco's work occupies a liminal cultural site defined by the engaged and refined consumption practices of an educated audience (2000: 113). Indeed, the richly knowledgeable and committed audience spoken of by Hawkins relates to the paracinematic community of Jeffery Sconce (1995), who also turn their attention to films of Lucio Fulci, Dario Argento, Jean Rollin and Ruggero Deodato. Therefore, while these directors are commonly positioned within the 'lowbrow' – and are consequently burdened with certain reputations regarding both style and content – the actions of specific reception cultures have the power to validate these patently commercial narratives.

Ilsa, the Wicked Warden echoes the thematic template to Pasolini's film in many ways. While Franco replaces the four male libertines with a single female authority figure (Dyanne Thorne's Greta del Pino), he still portrays her as a corrupting force who uses her position of power to live out her sexual fantasies. Although these parallels are clear, the two films have rarely been discussed together. This is in part due to Franco's position within the exploitation industry, and Pasolini's contrasting connections to the art-house scene. However, it is also due to the film's title – or at least its reference to 'Ilsa' – which carries significant

connotations within the exploitation community. The name references one of the most enduring franchises within the Nazi-sexploitation cycle. Comprising of *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS* (Edmonds 1975), *Ilsa, Harem Keeper of the Oil Sheiks* (Edmonds 1976), and *Ilsa, the Tigress of Serbia* (LaFleur 1977), the *Ilsa* trilogy remains a valuable commodity laden with exploitation lore and desirability. Despite being highly controversial due to the convergences of sex, torture and Nazi imagery, the 'Ilsa' brand has become engrained within culture through its appearances on university syllabi, Trivial Pursuit, and various songs (Rapaport 2003: 72). Franco's film – in classic exploitation style – was an unofficial fourth addition to the original trilogy (Spiderbaby 2011: 32), produced by Erwin C. Dietrich in order to exploit the franchise's popularity while it still held market value (Tohill and Tombs 1994: 114–15). All of the films starred Dyanne Thorne, who as well as being credited as the real attraction of the series (Spiderbaby 2011: 32), still receives over 200 fan letters monthly (Rapaport 2003: 71).

While the film is dominated by the counter-aesthetic that remained a constant throughout Franco's career, legitimising *Ilsa, the Wicked Warden* within the same historical metaphor as *Salò* is problematic. While overlap is present, and should not be ignored, the tyranny portrayed within *Ilsa, the Wicked Warden* is less historically specific. Unlike Pasolini's use of the Republic of Salò, Franco employs the semiotics of political domination – uniformed soldiers, oppressed prisoners, a single authorial figure, and expensively ornamented headquarters – within an indeterminate tropical setting. As such, the strong political message offered by Pasolini is missing in Franco's film, making it more difficult to sanction the multiple transgressions present within the narrative. Furthermore, while the sub-par acting and poor dubbing complicate certain channels of identification, scenes of sex are characterised by soft music and focus on the female form. As such, the sense of disgust that proliferates throughout *Salò* is replaced by an eroticisation of the same imagery within *Isla the Wicked Warden*. This has allowed the film to become comfortably positioned within the women-in-prison narrative cycle, a sub-branch of exploitation cinema which later morphed into Nazi-sexploitation (Petley 2011: 213). This unpopular and much-maligned series of films makes use of a very particular aesthetic template to sexualise the Holocaust, while doing little to assess the ideology behind the iconography (Krautheim 2009: 5). Certainly, similar claims were levelled towards Pasolini's narrative, yet *Ilsa, the Wicked Warden* is far more forthcoming in its desire to sexually stimulate the audience and far less concerned with the political nature of the imagery it uses. Franco's film welcomes erotic readings, as it uses the

iconography of fascism to frame various sadomasochistic acts rather than foster a political metaphor.

Consequently, although the films share an iconographical register, the deployment of fascist imagery and sexual transgression differs. Yet both retain shifting and slippery filmic personas. As claimed by Hawkins, Franco retains an auteur status due to his employment of a paracinematic counter-aesthetic, while also existing as a traditional exploitation director who uses the mores of the industry in an unapologetic manner. Similarly, *Salò*'s extremity has disrupted its placement within the art film sphere, de-stabling a director who otherwise embodies the characteristics of the 'highbrow'. It is, in fact, the very fluidity of these personas which furthers the paratextual object's significance and potentially gives it more power to shape the films' commercial identities.

The Paratext

Salò, Or the 120 Days of Sodom: *DVD Aesthetic, Marketing and Paratextual Identity*

Salò was released by BFI distribution as a special edition Blu-ray in 2008. In 2011, the film was distributed again, this time as a dual format Blu-ray DVD. Both releases have the same cover image and special features, and therefore many of the findings can be applied to either version. However, as the Blu-ray entered the market first, it makes sense to focus on this earlier edition. While the BFI's importance as a distributor was alluded to at various stages in Chapter 3, especially in reference to the role it played in the rehabilitation of *Eyes without a Face* and the filmography of Jean Rollin, further consideration of their cultural standing is helpful. BFI distribution is the most profitable part of the British Film Institute (Bennett and Brown 2008: 116), a charity that curates both the BFI National Archive and BFI Library. Its distribution label is responsible for releasing a series of historically important global art films, forgotten British films and the catalogues of Akira Kurosawa and Jacques Tati, among others. The BFI's DVD catalogue plays an important role in educating the audience about film culture as a whole (Bennet and Brown 2008: 117). Like The Criterion Collection in America, the BFI is responsible for creating a digital canon: an archive of validated films created through and maintained by a strictly regimented selection process (Carrol 2005: 25). Thus the BFI logo becomes a signifier of cultural worth and a symbol of a particular kind of 'highbrow' cultural experience. This is, of course, fundamental to the remediation of *Salò*, as the BFI branding can eclipse

the negative stigma attached to the film and remove it from its critical quarantine. However, this can only be successful if the paratext as a whole works towards this goal.

The Cover

This edition of *Salò* is a premier release by the BFI and features a cardboard sleeve and a fifty-two-page colour booklet, as well as several on-disc featurettes. The presentation of this artefact conforms to Barbra Klinger's ideas on special editions:

> Special-edition marketing in particular provides an opportunity to elevate film to the status of high art [. . .]. In addition, through the often extensive background materials that accompany it, a special edition appears to furnish the authenticity and history so important to establishing the value of an archival object. (2006: 66)

The status of the product is also advanced by the use of the Blu-ray format, which maintains its own levels of prestige due to its relationship to superior image quality. Certainly it can be said that the impact of this has perhaps lessened in recent times, however in 2008, when this edition entered the market, Blu-ray was a relatively new format and therefore carried with it additional connotations of quality and exclusivity. Yet whereas the film acquires a level of legitimisation due to its distributor and special edition presentation, the narrative image projected on the product's cover exposes a different identity (see Figure 5.1). Essentially a reproduction of the BFI's theatrical poster, the black and white image shows two open-mouthed, naked females, bent over on all-fours. The word 'Salò' runs horizontally through the centre of the image, partially obscuring the women's naked breasts, however nipples are visible. This level of exposure is significant as even though the black and white photography combines with the BFI logo to imply that this is a text of cultural worth, the image is unavoidably sexual. Despite these signifiers (such as the female nudity, dog collars and pose itself) serving an allegorical purpose within the narrative, they fail to do so in its de-contextualised state. Therefore the relationship the image shares with fetish photography and erotica overwhelms an audience unfamiliar with the film's political message, leaving few viable readings beyond those based on sexual gratification.

Granted, it would be nearly impossible to use a still from a film such as *Salò* which did not show nudity. Nor would it be better to ignore the sexual nature of the text. As stated, this work is not concerned with rights or wrongs, and does not claim to offer solutions to the difficulties faced when presenting such complex films within the market. Yet overlooking the sexual potency of the image, and the manner in which it uses extremity as a

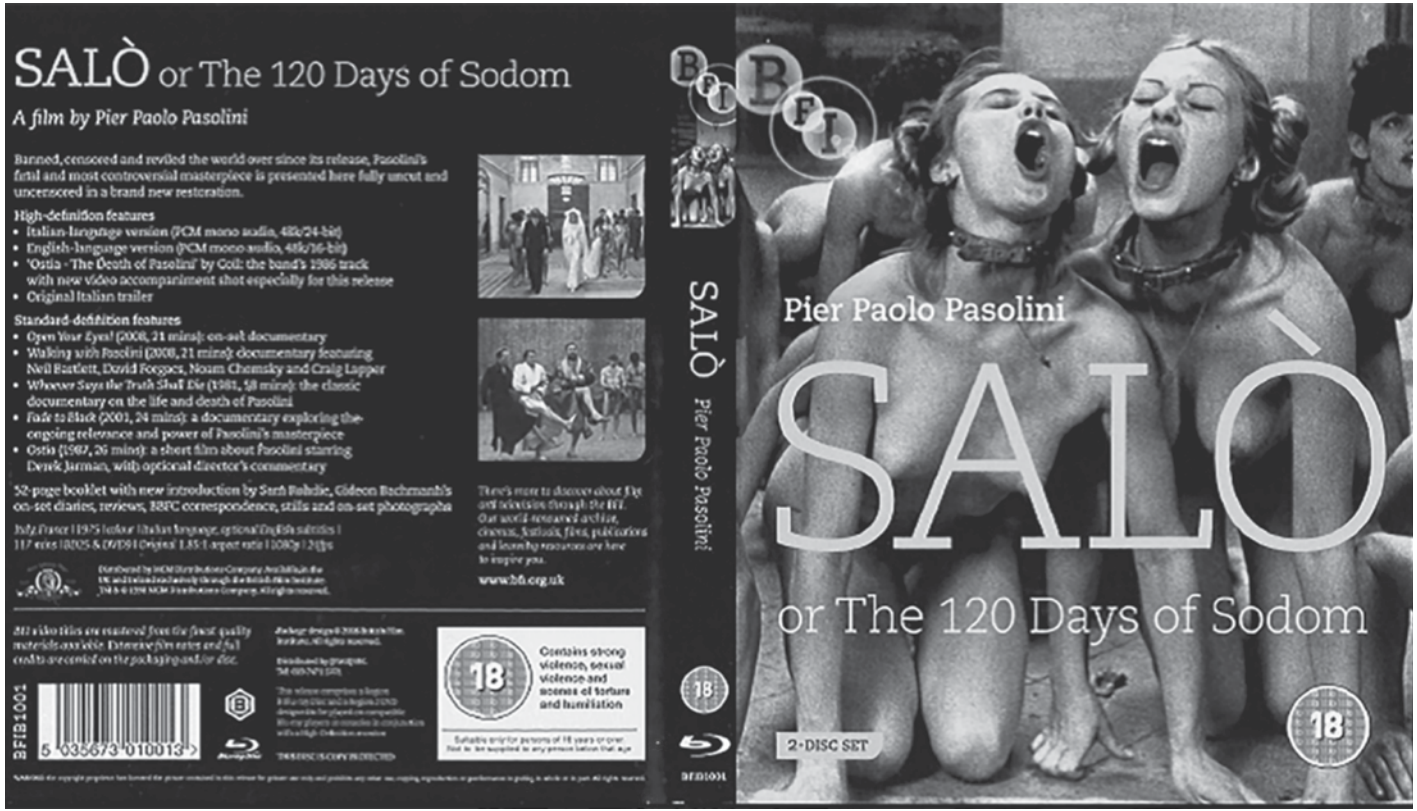

Figure 5.1 *Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom* inner jacket. (Source: *Saló, or the 120 Days of Sodom* is released on DVD/Blu-ray by the BFI. Image and artwork appear courtesy of the BFI. © British Film Institute.)

commercial signifier, would obscure my investigation into the paratextuality of extreme art cinema. The image is illustrative of the way a distributor can attempt to capitalise on the most exploitative part of a film's narrative. There is no suggestion in the image or the small blurb that accompanies it of the film's fascist allegory, and aside from the standardised mention of the director, Pasolini's directorial status is subservient to the promotion of the film's sexual qualities. It is perhaps obvious that this is a defensive move on the part of the BFI. By making the film attractive to a different market sector, the company can increase the commercial revenue for the product, and are thus more likely to survive in what may be an increasingly shrinking market. However, as a consequence of this decision, the exploitative aspects of *Salò*'s narrative are promoted unchecked, as its extremity becomes its defining factor, and the sole reason to consume.

As considered at length within Roberts' article (2010), the film was a target for censorship boards, a history which informs the small blurb on the back of both the outer and inner sleeve. The text reads: 'Banned, censored and reviled the world over since its release, Pasolini's final and most controversial masterpiece is presented here fully uncut and uncensored in a brand new restoration'. Although a promotion of the film's censorial history shows it to be complicated, difficult and potentially misunderstood, the opening line, 'banned, censored and reviled', isolates and promotes the film's forbidden quality, and unlike the examples cited in Chapter 3, no redemptive narrative is introduced at this stage. In fact, the brief mention of the film's censorship relates to the findings of Kate Egan's work on the video nasty scandal, wherein she claims the longevity of a film's censorship is a valuable commodity to the exploitation film distributor, as it allows them to conjure the sense of exclusivity so valuable to hierarchies that shape the paracinematic community (2007: 194). In this sense, it is easy to compare this release to a multitude of scandalous exploitation narratives which proudly advertise their illegitimacies with sexual imagery.

The cover of the exclusive fifty-two-page booklet, which itself is described as having a 'new introduction by Sam Rohdie, Gideon Bachmann's on-set diaries, reviews, BBFC correspondence, stills and on-set photographs', reflects the colour palette and typography of the sleeve, yet focuses on an image of Pasolini (see Figure 5.4). This shift from nudity to the auteur frames the extremity of the cover within the discourses of quality cinema, cleansing and sanitising the 'lowbrow' readings that were offered externally. However, the isolation of transgression which characterised the film's sleeve is re-established on the booklet's over-leaf, where the selected film still contains several naked bodies. This juxtaposition between auteurism and extremity continues throughout

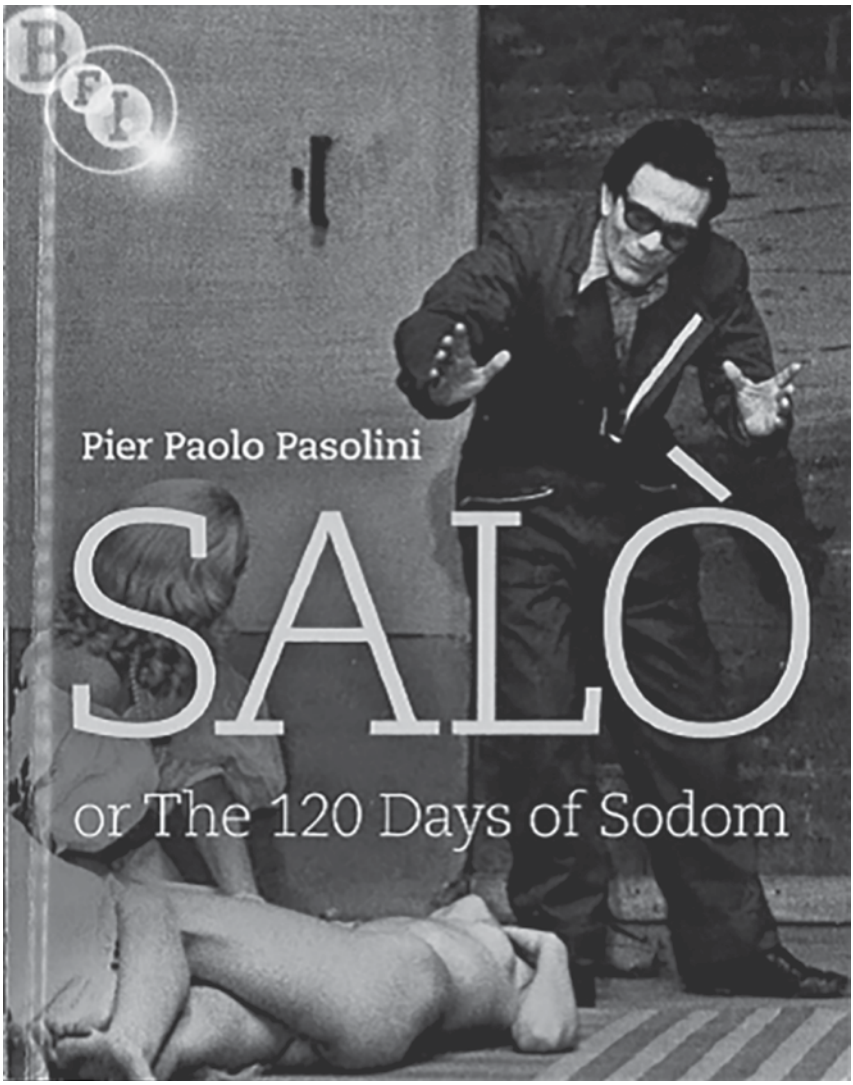

Figure 5.2 Front cover of the *Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom* additional booklet. (Source: *Saló, or the 120 Days of Sodom* is released on DVD/Blu-ray by the BFI. Image and artwork appear courtesy of the BFI. © British Film Institute.)

the booklet as ten out of eighteen stills portray either nudity, suggested sexual situations or violence, while only six present pictures of Pasolini. Undoubtedly, avoiding stills that show nudity in a film dominated by such images is a difficult task, and doing so would not only be misleading, but would also fail to rightfully address the nature of the narrative. Yet

avoiding the similarities this tactic of segregation and repetition shares with exploitation marketing is to ignore the ways in which the paratextual artefact can actively hybridise itself to become more appealing to a larger variety of consumers.

It would be disingenuous to claim the images are completely without context. The numerous written passages, as is so often the case, work to readdress the balance between 'low' and 'high' whilst allowing the BFI to achieve its educational objective. The introduction talks of Pasolini's career as a poet, his early days as a filmmaker, and his political beliefs, painting the director as an artistic filmmaker of considerable merit. This reading becomes especially important as the reader moves through the booklet, as the following two sections present more problematic renderings of Pasolini's most infamous work. The first, entitled *Pasolini and Marquis de Sade by Gideon Bachmann*, is a reproduction of the on-set diaries of Bachmann originally published in *Sight and Sound* in 1975–6. In the most part, the article is informed by a subjective register, summarised by the final sentence: 'I have seen sadomasochisation, rape, hanging, shooting, scalping, a variety of anal activities, executions by garrotting and electric chair, disfigurations of all sorts, beauty defiled in all possible ways, human bodies destroyed'. While this quote further de-contextualises the violence, delivering it within a digestible list which allows each individual sighting to function as a new marketable element, its linguistic construction is also problematic. Bachmann's use of 'I have seen' collapses the barriers between fiction and reality, merging the production process with real acts of exploitation. This consequently positions Pasolini as a 'real-life' exploiter, heightening the extremity of the text significantly and raising questions about the director's intentions. This is continued within another reprinted review entitled *Salò o le Centoventi Giornate di Sodoma reviewed by Gilbert Adair in 1979*. Within this review, originally published in the BFI's own *Monthly Film Bulletin*, Adair compares Pasolini to the fictional libertarians depicted within the narrative, stating:

> P.P.P, dandy [. . .] cineaste and homosexual, encloses himself and his crew for 52 days in an isolated villa (studio interiors) with sixteen beautiful young men and women, on whom he inflicts humiliations less appalling, certainly, than those depicted in the film [. . .] but humiliations nonetheless.

This statement, akin to the one by Bachmann, problematically confuses the line between reality and fiction, and marks fictional, cinematic events as real exploitation.

Although these reviews encourage an exploitive reading of the text (and more significantly its director), their reproduction is important to

understanding the way this edition in particular reconstructs, refashions and repairs the cultural image of *Salò*. As with Studio Canal's *Peeping Tom* release, the inclusion of negative reviews allows the artefact to function as an amendment piece, drawing attention to the 'wrong' reading in order to highlight the distributor's intervention. Herein, the poor reviews expose the audience to readings which fail to appropriately allegorise the text, allowing the BFI to use the additional material found across the release to reappraise the narrative and educate the viewer. This increases the importance of this particular version of the film, and, in a similar manner to that of the *Cannibal Holocaust* release studied in the previous chapter, codes the film as one worthy of serious cultural and critical debate.

The other segments tread the familiar line between 'high' cultural legitimisation and 'lowbrow' hyperbole. Both pieces focus on the censorial past of *Salò* and as such unavoidably promote the very issues they are trying to contextualise. The first, entitled *Salò Censored*, provides a brief overview of the film's censorial history. Concentrating on the film's seizure, and the creation of a special 'club' cut that would be screened in special venues, the piece marks the narrative as an important part of British censorship history. Although the piece's story of the film's confiscation unavoidably parallels the video nasty scandal, the transcription of the spoken word prologue and epilogue that bookended the aforementioned 'club' cut provides greater context. Used to 'legally "explain" the context of Mussolini's regime at Salò and the writings of Marquis de Sade', its reproduction here stands as evidence of this forgotten version's existence, allowing the new product to further revise the film's status. This is continued throughout *Letter from the BBFC to the Director of Public Prosecutions in 1979*, the second piece to evaluate the film's censorship history. Written by James Ferman, Director of the BBFC from 1975 to 1999, the reproduced letter was sent to Sir Thomas Hetherington as a defence of the feature and argues for the film's right to be seen and released as a work of art rather than mere exploitation. The strong relationship this letter has to governmental procedures removes any sense of hyperbole and again centralises the theme of reappraisal, refashioning and reassessment.

As such, the cover and supplementary booklet mirror the contradictory status of the text itself, as they simultaneously situate Pasolini's film within the confines of the Nazi-sexploitation aesthetic, while lobbying for its re-evaluation. This internal contradiction means the film, as a tangible commercial product, floats between art and exploitation cultures, not completely comfortable in either.

The Disc

The fluctuating nature of these external features means an investigation of the internal content proves even more important. The first disc of two, which uses the Blu-ray format, contains the original Italian version of the film and an English dub, continuing the notions of historical authenticity which were foregrounded throughout the booklet. However, it is the second disc – this time a standard DVD – which positions this release as an ambassador of context, complete with its own fleet of discourses meant to influence reception (Klinger 2006: 21). In the case of this release, this 'fleet' is comprised of five featurettes: *Open Your Eyes*; *Walking with Pasolini*; *Whoever Says the Truth Shall Die*; *Fade to Black*; and *Ostia*. *Open Your Eyes*, a twenty-one-minute on-set documentary, commences this process of re-positioning by resolutely locating Pasolini as an auteur. In truth, the feature strives to show the filmmaking process as a precise exercise, contradicting the earlier statements that questioned the film's production environment and Pasolini's intentions. The second extra continues in this vein, further strengthening the auteur brand of Pasolini by calling upon external forces and talking heads. Much like the documentaries seen within the last chapter, *Walking with Pasolini* uses the status of its interviewees to further validate the feature itself, and most importantly, the primary text itself. Once more, academia is represented, this time in the shape of Professor David Forgacs. An increasingly common tactic within contemporary distribution, the refined and educated voice of academia, made all the more potent due to the reputation of Forgacs, infuses the text with additional levels of cultural value. Yet *Walking with Pasolini* goes further, enlisting the services of film director Neil Bartlett and Craig Lapper, a senior examiner at the BBFC. The intimate relationship these figures share with the filmmaking world affixes even more cultural capital to the film and their involvement with this particular release further authenticates the status of the BFI. Ultimately therefore, *Open Your Eyes* and *Walking with Pasolini* use the auteur figure to authenticate *Salò* within its prevailing discourse of respectability, countering the visual extremity of the cover art and certain areas of the scholarly discourse.

Next up is *Fade to Black*, which, analogous to the other features on the disc, combines new interview segments, archival footage and montages of key scenes. Yet most important when considering *Fade to Black* is its presenter, Mark Kermode. Kermode, whilst having academic capital, is also a firm champion of cult cinema. His sub-cultural capital is authenticated in writing such as 'I was a Teenage Horror Fan: Or "How I learned to stop worrying and love Linda Blair" Mark Kermode (Age 36)' (Kermode 2001), in which he writes a highly personal account of his horror fandom.

In conjunction with both the academic and paracinematic personas is a more populist 'film buff' identity. This is perhaps clearest on YouTube, where Kermode, along with Simon Mayo, run a channel entitled *Kermode and Mayo's Film Review*, whereby the two presenters offer reviews of most mainstream releases. Boasting 142,610 subscribers as of November 2017, the channel's popularity and the films reviewed by the pair expose the type of figure Kermode is: a 'superstar' cinephile, who is both well-respected and accessible, and is able to talk to a range of audiences almost simultaneously. The multi-faceted nature of his persona, and his general celebrity within film culture, has the potential to shape the audience's understanding of *Salò* as his trace permeates and envelopes the text. In the first instance, the decision to use a figure such as Kermode relates to the larger aims and objectives of the BFI. As stated earlier, they seek to educate as well as to broaden access, and therefore endeavour to pitch their features at the 'average' consumer, as it is assumed academics already have access to contextual materials and research (Bennett and Brown 2008: 122). With this in mind, Kermode becomes a vessel of approachability, a user-friendly voice through which the BFI can articulate their preferred reading of the primary text.

Yet Kermode's love of the 'lowbrow' comes through in his often sensationalist delivery. The critic's lyrical description of Pasolini's film tends to present it hyperbolically as a transgressive spectacle. For example, his opening line, 'in November 1975 Italian filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini was beaten to death by a rugged youth who could have easily stepped out of one of the director's famously homoerotic films', sees Kermode adopt the role of circus barker – exciting the audience with macabre and morbid details. This continues throughout, as Kermode's choice of words are deliberately provocative: 'orgy'; 'degradation'; 'sadist'; 'death'; 'languishing'; 'notorious'; 'ritualised'; 'sodomy'; 'coprophila'; and 'rape'. Despite being relevant to the narrative, these terms are calculatedly emotive and recount the ballyhoo list tradition so valuable to the marketing practices of the 'lowbrow'. As such, his involvement here, through an understanding of both his externally functioning cultural history and at times theatrical delivery, grafts a level of counter-cultural appeal to the release.

The next paratext on the disc is the longest: a fifty-eight-minute documentary entitled *Whoever Says the Truth Shall Die*. The length of the feature showcases the BFI's commitment to providing context and knowledge, further allowing the product to work within the remit of their mission statement as it educates and lectures the audience on the 'importance' of the film. Nonetheless, while the length suggests the feature is looking to teach and instruct an audience, the content is at

times hyperbolic and trades off the film's most shocking details. The documentary opens with newspaper clippings detailing Pasolini's murder before discussing his objection to the war and life as a poet, with interviewee Alberto Moravia stating that 'he is [Italy's] most important poet since the fifties'. Yet while the feature constructs Pasolini's auteur status, through both its concentration on personal stories and the employment of trace surrogates such as Federico Fellini, Jean-Luc Godard and Bernardo Bertolucci, there is, as noted, slippage between traditional legitimisation and hyperbolic titillation. The feature 'gossips' about Pasolini's homosexuality, demonising his sexual preference by claiming he is a 'corrupting homosexual' who was tried thirty-three times for various crimes but always acquitted. Moreover, information surrounding Pasolini's teaching career problematically alludes to paedophilia, as it is claimed his position was terminated following allegations about his relationships with his students. This fascination with morbidity is supported by the details given about his death and the gory images that accompany them. The feature casts the death as a mystery, with Maria Antonietta Macciocchi (an Italian journalist and politician) claiming the murder was a politically charged public execution. This idea of mystery presents Pasolini as a cult icon alongside other deceased actors and directors (a concept explored in detail by Matt Hills in *Fan Cultures* [2002: 138–42]) and again places Pasolini between paracinematic validation and official authorial standing. Perhaps more troublingly, the newspaper images of Pasolini's deceased body are edited over *Salò*'s violent climax, once more creating an unnerving relationship between the two events, and fact and fiction.

Undoubtedly, taste slippage occurs throughout these featurettes, with three competing approaches coming to the fore: auteur branding; critical legitimisation; and the currency of disgust. However, regardless of this instability, the film's encapsulation within this rigorously researched paratextual context casts it as 'new', a world premiere within the private sector of the home (Hawkins 2000: 44). In this sense, 'newness' becomes something of a cleanser, wiping the slate clean and offering an original take on the film. Furthermore, while this edition still offers uncertainty and volatility, the multifaceted marketing approach should not be surprising, as it stems from a need to stay afloat within a diminished yet overcrowded market. What this release shows is the manner in which extremity is rarely presented simply and is more often than not bordered by several other cultural frameworks which seek to explain, allegorise or redeem.

Ilsa, the Wicked Warden: *DVD Aesthetic, Marketing and Paratextual Identity*

The 2004 Anchor Bay Entertainment 'Jess Franco Collection', which contains *Ilsa, the Wicked Warden*, includes seven other films: *Barbed Wire Dolls* (Franco 1976); *Jack the Ripper* (Franco 1976); *Blue Rita* (Franco 1977); *Love Camp* (Franco 1977); *Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun* (Franco 1977); *Sexy Sisters* (Franco 1977); and *Voodoo Passion* (Franco 1977). There is also a 'Jess Franco Collection Vol. 2' containing *Down Town* (Franco 1975), *The Inconfessable Orgies of Emmanuelle* (Franco 1982), *Mansion Of The Living Dead* (Franco 1982), *Macumba Sexual* (Franco 1983), *The Story Of O* (Franco 1984), and *Downtown Heat* (Franco 1994), which utilises the same narrative image as it predecessor. The release of these two large box sets confirms Lucas's claims that nearly all of Franco's most important titles are available on DVD (2010: 17). The director's extended presence within the sell-through market is especially significant due to the lack of scholarship dedicated to his work. In this sense, the individual commercial artefacts play a larger role in defining the director's cultural identity, as each blurb, image, or special feature offers rare bits of information.

Anchor Bay Entertainment, discussed briefly in Chapter 3, is part of the larger Starz Media LLC. Prior to this, the label was part of first the Handleman Company (1995–2003), then IDT Entertainment (2003–6). In 2007 Anchor Bay was renamed Starz Home Entertainment, before being reinstalled as Anchor Bay Entertainment in 2008. Within the contemporary climate the company distributes children's films, fitness guides and stand-up comedy and is far removed from the type of dedicated exploitation label exemplified by the likes of Arrow Video, Shameless Screen Entertainment and 88 Films. However, during the mid-2000s, Anchor Bay was synonymous with the distribution of horror and cult cinema. As Mark Bernard notes, Anchor Bay catered to niche audiences and was one of the first distributors (along with The Criterion Collection) to make use of DVD's extra storage (2015: 58). Though it is important to recognise how the company's varied catalogue dilutes the purity of its sub-cultural capital, Anchor Bay continues to maintain a high level of admiration within the paracinematic community due to the distribution of certain canonical narratives, concentration on extra paratextual material and utilisation of bespoke packaging.

Anchor Bay's release of *The Evil Dead* (Raimi 1981) offers a key example of the company's painstaking attention to detail which continues to afford them a high standing within their niche market sector. As Brigit Cherry's study of the horror fan discourse proves (2008: 213), Sam Raimi's film is a

certified genre classic. This makes it something of a poison chalice for the distributor, as the film's status allows the company to acquire and adopt some of its pre-established sub-cultural capital, yet comes with greater expectations from the fan base. Due to the precious nature of the film, the fans preserve particular ideas about how such an important and protected text should be handled. Crucially, Anchor Bay's release lives up to these expectations. The release, encased within a rubber sleeve, replicates the 'Book of the Dead', a prominent part of *The Evil Dead*'s fictional mythology. Opening like a novel, the thick, card pages are filled with drawings akin to the ones present within the fictitious manuscript, providing the consumer with not only the film, but also a prop. The excessive lengths Anchor Bay go to create an original and unique item helps them impress the often unforgiving cult audience, amplifying the sub-cultural capital of the film while increasing their reputation among their primary demographic. The 'Jess Franco Collection', due to its later release date, is able to capitalise on this credibility and benefits from the trace of Anchor Bay's past accomplishments.

The Cover

As stated, the collection gathers eight of Franco's films. Each film is presented on a single disc and packaged within a slim case, which is then housed within a larger outer sleeve. The front of the outer sleeve is dominated by gold writing which reads 'the Jess Franco Collection'. The gold writing lends a sense of prestige to the release, imparting the collection with an impression of authority and legitimacy through the adoption of grand signifiers and auteur branding (see Figure 5.3). The individual covers of *Ilsa, the Wicked Warden*, *Barbed Wire Dolls*, *Blue Rita* and *Jack the Ripper* appear below this title. The size of these reproduced sleeves (4cm) suggests that the box set is looking to trade off Franco's marketability rather than that of his individual films. This represents a significant yet increasingly common shift in the vocabulary afforded exploitation cinema, as previous incarnations of the exploitation object would have promoted terms such as 'gore' and 'splatter' over any sense of authorial expression (Guins 2005: 26). The cover further rejects traditional exploitation branding techniques as it refrains from using sexual images, horrific typography or dark colour schemes. Instead, the primary colour used is grey and gold and the typeface is formal and bookish. The back cover follows the same aesthetic composition (see Figure 5.4), while a small blurb claims the films can be experienced as never before 'with brilliant colours, clear sound and technical perfection surpassing the originals by far'. Here, Anchor Bay position themselves as archivist offering a new 'world premier' to the

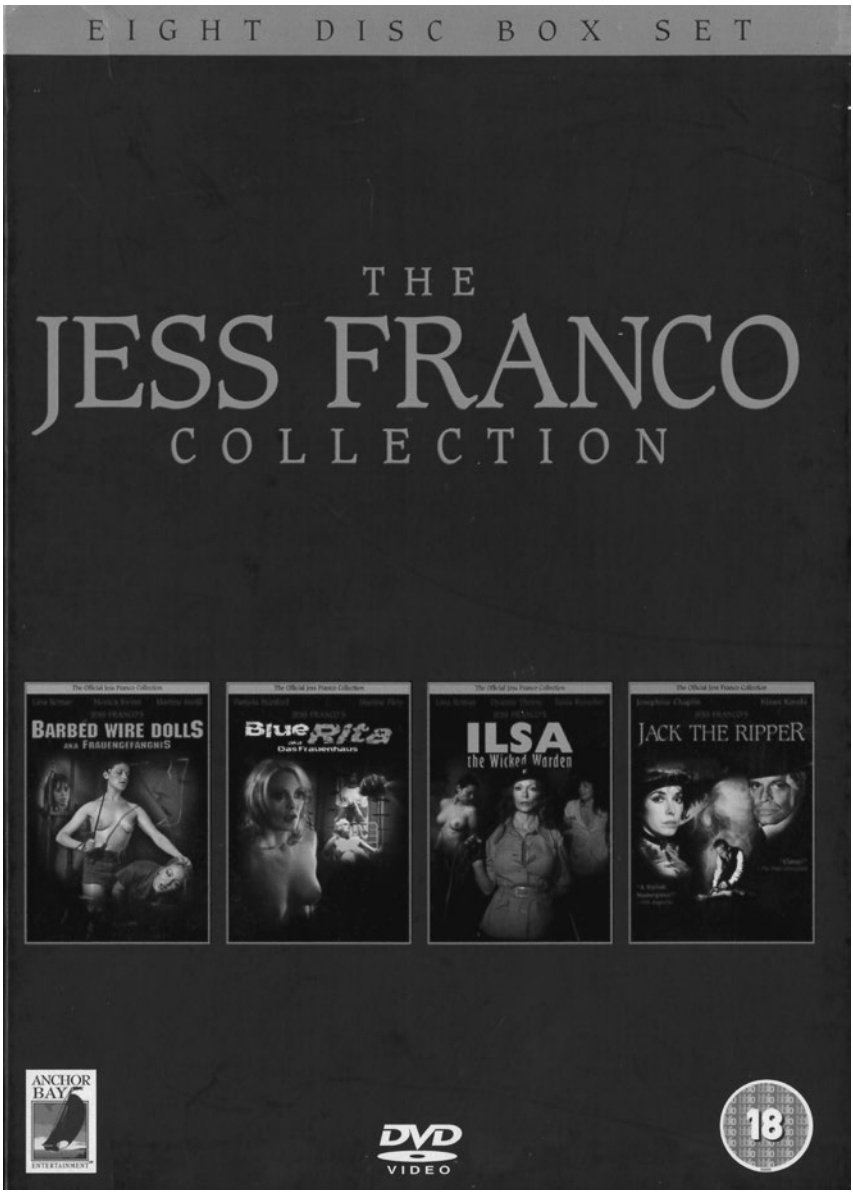

Figure 5.3 The 'Jess Franco Collection' cardboard sleeve (front). (Source: © Anchor Bay.)

prospective consumer, a role that comes with additional cultural credibility and illustrates Anchor Bay's willingness to co-opt art film marketing strategies. Overall, the external cover is restrained and erudite, encouraging an auteur reading of the previously 'lowbrow' content.

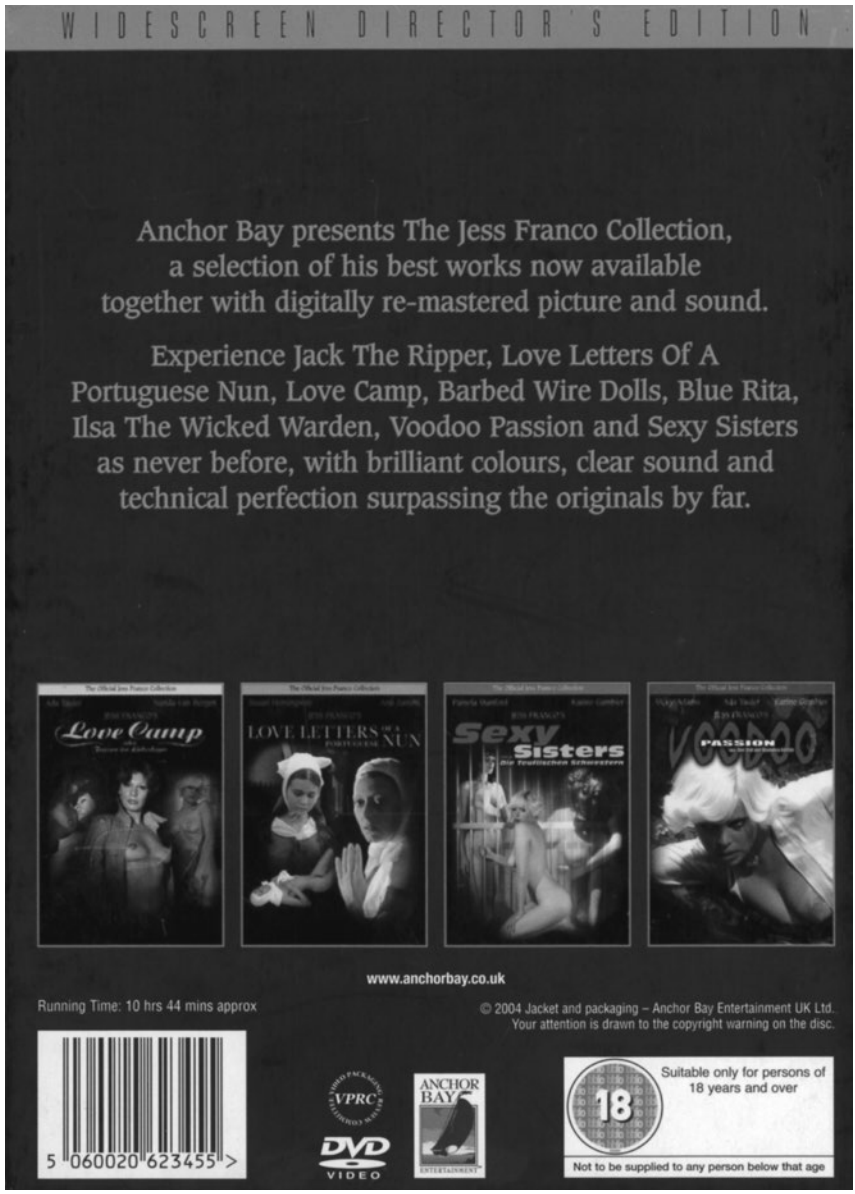

Figure 5.4 The 'Jess Franco Collection' cardboard sleeve (back). (Source: © Anchor Bay.)

In regard to the design aesthetic of *Ilsa, the Wicked Warden* and the other films included within the collection, this 'high' cultural legitimisation is replaced by more traditional exploitation marketing models. Out of eight covers, seven display nudity on the front cover, with six showing

breasts, while *Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun* shows a woman's genitals. Unmistakably, Anchor Bay's focus on the naked female body mirrors BFI Distribution's use of similar material, highlighting the existence of a communal marketing method used across traditional taste divides. However, while the legitimisation of the BFI brand helped to validate the sexuality of the *Salò* cover, the paracinematic reputation of Anchor Bay only works to further amplify the exploitative nature of Franco's narratives. However, the 'lowbrow' connotations of these images are countered by the presence of national branding. Five of the releases – *Barbed Wire Dolls*, *Blue Rita*, *Love Camp*, *Sexy Sisters* and *Voodoo Passion* – openly encourage the purgative potential of European-ness by displaying German-language titles underneath the English counterpart. As I have noted elsewhere, secondary readings of European-ness – whereby the use of European titles underscores the potential sleaziness of the product – are available. However, when these titles are considered alongside the gold typeface, bookish cover design and general 'auteurification' of Franco, it seems clear that the audience is urged to read them as signs of authentication, rather than infamy.

Ilsa, the Wicked Warden, whilst not partaking in this process of Europeanisation, does deliberately invoke several established brands so as to increase its commercial desirability (see Figure 5.5). Firstly, a border confirms the film's inclusion within the 'official Jess Franco Collection', grafting further prestige to an already auteuristic product. Yet particular attention needs to be paid to the use of the word 'official', as it actively promotes a sense of professionalism and authority absent in the early days of exploitation distribution. During the film's original release, or the days of VHS that followed, these texts would have been rushed to market, or bootlegged, pirated and traded among a small but devoted community. Now, in stark contrast, the release is refined, polished and 'official'. However, the driving force behind this 'official' standing – Franco's auteurism – is made to compete with the brand 'Ilsa', which as established remains a valuable, sub-culturally rich property within the paracinematic community. It is the meeting of these two brands, and Anchor Bay's desire to capitalise on *Ilsa*'s commerciality, that begins to accelerate the artefact's transition back into the 'lowbrow'. In the first instance, the word 'ILSA' dominates the cover, towering over Franco's name. The sheer scale of the word rouses the trace of the entire *Ilsa* franchise – which is soaked in the 'lowbrow' connotations of the Nazi-sexploitation cycle and marks the object with that reputation. Of course, this is not necessarily a bad thing, as it allows Anchor Bay to target a very particular audience sector and validate the extremity of their product. It also enables the company

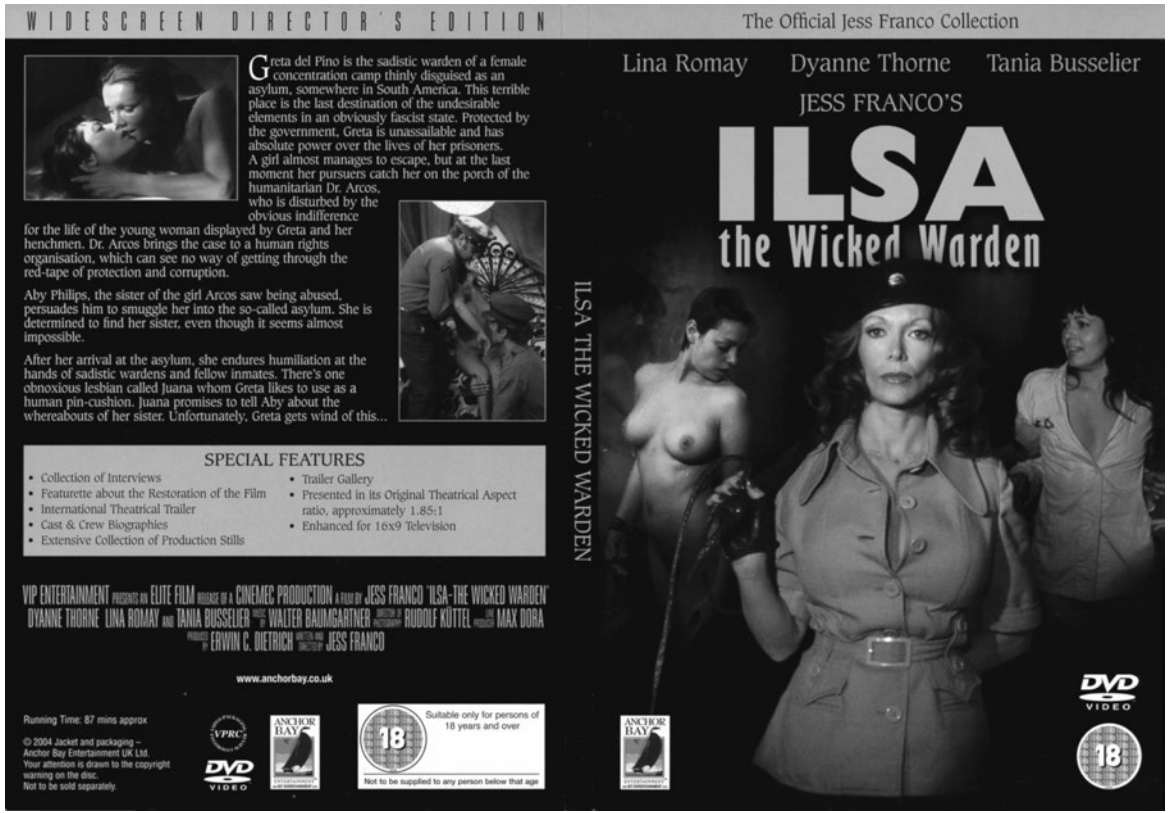

Figure 5.5 *Ilsa, the Wicked Warden* DVD artwork. (Source: © Anchor Bay.)

to draw from the successes of the more popular *Ilsa* offerings and share the entire franchise's accomplishments among its own library. In support of the latter claim, the second part of the title, 'the Wicked Warden', is neither capitalised nor presented in a bold typeface, indicating that Franco's variation of the concept is of little importance when compared to the commercial potency of the original trilogy. Undeniably, for Anchor Bay, the word 'Ilsa' triggers a series of generic meanings that are more significant than the sum of their individual parts.

Moreover, just as Luis Buñuel and Roman Polanski were made to compete with the branding of Catherine Deneuve throughout their paratextual incarnations, Franco is forced to compete with his own highly sexualised female lead, Thorne. Thorne, who shares an intrinsic relationship to the franchise, is placed centrally on the cover. Appearing in colour between a pair of sepia images, Thorne assumes the stereotypical 'Ilsa pose' – strong and authoritative yet still sexually suggestive. Dressed in a green military uniform, Thorne's shirt is unbuttoned and drawn in at her waist to accentuate her breasts, while the whip she holds deliberately goads ideas of sexual fetish and sadomasochism. Although the majority of 'Ilsa' cover art shows a drawn version of Thorne's character, the pose, and the deliberate exaggeration of the actress's bodily dimensions, allows this cover to sit neatly within the pre-existing visuals of the franchise. Once more, this allows for a smooth exchange to take place between the different products, allowing Franco's unofficial fourth addition easier access to the sub-cultural capital of its predecessors. Crucially, the text's association with Nazi-sexploitation films and women-in-prison narratives is capitalised on in the two images that flank Thorne. One image portrays a woman being restrained by male hands, while another depicts a nude female. Together, the three images neatly summarise the generic traits of the sub-genre, which often feature the archetypical character types on display here: the empowered figure; the nude female; and the restrained woman.

The promotion of this particular strain of exploitation cinema is continued throughout the film's blurb, which quickly establishes notions of fascism, stating 'Greta del Pino is the sadistic warden of a female concentration camp thinly disguised as an asylum, somewhere in South America [. . .] the last destination of the undesirable elements in an obviously fascist state'. This opening line connects Franco's film to both the *Ilsa* series and the broader semiotics of the cycle, once more allowing it to appropriate valuable meanings not directly connected to it. In this sense, the paratext revises the product, not by adding 'high' cultural capital but by affixing further 'low' cultural capital from a range of sources. Consequently, the individual paratext of *Ilsa, the Wicked Warden* counterbalances the 'high'

cultural image offered by the formal outer slip case. This multipronged approach allows the item to appeal to both 'lowbrow' markets and 'highbrow' spaces, sanitising extremity for the latter while providing sufficient stimulus for the former. In a more general sense, this multifaceted approach suggests that paratextual expressions of extremity are far from simple and are composed of a complex amalgamation of several visual and linguistic registers.

The Disc

A slow montage of sexual images matched with music and a sexual groan of 'Greta' plays before the main menu. This initial foregrounding of sexuality continues on the title screen, as a moving frame featuring a female touching her breasts borders the menu. In fact, images of nudity are present throughout all selection screens, backdrops and title pages. However, it is hard to ignore the correlation these de-contextualised images share with the proliferation of nakedness seen throughout the *Salò* booklet. This affiliation is perhaps clearest within the first special feature on the disc entitled *Production and Film Stills*. The gallery hosts twenty-five images, fifteen of which depict either nudity or violence, or a combination of the two. This number collates neatly with the division present throughout the *Salò* booklet. Yet unlike the booklet, there is little in the way of context on offer. Rather than the essays presented by the BFI, these images are framed by further nudity, as a border featuring an image of a topless female remains a constant presence on-screen. Significantly, the border image is almost the size of the production stills themselves and therefore even when the picture itself does not display nudity, nakedness is still exhibited.

The persistence of nudity is unwavering and resolutely positions Franco within the 'lowbrow' realm of sexploitation. Nonetheless, the biographies seek to offer a more sophisticated reading of the main cast and crew. For example, the biography of the film's producer Erwin C. Dietrich operates within the framework of traditional art film legitimisation, endeavouring to place Dietrich in three different cultural-cinematic locales: American exploitation cinema; mainstream cinema; and European art cinema. By using these three sites as cultural footholds, the special feature seeks to develop Dietrich's status outside of the often limiting space of exploitation cinema. Firstly, although the text mentions his links to exploitation cinema, it carefully uses Roger Corman as a comparison point, allowing Dietrich to adopt some of the American's trace memory. Corman – who is responsible for films like *Attack of the Crab Monsters* (1957), *The Wasp Women* (1959) and *A Bucket of Blood* (1959) – represents a very different mode of exploitation cinema than that of Franco and Dietrich's other

collaborators. Corman, working during an era defined by camp shocks rather than excessive violence and sex, embodies a more innocent and therefore acceptable strain of 'lowbrow' pleasure. Without doubt, Anchor Bay make this connection in order to soften Dietrich's image and cast him as a more nostalgic, even playful figure. Secondly, the biography uses the Oscars to adorn the producer with mainstream kudos, stating that the producer gave eventual Oscar winner Xavier Koller (Best Foreign Language Film – *Journey of Hope* [1990]) his first shooting experience. Finally, the biography declares Dietrich is 'an irreplaceable and integral part of the European film identity', a statement that challenges the 'high white tradition' (Mathijs and Mendik 2004) by inserting the producer within the previously unattainable cultural space of European film culture. In general, this feature uses cultural touchstones to appease an audience unsure of the producer's credentials and recalibrates his history by manoeuvring him away from the 'lowbrow'.

Crucially, the biography of Franco uses a similar method, stationing him within several culturally established frameworks: the history of American cinema; the British theatre tradition; the prestige of the festival circuit; and the 'high' cultural space of art cinema. Firstly, the biography mentions that Franco worked with Orson Welles on an adaptation of a Shakespeare play, which was in turn nominated for a British Film Award. These three aspects – Welles, Shakespeare and culturally valid recognition (the biography later mentions the Berlin Film festival) – all work to draw legitimacy from differing cultural locations and splice them with the brand image of Franco. Later the biography recalls the taxonomy of auteur theory and François Truffaut's romantic 'man of cinema' ideal by insisting that 'it was not unusual for [Franco] to be the screenplay author, director, cameraman, composer and star all at the same time'. Finally, the biography remarks that 'in the 1970s, Franco shared, along with Luis Buñuel, the Catholic Church's title of most dangerous film maker'. The mention here of Buñuel enables the paratextual feature to fuse the histories of the directors, positioning Franco as Buñuel's contemporary and an artistic, anti-establishment filmmaker rather than mere exploiter. Intriguingly, these approaches counter the hyperbolic statements historically associated with exploitation cinema, as there is no mention of Franco's use of gore, sex or violence, and no claims that he is the 'master' of sleaze or erotica. They also sit in direct contrast to the images of nudity that define the menus and backdrops of the disc's inner mechanics. Once more showing the slipperiness of 'high' and 'low' marketing methods, the coming together of these approaches on a single item fragments the product, as it is pulled in opposing directions simultaneously.

Indeed, the disjointed nature of the disc is typified by the final feature, which replaces the sexual imagery with an in-depth discussion of Anchor Bay's restoration process. Entitled *DVD Production Report*, the featurette claims the box set represents 'the resurrection of Jess Franco's films'. The rhetoric is similar to the BFI's description of *Salò*, particularly their discussion of the 'club' cut, which was underpinned by the notion of careful and loving recovery. The use of a reciprocal pool of language between the BFI and Anchor Bay is important, as while the companies are working within different parts of a mutual marketplace, the emphasis they place on these types of activity achieves the same results. Essentially, through highlighting their role as restorers, Anchor Bay endorse Franco's films, showing them as 'worthy' of this treatment while elevating their own status as proprietors of 'quality' cinema. Moreover this also shows a communal nature of the audience, who – regardless of personal taste – find value in history, authenticity and restoration. Nonetheless, this discourse remains overpowered by the continued focus on female nudity. Essentially therefore, while the object masquerades as 'art' through its discussion of renewal, use of the auteur branding and continued reference to the film's position within the histories of European film culture, it still revels in its role as a piece of 'lowbrow' exploitation and enjoys its label as forbidden. While making the film no less important to the histories surveyed within this work, the box set is evidence of not only the commercial power of extremity, but also the difficultly distributors have in denying its place upon the commercial object.

Conclusion

In conclusion, both these objects merge the marketing methods of art and exploitation, highlighting the existence of a shared language which enables the paratextual item to slip between taste cultures with ease. Both distributors accentuate the act of restoration, casting their releases as scholarly incisions and elevating both the text's status and that of the company in the process. Both distributors package and market their editions as 'events' through the addition of supplementary features, an aspect particularly important when evaluating the 'Jess Franco Collection'. In this example, the distribution company associated with 'lowbrow' cult cinema shares the attention to detail more common within the 'highbrow' sector, bestowing their product with new-found capital. Of course, this has become a common practice now, but in 2004, this type of approach was less widespread. This consequently proposes that the introduction of DVD and Blu-ray provided exploitation films with a platform upon which

they can instantly increase their status as cinematic artefacts. This idea is suggested within Raiford Guins' 'Blood and Black Gloves on Shiny Discs: New Media, Old Tastes, and the Remediation of Italian Horror Films in the United States', wherein the author notes that previously 'lowbrow' products are given a 'highbrow' status through their encapsulation on the new format (2005: 29).

Similarly, both releases construct their public face through a centralisation of the naked female form. The 'Jess Franco Collection' clearly desires to be read in this way, and laces its paratextual zones with references to sexual extremity at every opportunity. In the case of *Salò*, the BFI also actively invokes the stigma of sexual extremity, ultimately meaning the film is unable to penetrate completely the art film market space as it is still framed as potentially 'disgusting'. However, one can put forth an additional reading of the sexualised body used on the cover of *Salò*. The body can be read as an extension of Pasolini's main political theory: the belief that within society the body has become a commodity – a product to be bought, sold and owned. In this framework, the centralisation of the female body on the cover of the BFI release works as a visualisation of the director's worldview. The body becomes an exploited commodity, presented nude for the pleasure of a consumer who wants to exert their power over the image and object. Although this reading is reliant on a sophisticated understanding of the film's political messages, and therefore is not available to the casual consumer, it is vital to understanding the complex paratextuality of extreme art film. Here, the object itself becomes an act of subversion, challenging the consumer to think about the image rather than passively accept it. Certainly, those who do not are likely to be disappointed with the feature itself, as it fails to deliver the uncontested sexualisation the cover seems to offer. What becomes clear once more is the complexity of extremity's commercial function. It seems increasingly obvious that extremity is rarely presented in an unadorned state. Even within the 'lowbrow', the images are flanked by signifiers of auteurist credibility, narratives of restoration and reprisal, and arguments of support from academics, filmmakers and other culturally validated sources. In this sense, it can perhaps be suggested that extremity becomes more commercially appealing when it can be seen as culturally worthwhile. Simple guts and gore is no longer as enticing as it used to be.

CHAPTER 6

Contemporary Extremity on DVD: Trends, Hard-core and Geographic Mobility

Using the areas of focus established in Chapter 3, I will continue to chart the paratextuality of extreme art cinema throughout this chapter, paying particular attention to moments of hybridisation, borrowing and remediation. The chapter will start by briefly evaluating the specific cultural and cinematic changes which led to a lack of extreme art film production in the 1980s, before charting its resurgence in the 1990s and 2000s. During the latter, I will undertake paratextual analysis of key French extremity narratives, before assessing the differing techniques used in the distribution of other forms of European extremity. Thereafter the chapter will examine the changing nature of exploitation cinema, evaluating how the increasing refinement of the horror genre eventually led to the re-emergence of an excessive European horror product. These films sit on the margins of the extreme art film tradition, yet their paratextuality offers interesting points of insight and affects the way transgressive art films are understood by audiences. Once more, my aim here is not to provide an extensive historical survey. Rather, I seek to offer a snapshot of important shifts, films, directors and paratexts in order to provide a contextual framework for the case studies that follow.

Contemporary Extreme Art Cinema: 'New French Extremity' and Beyond

Market forces and changes in the industry are fundamental to understanding extreme art film. The fall of the Berlin Wall meant art cinema operated for the first time within a global film market (Galt 2006: 6), creating a new economic culture governed by the pressures of globalisation. These developments allowed Hollywood to find audiences within a larger number of territories (Chaudhuri 2005: 14), forcing art cinema to compete on a global stage. Changes to production models in Italy, which had previously been vital to the progression of extreme art film due to the films of Pier Paolo

Pasolini, Bernardo Bertolucci, Dario Argento, Ruggero Deodato and Lucio Fulci, are illustrative of these larger shifts. Following the deregulation of television, the Italian industry was struggling to find an audience (Wood 2005: 29) and responded by concentrating national production on more mainstream-friendly features such as *Cinema Paradiso* (Tornatore 1988) and *Life is Beautiful* (Benigni 1997) (Brunetta 2005: 299). A similar trend was occurring across other European territories, as the pressures of globalisation were changing the aesthetic and thematic concerns of art cinema, while altering the 'highbrow' film culture more generally. Within France, a concentration on visual excess saw to the suppression of extremity, with films such as Jean-Jacques Beineix's *Diva* (Beineix 1981), Luc Besson's *Subway* (Besson 1985) and Leos Carax's *Mauvais Sang* (Carax 1986) coming to the fore. Widely labelled as the Cinéma du Look, these films defied the generation of directors schooled in naturalistic modes of the French New Wave and instead centred on extravagant visual spectacles (Harris 2004: 219). Rosalind Galt claims this visual excess covered for the films' lack of depth (2006: 15), whilst Sue Harris insists that they offered the audience moments of sensory pleasure (2004: 221). As suggested throughout this and other works on the subject, extreme cinema provides very few moments of pleasure, and thus this shift is illustrative of a wider change in the art film climate. Yet in the latter part of the 1990s, extremity began to re-emerge as a cinematic force.

'New French Extremity': Hyperbole and Ballyhoo

French Extremity remains the most well-documented form of contemporary extreme cinema. Key texts include Catherine Breillat's *Romance*, *À Ma Sœur!* (2001) and *Anatomy of Hell* (2004); Gaspar Noé's *I Stand Alone* (1999) and *Irreversible*; Virginie Despentes and Coralie Trinh Thi's *Baise Moi*; Claire Denis' *Trouble Every Day*; Marine de Van's *Dans Ma Peau* (2002); and Bruno Dumont's *Twentynine Palms*. Defined by their aggressive inversion of generic expectations, these films deliberately seek to disgust and repulse, and provide a challenging cinematic experience that forces the audience to consider their reasons for consuming such material. As was suggested throughout the Introduction, this has often been seen as a commercially motivated tactic. Many critics have noted that the use of extremity leads to greater exposure and commercial stability, with the likes of James Quandt (2004) and Hampus Hagman (2007) claiming that scenes of hard-core sex or gory violence are simple ploys used to attract attention within an overcrowded marketplace. Tim Palmer agrees, noting 'those filmmakers [. . .] associated with the cinema du corps have either

drastically advanced their reputations [. . .] or else become agit-prop auteurs seemingly overnight' (2011: 58). Thus to these critics and others, the inclusion of sex and violence simply becomes a way to mark the texts as 'must-see', a gimmick with little or no value beyond its innate ability to entice and excite. Nonetheless, many scholars have worked to redefine the ambitions of French extremity and dislodge this singular focus. Palmer, despite pronouncing the marketability of these narratives, notes the manner in which they continue art cinema's history of stimulating the mind of the audience, claiming that in an age of the jaded spectator, the brutality of the texts illustrates cinema's continued potential to inspire bewilderment (2006: 22). This ability to stir a reaction within a generation saturated by an array of media images is crucial to positioning these narratives as a continuation of art cinema's historic concerns, and is one echoed by Tanya Horeck and Tina Kendall (2011: 2). Essentially, these readings, and the many others that surround extreme art cinema, rest at opposing ends of a dialogue which pits artistic integrity against commercial opportunism. It is this argument that motivates the investigation undertaken throughout this chapter, and this book in general.

The work of Breillat typifies the duality present within the critical discourse, as her films have been read as both financially exploitative and artistically challenging. Often labelled as a pornographer due to her uncompromising utilisation of hard-core sex, Breillat has been intermittently denied the 'highbrow' reading protocol commonly applied to the consideration of art cinema. However, the work of Lisa Downing suggests Breillat's use of sexual explicitness exists as an active reworking of the male gaze (2004: 269), citing *Romance*'s use of voiceover – whereby the metaphysical monologues of Marie (Caroline Ducey) disrupt the audience's identification with sexual explicitness (2004: 269) – as a key example. Catherine Wheatley's article 'Contested Interactions: Watching Catherine Breillat's Scenes of Sexual Violence' (2010), further articulates how Breillat uses unsimulated sex not as an exploitative gesture, but as an artistic deconstruction of dominant ways of seeing.

However, this complex reassessment of the mores of pornography is largely ignored during the director's paratextual life. *À Ma Sœur!*, released by Tartan Video in 2002, foregrounds the auteur status of Breillat, the personal relevance of the film (digital film notes by film critic Tom Dawson note the film is inspired by Breillat's own relationship with her sister) and the film's festival prestige (the blurb states the film 'won awards the world over'), while the paratextuality presentation of *Romance* and *Anatomy of Hell* exploit the extremity of the texts in far more obvious ways. Though it is apparent that *Romance* and *Anatomy of Hell* are more

extreme than *À Ma Sœur!* – due to the multiple scenes of hard-core sex that typify the narratives – the gulf in paratextual register is telling and supports calls that extremity serves a commercial purpose when the films reach shelves.

Romance was first released by Bluelight in 2000 before being re-released by Second Sight in 2014. Whilst there is a fourteen-year gap between the artefacts, there is little evidence that Second Sight were interested in the type of redemptive narratives that came to the fore in Chapter 3. There are few differences between the two covers. Both use a similar narrative image, focusing on a naked female torso, which although differing slightly in angle, lighting and flesh exposed (a nipple is visible on the Bluelight release), are almost indistinguishable. In both cases, a stock image of a nude female body is favoured over that of actress Caroline Ducey. This decision has significant ramifications on the audience's expectations, as the chosen images represent a far more polished, titillating and unobstructed version of female sexuality than what is actually presented within the narrative. In truth, the image used on the Second Sight release is more problematic in this regard, as the model's breasts are larger, while the body is slimmer and more toned. Both covers, in their promotion of the nude female, show a direct misunderstanding of the narrative. In their use of a hyper-sexualised cover, the artefacts force the film to wear the mask of soft-core erotica – the very type of text the narrative is trying to challenge. As a result, the products actually subdue any sense of artistic depth the film may merit, as they reduce Breillat's text to its basest form in order to make it desirable to an alternative – yet likely disappointed – demographic.

This repression of artistic complexities in favour of exploitative simplicity is continued in Tartan Video's 2005 release of *Anatomy of Hell*. The cover image, a take on the theatrical poster, once again centralises nudity. This time the actors are used, with Amira Casar and Rocco Siffredi both appearing topless. Although Casar's nipple has been digitally removed from the image, an act that slightly softens its extremity, the shape of the breast is still clearly visible. In fact, the possibility of a sexualised reading of the image is heightened by the appearance of a 'warning' which reads 'this film contains some scenes that may offend'. The 'warning', presented in a font the same size as Breillat's name, supports the sexualisation of the characters and is worn like a badge of honour, an official sign of the film's forbidden qualities. In essence, the 'warning', which marks the film out as unsuitable for certain audiences, works in much the same way as the video nasty's 'previously banned' logo. It makes the film seem exclusive and forbidden, unfit for general consumption and a risk to health. Naturally this could repel certain consumers and one could

argue that Tartan Video is merely doing a service to their customers by rightfully warning them about the content of the film. However, there is no mistaking the fantastical nature of the caution and the manner it dares and goads the spectator, and prepares them for a certain experience. The blurb indulges this reading further, opening with the declaration that the film stars 'gorgeous ex-model Amira Casar' alongside 'world renowned porn star' Siffredi. These descriptions promote the type of gender imbalance the film is aiming to challenge by actively encourage the audience to objectify Casar and identify with Siffredi. Casar is positioned as the type of woman Siffredi could 'get' – a 'gorgeous ex-model' – and thus she quickly becomes something of a trophy, an object of a man's gaze. An additional pamphlet takes this reading further still by sporting the tagline 'eXtreme. eXotic. eXplicit'. Through its illusion to the infamous 'XXX' emblem of the sex industry, the mini-booklet again foregrounds the film's relationship to pornography over that of the art circuit, creating an overwhelmingly sexual narrative world.

Ultimately, Breillat's ability to complicate issues of the gaze is not only ignored, but also directly opposed by the paratextual presentation of her films. Extremity is stripped of any prospective meaning in order to exploit its potential as a commercially desirable signifier, resulting in a misrepresentation of the director's cinematic message. Again, I am not judging the distributor's creative choices or accusing the products they release of any wrongdoing. Certainly, the films of Breillat would prove incredibly hard to market due to their aggressive and unforgiving nature, and avoiding their sexual nature would not only be misleading, but may also prove impossible. Instead, what I am interested in is the manner in which these releases confirm the influence paratexts and their makers can have upon the films distributed under their care. In this case, Breillat's cinema is transformed from cinematic attacks on patriarchal ways of seeing to artefacts that further propagate the sexualisation of women.

The duality of Breillat's cinema unsurprisingly defines the cultural image of Gaspar Noé, especially his 2002 film *Irreversible*, which Palmer insists is the most disliked of the New French Extremism (2006: 27). This critical aversion stems from the film's rape sequence, which Daniel Hickin claims sets a new precedent for on-screen depictions of rape (2011: 128). The sequence, which shows Alex (Monica Bellucci) being raped for several minutes in an unedited static shot, was seen as an unamusing way to capture attention (James 2003: 20) and was largely understood as an exploitative spectacle. As a consequence of this, the experimental elements within the text – which included a reversed story arch, fluid camera work and juxtaposing expenditures of pace – became largely discredited as meaningless

frivolities (Brottman 2004: 38). Additionally, the film began to enjoy a 'second life' in a similar manner to *Salò, Or the 120 Days of Sodom*, whereby it is popular on extreme film lists. In this sense, Noé's film has become something of a yard stick for an audience who wants to test their cinematic threshold, a rite of passage for those who fancy themselves as extreme film fans. Yet alternative readings of the rape sequence are offered by Mark Kermode, who suggests the scene's innate violence denies spectators the titillation that is so often associated with scenes of sexual abuse (2003: 22).

Perhaps obviously, the duality of this discourse has little impact on the paratextual presentation of the film, which was released by Tartan Video in both a standard and collector's edition in 2003 and 2006 respectively. At times, the objects hint at the validity of the text – noting its 'importance' – yet ultimately they promote the film's extreme reputation while trying to generate a cult appeal. Evidence of this is not only seen in the release of a collector's edition (an indication of *Irreversible*'s commercial desirability), but also in the bespoke design of the standard release. As a play on the film's reversed narrative, the sleeve's placement within the box forces it to open from left to right, or 'backwards'. Flipping the DVD in this manner recalls marketing techniques more often associated with fan discourses, where these small details bring pleasure to the audience, while its playful approach brands the reversed narrative as a gimmick. This twist on the concept of backwardness is continued as the names of the cast and crew (Bellucci, Cassel, Dupontel and Noé) have the 'e's' and 'n's' of their names inverted. Repeated on the collector's edition, this light-hearted in-joke reduces the chances that the reversed storyline will be considered as a serious artistic decision and supports sections of the critical discourse which denounced its value.

The mischievous nature of the box is juxtaposed against the central image, which shows Bellucci's Alex walking down the underpass in which she is raped. The image, which is slightly tilted and presented predominantly in dark reds and browns, publicises the film's most transgressive sequence, and is thus able to capitalise on the critical discourse's widespread denouncement of the scene's extreme sexual violence. Indeed, the *Irreversible* cover is an interesting example of the way extremity informs the paratextuality of contemporary art cinema. Without explicitly showing extremity, the paratext manages to invoke the film's infamy, triggering a series of memories within the consumer as it turns a vicious sequence of rape into the product's chief commercial signifier. Although the collector's edition shows Alex in a sheer dress pressed against a wall, the artwork is taken from the same sequence and once more gives the paratext licence to commodify the film's most extreme aspects.

The blurb – identical across both releases – accelerates this promotion of extremity. For example, the first paragraph ends with the sentence 'they are totally unaware that their world is about to be torn apart in the most unimaginably brutal way possible'. The second paragraph continues this hyperbolic rhetoric, stating the characters are 'plunged headlong into a nightmarish world of darkness, where an act of extreme sexual and physical violence will serve as the spark for yet more violence'. Of course, the film is violent and brutal, and to suggest that it is not would be both misleading and dishonest. However, it is the manner in which the blurb purposefully recounts the narrative as a conventional story of violence that is of interest. The ballyhoo language, which builds anticipation for this 'nightmarish world of darkness' which is set to be 'torn apart in the most unimaginably brutal way possible' dismisses the complexities of the reversed structure. It positions these events as moments to be enjoyed and revelled in – moments that will enhance the violent spectacle and not disappoint even the most avid horror film enthusiast. In this sense, the film is cast simply as extreme, rather than a combination of extremity and intellectual stimulation. Once again, this decision illustrates the role textual extremity comes to perform within the commercial sphere, and the manner in which scenes of even extreme sexual violence can be turned into promotional material.

Claire Denis's *Trouble Every Day* offers a useful example of how these hybrid art texts are pushed into less complex commercial categories. Prior to the release of *Trouble Every Day*, Denis retained a validated status as a successful art film director; however her take on the cannibal mythos was met with a series of negative reviews (Ratner 2010: 36), due mostly to the mixture of narrative banality and extreme violence. Arguably the film's depiction of bodily mutilation was seen as more offensive due to the pre-circulating legitimacy of Denis, as her adoption of the exploitation techniques that were dominating French art cinema at the time were read as an affront to her previous successes and style. In many ways, this resulted in a temporary disavowal of her cultural validity.

Evidence of this temporary exile can be seen to have influenced *Trouble Every Day*'s paratextual identity. The film was released by a combination of Tartan Video and Prism Leisure, before a second release tentatively welcomed the film back to the art film realm. Yet it is the former that is of real interest here. Unlike Tartan Video, Prism Leisure exists as a budget DVD label retaining none of the cultural legitimacy of the other distributors discussed so far. The company's connection to the lower end of the straight-to-DVD market impacts the cultural 'worth' of Denis's film in significant ways, as it instantly casts the film as more disposable – one

part of a large catalogue of unremarkable texts not 'worthy' of a more refined paratextual treatment. As noted throughout this work, the primary text can become validated due to the labour a distributor puts into their release, and the paratexts that surround them. Within this, paratextual additions like bespoke packaging designs and additional booklets lavish the text with prestige and make them seem precious and creditable. In opposition to this, *Trouble Every Day* is released in an unaccompanied state and is housed under the branding of a company not known for their special treatment or paratextual efforts.

This explains the DVD's presentation, which uses a standardised and well-established horror genre template. Clearest within the film's tagline ('I love you so much . . . I could eat you'), the cover oversimplifies the narrative and allows the film to masquerade as a light-hearted horror film rather than an inversion of longstanding generic traditions. The quotation on the back cover, accredited to the *New York Post*, continues this, stating 'nothing Denis has made before, like *Beau Travil* and *Nenette et Boni,* could prepare us for this **gory, perverted, sex-soaked** riff on the **cannibal** genre' (emphasis in original). Emboldened on the cover, the terminology traps the film within the ghetto of low-budget horror narratives, as the blurb goes on to claim the film 'explores the dark side of desire in a way that no other film before it ever dared'. However, it is the inside of the sleeve which underscores this approach, as it showcases the type of library the text belongs to. Printed on the inside of the jacket is an advert promoting 'more great value DVD horror films from Prism Leisure'. By looking at the products listed, it is easy to assume the type of audience the release was aimed towards and the manner in which Denis's film is being positioned as a 'normal' horror film. While listing (through the replication of DVD thumbnails) art-horror titles such as *Blue Velvet* (Lynch 1986) and *Rabid* (Cronenberg 1977), the advert contains mostly 'lowbrow' horror narratives such as *Ed Gein* (Parello 2000), *Ted Bundy* (Bright 2002), *Curse of the Forty-Niner* (Buechler 2002) and *Madhouse* (Butler 2004). *Trouble Every Day*'s proximity to these narratives, and their straight-to-DVD status, knowingly ousts it from the art sphere, quashing the film's complexity, its appearance at Cannes and the pre-existing auteur status of Denis. In essence, belonging to the Prism Leisure family caps the film's ability to gain traction within a 'highbrow' community, while illustrating how simply moments of textual exploitation can be recast, refashioned and resold.

Collectively the distribution of these French texts supports the more cynical opinions of contemporary extremity. The paratexts promote the extremity of the texts over all other attributes, offering simplified

commercially minded objects that hide their innate hybridity and relationship to art cinema. This is a key finding, as French extremity has served as the most visible form of extreme cinema in the contemporary market and therefore has the potential to influence commercial images of cinematic extremity on a larger scale. It is crucial therefore to look beyond these much-debated French texts and examine whether this practice is localised to French products or blankets all contemporary extreme paratexts.

Beyond France: Hybridity and Changing Representations

There are two distinct eras considered here: pre-French Extremity and post-French Extremity. The first of three pre-French Extremity texts to be examined is Lars von Trier's Dogme 95 entry *The Idiots*. Dogme 95 has been steadily nationalised within academic scholarship, consistently framed as Denmark's reaction to particular economic circumstances brought on by the increasing Americanisation of the domestic product (Hjort 2003, 2005; Stevenson 2003). However, due to the experimental aesthetics of the movement and its deliberately provocative nature (Hjort 2005: 49), the movement can be read as an important part of extreme art cinema's genealogy. Yet suggesting all Dogme 95 films belong to the extreme art film tradition is misleading. It is only through von Trier's combination of Dogme 95's formal extremity, taboo subject matter and extreme sexual imagery that *The Idiots* is afforded entrance into the histories surveyed in this work. Von Trier uses the already marginal aesthetic – which relied heavily on grainy realism – to tell the story of a group of bourgeois adults who act in public as if they were disabled. This offensive subject matter was made all the more transgressive by the inclusion of an orgy sequence which contained moments of full penetrative sex. Notably, von Trier's use of hard-core sex pre-dates its employment within the cinema of the French extremists, showing the film's importance to the histories of extreme art cinema and its role in the further erosion of cultural boundaries.

The film's DVD release was, like the French extreme narratives discussed earlier, handled by Tartan Video. Evidently Tartan Video performed a crucial role in shaping the commercial identity of extreme art cinema in Britain during this era. Released in 2000, the cover summons memories of the film's most extreme moment by directly referencing the aforementioned orgy scene. However, while the blurry image shows several nude figures running through a large garden, it is anchored by the mention that the film was 'made in compliance with the rules and intentions set forth in the Dogma '95 Manifesto'. This statement softens

the provocative nature of the image by safeguarding it within the prestige of European film movements. Herein, Tartan Video is able to call upon more prestigious film waves and manifestos, draping their release in the historicity of European film culture. The nudity of the cover is further tempered by the prominent placement of von Trier's name, which although breaking the rules of Dogme 95 (which calls for the director to not be credited), does allow for the cleansing qualities of auteurism to take root. Finally, while the cover's sole quotation comes from the populist outlet *Empire* magazine, the passage avoids hyperbole, reading '. . . this is real cinema: original, hilarious, unexpected, affecting, shattering ***** [five stars]'. The blurb continues to use the framing devices of art cinema, choosing once more to focus on the film's relationship to Dogme 95 before using the trace of *Breaking the Waves* (von Trier 1996) and *Dancer in the Dark* (von Trier 2000) to draw attention to the director's artistic eminence. Consequently, the object rejects the design choices that prevailed within the marketing of the later French texts and avoids externally sensationalising the internal extremity of the film.

Man Bites Dog, a Belgian mockumentary following the exploits of serial killer Ben (Benoit Poelvoorde), fits nicely into the models of art-horror and cult art discussed earlier, even as its domestic reception largely ignored its relationship to horror cinema (Hunter and Mathijs 2012: 36–7). Too often overlooked in the histories of extreme art film, the film's combination of mockumentary address and bodily transgression is vital to its commentary on contemporary Belgian society. In the first instance, the mockumentary format critiques the domestic product's violence (Mathijs 2005: 325–6), while also allowing it to question the audience's ingestion of transgressive material.

Once again Tartan Video handled the film's distribution, releasing it in 2000. The cover art – which adapts the film's original poster – shows Ben shooting towards the ground as a child's dummy and a plume of blood flies through the air. The mostly black and white image is highly stylised and violent, recalling the generic semiotics of crime thrillers and neo-Noirs. This reading is further encouraged by the cover's most centralised quotation (there are four in total), which comes from *The Guardian*. Stating the film 'makes *Reservoir Dogs* look like muzzled mongrels', the quotation performs a key role in shaping the commercial image of the DVD and has a profound influence on shaping expectations of the film itself. Although *The Guardian* is an authenticated source and helps suggest the film is worthy of coverage by respected press outlets, the sentence knowingly misrepresents the film. *Man Bites Dog* has little in common with Quentin Tarantino's film bar the use of the word 'dog'

in the title. Therefore the quotation, which is clearly an off-the-cuff journalistic comment, welds a misleading persona to the film whilst using Tarantino's trace to validate *Man Bites Dog* within a dualistic audience made up of both mainstream viewers and cult film fans. Importantly it is not the quotation itself that is of interest. While slightly misguided, it is, in essence, an unremarkable quotation and would perhaps have been overlooked when read as part of a larger piece of writing. What is of interest is its selection and use on the cover. The quotation is given a far greater level of control and influence when singled out and reproduced across the cover. Its use here is clearly a carefully calculated move on the part of Tartan Video, as it allows them to dress the film in the guise of a more popular filmic tradition. Herein the company exposes the marketability of violence and the ways in which it can be emphasised in order to gain access to certain demographics. Yet the blurb offers a different viewpoint, using more traditional art film registers to push the film towards the 'high' cultural sector. Stating the film was a 'prize winning sensation', the blurb points towards the 'previously unreleased short film from the directors of *Man Bites Dog*' included as an additional feature on the disc. Emphasising the auteur status of the directors, while using a digitalised film review to compare the three to the likes of Luis Buñuel and Alfred Hitchcock, the special features make amends for the misrepresentative quotation. In many ways, this hybridises the product, allowing it to appeal to a broader demographic.

The final release of the pre-French Extremity era to be considered is *Tesis*. The directorial debut of Alejandro Amenábar, *Tesis* tells the story of a snuff ring within the University of Madrid and was instantly cast as a commercially driven horror film (Klodt 2008: 3; Russell 2006: 81). However, analogous to the reading of *Man Bites Dog*, *Tesis* contains several allegorical critiques which enable it to be read as part of the extreme art cinema tradition mapped throughout this work. Firstly, the film's polished aesthetic – which recalls American horror traditions rather than those of Europe – allows *Tesis* to comment upon the high level of control the American industry commands over smaller national production sites (Russell 2006: 81) and the growing threat of standardisation. Moreover, the reflective possibilities offered by fictional representations of snuff sanction an interrogation into the audience's appetite for the macabre (Klodt 2008: 5). Overall, if these allegories are accepted and actioned by the viewer, *Tesis* can be approached as a manifesto text which warns audiences of the dangers of trash television and screen violence (Jordan 2012: 1), rather than as a standard horror narrative that indulges the viewers' desire for violent set-pieces.

The paratext balances these identities, using the trace of Amenábar's most commercial film *The Others* (Amenábar 2001) to provide a point of recognition for a 'mass' audience, while elsewhere highlighting the validity of the text and its importance to Spanish film culture. The sleeve centralises *Tesis*'s success on the festival circuit (notably its six wins at the Spanish Film Academy [Goya] Awards) to elevate it above standard horror fare that would, in the most part, be absent from these exhibition circles. Although the blurb uses fragments of the hyperbolic language common within the marketing of horror films (the viewing experience is said to 'stay with you'), the twenty-two-minute long 'Making Of' featurette presents Amenábar as an auteur of worth and importance. What is most striking about the paratextual identity of *Tesis*, and by extension *The Idiots* and *Man Bites Dog*, is the way in which Tartan Video repress the urge to exploit the economic potential of extremity. Unlike in their later New French Extremity products, hyperbolic language is minimal and a decidedly restrained approach is observed throughout. While each product rightfully addresses the transgressive nature of the primary text, these moments – be they snippets of hyperbolic language, images containing nudity or violence, or external quotes that hype up the film's sensationalist aspects – are placed in relation to more 'highbrow' signifiers which cast the films as auteur-driven national productions, or critically successful narratives that have performed well on the festival circuit. This can be seen as a consequence of the era. Released in 2000 and 2001, the films' distribution predates the extreme boom which would popularise exploitation marketing tactics in the forthcoming years. It is therefore beneficial to direct attention towards paratextual items that enter the market in the mid- to late-2000s – at the height of extreme cinema's visibility, popularity and infamy.

Lukas Moodysson's Swedish production *A Hole in My Heart*, which details the attempt of Richard (Thorsten Flinck), Geko (Goran Marjanovic) and Tess (Sanna Bråding) to make amateur pornography in a small flat in Sweden, is a useful starting point. The film's combination of extreme imagery and formal experimentation – whereby Moodysson's hand-held camera work is intercut with scenes of surgery – has been labelled as an assaultive destruction of visual pleasure (Pierce 2005: 31). Importantly, the film's aggressive nature meant it enjoyed a similar reception culture to that of Denis's *Trouble Every Day*, as once again extremity clashed with the pre-existing reputation of its director – which was well established due to the critical success of his three previous features: *Show Me Love* (1998); *Together* (2000); and *Lilya 4-Ever* (2002). This ultimately led to a reception defined by disappointment, wherein *A Hole in My Heart*'s

continued depiction of extremity violated the critics' expectations of the director and ideas surrounding the 'type' of films he 'should' be directing. Although the director's pre-circulating auteur capital legitimises the film for some (evident in the comments of Gunnar Rehlin, who states 'the film is yet another proof of Moodysson's fearlessness and his willingness to push forward and break through the boundaries of convention' [2004: 49]), praise was rare and *A Hole in My Heart* was more commonly criticised and disparaged. For example, one of the film's most extreme moments sees a food fight end with Geko vomiting in Tess's mouth. In the accompanying review in *Sight and Sound*, Ryan Gilbey notes that even though this scene is the climax of Moodysson's metaphoric message, it 'plays like a run-of-the-mill *Jackass* outtake' (2005). Comments such as these have an impact on the cultural standing of the director, while also illustrating the critical hostility levelled towards sequences of extremity during the mid-2000s. Yet it is not only his own auteuristic past that Moodysson is judged by. The Swedish director is seemingly unable to move out of the shadow of his countryman Ingmar Bergman: 'though "*Lilya 4-Ever*" [. . .] is only Lukas Moodysson's third feature film, he has become Sweden's most praised filmmaker since Ingmar Bergman. But unlike Mr Bergman, he is no metaphysician' (Kehr 2003). In this case, Bergman's overwhelming and far-reaching status burdens Moodysson's cinema with impracticable expectancies, as the latter is counted on to uphold the art film lineage of Swedish cinema. An impossible task, this critical practice means Moodysson is continually judged by the standards set by his highly praised predecessor, limiting his ability to find validation from traditional art film sectors.

With the presence of this critical discourse in mind, the paratextual presentation of Moodysson's most extreme text becomes even more intriguing. Released by Metrodrome in 2005 both individually and as part of a box set, the latter of which will be the focus here, the product enters the market at the height of extreme art cinema's cultural prominence. Entitled '4 films by Lukas Moodysson', the box set was representative of Moodysson's complete output at the time and as such contained his more widely appraised features alongside his extreme text. Due to the troubled relationship *A Hole in My Heart* seemingly held with the rest of Moodysson's filmography (at least in a critical sense), its involvement in a collection such as this is significant. As discussed, this type of box set works to confirm that the director is an artist capable of producing works of consistency and substance, a true auteur with clear vision, critical support and 'highbrow' value. Naturally the inclusion of *A Hole in My Heart* allows it to bask in the glow of the director's more celebrated films, rather

than being seen as an affront to his previous reputation. This process of embedding the film seamlessly within the rest of the director's body of work is sanctioned by a multifaceted narrative image that uses a collage of images to promote a cohesive – rather than divisive – representation of Moodysson's auteurism. The assortment of images ensures no one film is valued over another and means the collection avoids instances in which a single film is allowed to 'speak for' the rest of the box set's content. This occurred to some extent on 'The Luis Buñuel Collection', where the extremity of *Belle de Jour* acted on behalf of the rest of the box set, coding the other – less extreme – films in a particular manner that perhaps does not accurately represent them.

Creating a more unified narrative image allows the films to trade capital with each other. Of course, this could suggest that *A Hole in My Heart* is able to make its co-habitants seem more extreme as its powerful reputation dominates the subtler signifiers of artistic worth and critical acclaim. However, the three-to-one division, wherein three of the texts have been widely celebrated, means the extreme text is unable to overwhelm its fellow inhabitants. This is clearest in the blurbs, as each film is celebrated as an artistic achievement, coating the object as a whole in critical praise, value and cultural worth. For example, *Show Me Love* is stated to be Moodysson's 'critically acclaimed debut', as *Together* is described by the *Mail on Sunday* as 'cinematic sunshine to warm the soul **** [four stars]', and *Lilya 4-Ever* is spoken of as a transformative experience in the quote from David Cox of *ID*. Although the cultural validation of these other films softens the extremity of *A Hole in My Heart*, it is notable that its own blurb also refuses to entertain an extreme reading. It is said to be '[a] technically astonishing visual and aural tour de force', as a quotation from *The Times* frames it as a political comment from 'one of Europe's most significant directors'. These testimonies allow the extreme film – so often pressed to the outskirts of these collections or positioned as a dominant, overpowering abnormality – to become more readily assimilated into the rest of the box set. In a more general sense, this permits extremity to not exist as an anomaly within a filmmaker's career – as it seems to in the paratextual identity of Denis's *Trouble Every Day* – and instead welcomes it into the broader concerns of the auteur, along with its associated theories, cultural understandings and rituals of validation.

Ultimately, a similar practice prevails throughout Optimum Home Entertainment's 2005 release of British extreme film *9 Songs*. Once more entering the market at the height of New French Extremity's prominence, the film's controversy stems from the simplicity and minimalism of the narrative, which cuts between sequences of unsimulated sex and live

concert footage. The explicitness of Michael Winterbottom's narrative meant it could have been paratextually presented in a manner similar to that of Breillat's *Romance*, where a pornographic narrative image was chosen to capitalise on the film's currency as a sexual spectacle. In the case of *Romance*, this obstructed the film's placement within the 'highbrow' and created unrealistic expectations of the narrative. Unlike Bluelight and Second Sight, Optimum Home Entertainment opt for a more complex narrative image which elects not to trade off the film's sexual nature. Although the main image is of Margo Stilley's Lisa in bed, naked from the waist down, the picture is not softly lit, but over-exposed and presented in a red sepia tone. The use of this filter obscures the female body and denies the consumer the sexual gratification that could be reaped from the *Romance* covers. Instead the sleeve is dominated by a rollcall of band names – including the likes of Franz Ferdinand, Elbow and The Dandy Warhols. Giving the music acts such prominence on the cover not only draws attention away from the film's sexual content, but also suggests the concert footage is actually the main attraction, the real 'gimmick', if you will.

The back cover continues to focus on the music, using a stage as the backdrop for the blurb. While the blurb foregrounds the film's controversial nature by stating '*9 Songs* is arguably the most sexually explicit film to be awarded an 18 certificate by the BBFC', the special features engage with this dialogue of censorship directly, with Tom Dewe Mathews, author of *Censored* (1994), using the academic voice to shift the rhetoric from potentially sensationalist to educational. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly in this renouncement of the film's sexual nature, is the feature *The 9 Songs: Music Only Option*. Allowing the viewer to completely forgo the sexual nature of the film in favour of just watching the musical performances, the option separates the two strands of the narrative, wholly altering the viewing experience. As such, the paratext promotes the energy, dynamism and uniqueness of the gigs over any promise of sexual gratification. Indeed, this product exists in contrast to the arguments that suggest extremity becomes a commercial gimmick on entrance to the market sphere, as it favours a less provocative marketing strategy even when other, more sensationalist ones are seemingly available.

Since Yorgos Lanthimos's *Dogtooth* won the new talent (Un Certain Regard) section at Cannes in 2009, the film has been championed as signalling the beginning of a New Greek cinema (Armstrong at al. 2010: 73–4). Kieron Corless claims that there was an increase in the number of young Greek directors able to find financing for their films in the wake of the film's success, showing its importance to the burgeoning domestic

industry (2010). Yet beyond its national resonance, the film features the key determinants of extreme art cinema and can be read as another example of cinematic extremity happening beyond French shores. The narrative focuses on the attempts of Mother (Michele Valley) and Father (Christos Stergioglou) to confine their three adult children within the closed world of the family home. Within this setting, the siblings, unnamed throughout (referred to here as the Younger Daughter [Mary Tsoni], Older Daughter [Aggeliki Papoulsi] and Son [Hristos Passalis]), are subject to the cruel games they devise, a unique language sanctioned by their parents, incest (between the sisters and the Older Daughter and the Son), and a single act of extreme violence (whereby the Older Daughter removes her canine teeth with a hammer in order to escape the home). Notably these moments of extremity are filmed in line with the typical practices of extreme art cinema, as sex scenes play out as un-erotic spectacles (Georgakas 2010: 49) and the bouts of violence take place in unflinching static shots.

The 2010 DVD and Blu-ray release, handled by Verve Pictures – an independent UK distributor who pride themselves on releasing the debut films of first-time directors – underplays this relationship to the extreme art cinema tradition. Although the colourful cover image, which sees Older Daughter in a pool wearing a blindfold, is given a slight edge by quotations that suggest the film is dark (*The Times*) and bizarre (*The Guardian*), the object as a whole represents something of a shift in the commercial register and aspirations of extreme art cinema. Rather than hyperbolic language or 'highbrow' praise, the back of the sleeve focuses upon star ratings: *The Guardian* 'brilliant **** [four stars]', *The Times* 'distinctive **** [four stars]', *The Independent* 'excellent **** [four stars]', *Sunday Times* 'mesmerizing **** [four stars]', *Evening Standard* 'extraordinary **** [four stars]', *Daily Telegraph* 'striking **** [four stars]', *Empire* '****[four stars]', *Total Film* '**** [four stars]', and *Uncut* '**** [four stars]'. A standard way of rating a film within the populist discourse, the number of star ratings gives the film traction within the mainstream market – a recognisable and easily decoded marker of 'value' and 'quality'. By appealing to the broadest possible demographic, this approach potentially tarnishes both the film's artistic and extreme credentials and is emblematic of the increased acceptance extremity begins to enjoy within the mainstream during the latter part of the 2000s. This shifting discourse will be discussed further in the conclusion, as it has significant ramifications for the paratextuality of extreme art cinema.

Yet some non-French extreme products do engage with the practices of exploitation marketing, ignoring both 'high' cultural strategies and ones that would make them appealing to the mainstream. Trinity Filmed

Entertainment's handling of Ulrich Seidl's *Import/Export* (2007) – which is notably tamer than many of the texts discussed so far – is one such example. Detailing two characters' movements across central Europe, the film is a traditional character study and features little in the way of exploitation shocks and provocations. Nevertheless, the 2009 DVD cover – which replicates the theatrical poster – capitalises on a rare moment of transgression. Split horizontally by the film's title, the top half shows a nude woman with her back to the camera performing in a pornographic webcam show. This deliberately provocative image draws an aesthetic relationship to the paratextual sexualisation of Breillat's cinema and makes it seem like images of sexual transgression occur regularly throughout the text. While this falsifies the reality of the text, it also succeeds in drawing it far more closely to the extreme art film tradition than ever before. In reality, the film was rarely discussed alongside those of the French directors cited earlier, yet here shares the same space and mirrors their modes of paratextual representation. Therefore in this instance, extremity does become a commercially exploitable marketing trait, a merchandisable element that can increase a film's economic prospects. In this case, the overtly sexual image, which sensationalises the narrative, aims to attract an audience purely through the promise of sexual stimulation and titillation. Notably, industrial factors perform an important role here, as by 2009, extreme cinema had proven its commercial desirability. Trinity Filmed Entertainment's exploitation of this zeitgeist shows the ease with which distributors can adopt, reframe and recycle the popular narrative images of the French releases upon their products. Nonetheless, it remains clear that the paratextual field is far more diverse than many scholarly accounts suggest. At times, extremity is placed as a secondary signifier to more traditional art film tactics, or used sparingly to hint at transgression rather than foreground it. What is unmistakeable is the manner in which extremity's commercial value is governed by broader industrial shifts, trends and fashions and is not merely a case of simple uniformity. In other words, the presence of internal textual extremity does not ensure external projection or promotion. This obviously means that it cannot simply insure success, as its existence may not be made known to the audience.

The Decline of the European Exploitation Tradition . . . and the Return of Excess

A consideration of the contemporary extreme genre product provides greater insight into the paratextuality of extreme art cinema. During the 1960s, 1970s and early parts of the 1980s, extremity was predominantly

the province of marginal independent producers. Exploitation films of these eras retained a level of nonconformity and appealed mostly to a commercially viable, yet peripheral, demographic. However, as attitudes towards cinematic violence changed and censorship regulations liberalised, the extremity that was previously the province of the exploitation arena transcended the marginal cinematic space and began to propagate within the mainstream. The success of *The Exorcist* (Friedkin 1973) was a turning point, as the film was both critically acclaimed (Dixon 2010: 148) and littered with transgressive set pieces that were, at the time, still the territory of exploitation cinema. This is summarised neatly by Rick Worland:

> The collapse of traditional social and ideological barriers in these gory movies paralleled the erosion of institutional barriers between major studio releases and exploitation horror exemplified by Warner Bros.' *The Exorcist*. A big budget movie with an Oscar-winning director, *The Exorcist* brought explicit horror firmly into the mainstream. (2007: 99–100)

In the wake of *The Exorcist*'s success, other horror narratives were conceived, produced and marketed as blockbusters (Abbott 2010: 28). David Church goes on to claim that Hollywood's increasing adoption of exploitation subject matter, marketing and distribution strategies eventually squeezed many independent exploitation companies out of the market (2015: 12).

The continued production of these high concept horror narratives (Abbott 2010: 29; Worland 2007: 115) was matched by the franchise mentality that dominated the horror genre in the 1980s and 1990s (Dixon 2010: 125). John Carpenter's *Halloween* (Carpenter 1978) remains a key example of this trend, as a number of sequels and remakes have increased the property's market longevity. The success of the 'slasher' film, which was quickly solidified into a repetitive formula of sexual explicitness and violent bodily corporeity (Worland 2007: 104–5), helped to normalise cinematic extremity, as access and exposure became vastly increased. In order to sanction and sanitise cinematic extremity further, transgressive images either shared ties with a literary tradition (as is the case for *The Exorcist* and *The Silence of the Lambs* [Demme 1991]) or became safely housed within supernatural frameworks (see the immortal resilience of fictional killers such as Jason Voorhees, Freddy Kruge or Michael Myers). In a more general sense, these films were more refined – in regard to formal and aesthetic construction – than their exploitation ancestors. This essentially removed the need for sophisticated reading protocols or sub-cultural capital, as audiences no longer needed to unpick illogical narratives, piece

together moments of poor editing or excuse sub-par dubbing. This is not to say that this period of horror was free from exploitation cinema or low-quality films, but rather to recognise the increasing civility of the horror genre and its movement into the mainstream consciousness.

As a result of these shifts, exploitation cinema was clearly no longer the sole provider of the forbidden spectacle. European exploitation – which has been the focus thus far – was struggling to compete with the more polished and coherent forms of screened transgression. As audience numbers decreased, many of the filmmakers who had played key roles in shaping European horror abandoned the genre (Onley 2013: 218). In Britain, a more specific rejection of extreme imagery was taking place. The influx of VHS – and the moral panic that surrounded the new format – led to many European exploitation narratives being banned amidst concerns that they would stimulate copycat violence. The video nasty scandal therefore further quelled the propagation of European extremity, allowing more refined – and therefore culturally acceptable – examples to circulate. As time progresses, the aspects that had previously made exploitation features shocking and desirable became less unique and the industry as a whole became less prolific.

Extreme European Horror Cinema: Negating European-ness

However, as Ian Onley notes, 'the first decade of the twenty-first century saw a wave of horror movies emerge from France, Spain, Germany and elsewhere in Europe' (2013: 219). Films such as *Switchblade Romance*, *The Ordeal*, *Antibodies* (Alvart 2005), *Satan* (Chapiron 2006), *Inside* (Bustillo and Maury 2007), *Frontier[s]* (Gens 2007), *[Rec]* (Balagueró & Plaza 2007), *Martyrs* (Laugier 2008), *A Serbian Film* (Spasojevic 2010), *The Human Centipede (First Sequence)* (Six 2009) and *The Human Centipede II (Full Sequence)* (Six 2011) typified this re-emergence and revived the aligning European horror tradition. Due to their foregrounding of violence and distinct temporal and geographic imminence, these contemporary horror films have become hard to differentiate from the extreme art films that have been my focus thus far. Yet certain distinctions exist. Firstly, it is clear that these genre narratives are less apologetic about their aims to arouse the body rather than challenge the spectator's consumption of extreme material. Acts of violence and sex are rarely obscured and are instead framed in ways more common within the horror genre. In this sense, these films offer faster-paced narratives filled with multiple scenes of exciting violence. Therefore rather than the single act of violence that defines *Twentynine Palms*, or the two seen in *Irreversible*, a film like *Inside*

offers numerous set-pieces of blood-letting, while *Martyrs* is predicated on extensive scenes of torture and gore.

This could be read as a result of the films' reliance on American horror film conventions (Onley 2013: 219–20). Caroline Verner claims *Switchblade Romance* – a key instigator within European horror's new-found extremity – relies heavily on the audience's fluency with the Americanised norms of the horror genre, particularly the trope of the 'final girl' (2010: 31). However, further evidence of this can be found elsewhere. Many of these films recycle and reframe American horror's habit of using rural iconography as a marker of difference. The likes of *Satan*, *Frontier[s]*, *Switchblade Romance* and *The Ordeal* all owe a debt to American horror texts such as *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (Hooper 1974) and *The Hills Have Eyes* (Craven 1977) due to their employment of the 'backwards' rural other trope. Accordingly, these films deny or at least conceal their European lineage, as influence is not taken from the art film scene (as it is with the likes of Noé, Breillat, von Trier, Moodysson and others noted earlier), but from the increasingly polished American texts which came to dominate representations of cinematic extremity.

The paratextual presentation of *Switchblade Romance* echoes the textual disavowal of European-ness. Released on DVD and Blu-ray by Optimum Home Entertainment, the film's French-ness is nullified in the first instance through the film's change of name. Domestically, the film was released as *Haute Tension*, which was translated to *High Tension* for the American market. The British title is clearly more frank, proudly advertising the violent nature of the text and thus provides a more exciting, and therefore commercial, narrative image. The title is supported by a blurb which simply and effectively positions the film within the horror discourse, insisting the film is the one that 'horror junkies have been waiting for'. Notably the cover makes no attempt to gesture towards the film's French-ness, making it clear that an acknowledgement of the film's French roots would make the release less palatable to a mainstream audience. This could perhaps be due to the difficulties some audiences have with subtitles, or could be linked to the country's history of producing 'highbrow', complicated cinema. Either way, that Optimum Home Entertainment choose to jettison this association suggests uncomplicated extremity affords a product a chance of a larger audience share.

Inside, another French horror text, similarly suppresses a national reading. Released by Momentum Pictures in 2009, the DVD buries its relationship to Europe by centralising bloody visuals and classic horror signifiers. A tagline 'terror comes calling' supports cover art featuring the faces of the film's two actresses – Béatrice Dalle and Alysson Paradis.

The red tones and blood-soaked wall allows the image to fit seamlessly within the paratextual traditions of horror cinema and quell any suspicion that the text may be anything more than a standard horror product. The blurb extends this, favouring lines such as 'GET READY FOR THE MOST GRUESOME, TERRIFYING, and DISTURBING film you've ever seen' (emphasis in original), once more choosing not to disclose the film's production background. The concealment of European-ness in this and other examples of this type is significant for multiple reasons. Firstly, it continues a longstanding exploitation marketing tactic whereby distributors elected to hide the 'foreign' nature of their product by changing the titles, giving directors 'American-friendly' names and redubbing the dialogue. It was the hope that by containing these more 'exotic' features, distributors could reach an audience who would normally avoid the challenge European films presented. However, perhaps more significantly, this decision separates these texts from the cultural and commercial understanding of extreme art cinema, which – as we have seen – often centralises its relationship to European film history. This suggests that although European extremity, due to its brutal and transgressive nature, can be used as a commercial signifier, Americanisation remains favourable for some distributors. This further complicates suggestions that extremity serves a merely commercial imperative, as the paratexts of *Switchblade Romance* and *Inside* could have easily masked their products under the guise of their extreme art counterparts, and capitalised on their popularity.

Extreme European Horror Cinema: Promoting European-ness and Borrowing

Of course, masking does occur. Tartan Video's 2007 two-disc collector's edition release of *Satan* uses the trace of its star Vincent Cassel and to a lesser extent his wife at the time, Monica Bellucci (who has a small cameo in the film yet is featured prominently in the *Vampire: A Short Film Starring Monica Bellucci* special feature) to advertise the film's French-ness. As claimed in the discussion of *Weekend* in Chapter 4, cinematic connotations of French-ness have been balanced between sleaze and esteem. However, by 2007, the widespread coverage of New Extremism had resulted in the introduction of a third connotation of French-ness, as French film culture became increasingly associated with images of cinematic extremity. Upon the *Satan* box, Cassel's star image is used as a vessel to bring forth this third reading. Listed in the blurb as the star of *La Haine* (Kassovitz 1995) and more significantly *Irreversible*, the 'Making Of' featurette focuses solely on an interview with him, providing his star image and all the trace

memories associated with his past roles with as much exposure as possible. This helps the paratext to exaggerate the film's relationship to the extreme art film tradition, helping it to court both a horror audience and one interested in the heightened levels of transgression French cinema had become famed for.

This sense of recognising French-ness in an attempt to prove a film's transgressive qualities is further evident on Optimum Home Entertainment's release of *Frontier[s]*. While *Switchblade Romance* and *Satan* use geographically anonymous terms – 'countryside' and 'the country' respectively – *Frontier[s]* openly states that the story takes place against the backdrop of the 'French presidential elections' wherein the '*banlieues* are ablaze'. This promotion of French-ness is further advocated in the final line of the blurb, wherein the film is described as 'a brutal and shocking masterpiece of extremity'. Here, the term 'extremity' fuses with the promotion of the film's French setting in a conscious effort to exaggerate the film's affiliation to New French Extremity. Whether this is successful or not is difficult to gauge, however there is certainly a definable attempt to recall the trace of the French extreme art films here and capitalise on their visibility within the market. Notably these links are only made within the paratextual discourse, as the film exists beyond the scope of the extreme art film tradition in an aesthetic, thematic and critical sense.

Extreme European Horror Cinema: Conflict, Hybridisation and Adaptation

This complex framing of European identity becomes further complicated when the pre-production stage of paratextual manufacturing is considered. *Martyrs*, one of the more violent examples of contemporary European horror, was again released by Optimum Home Entertainment on DVD and Blu-ray. Its marketing campaign, which provides guidelines for industry insiders, becomes an important primary resource through which the distributor's preferred reading can be determined (the document itself is simply a large table of information, which is split into smaller subsections). At the outset, the 'Background' section suggests the film's director, Pascal Laugier, is 'hotly tipped' (Optimum Releasing n.d.: 1) to direct the American remake of *Hellraiser* (Barker 1987). By underplaying his pedigree in European cinema, the document instantly favours a reading that positions the film as close as possible to American cinematic traditions. A further promotion of the film's horror credentials is evident in the section entitled 'Key Selling Points', as the narrative is said to be

'widely acclaimed and where not acclaimed talked about anyway due to the extreme and unusual content' (Optimum Releasing n.d.: 2). This is said to propel the release beyond the traditional 'foreign film' audience (Optimum Releasing n.d.), which is seen as too limiting and restrictive. The 'Weakness' section continues to suggest that *Martyrs* should circumvent the traditional art-house demographic, claiming that the film's media and visual advertisements should avoid obvious foreign-language aspects and underplay the film's European-ness in favour of a more accessible narrative image based on genre signifiers. This is further confirmed when the document lists its primary audience: fans of casual horror; impulse buyers; and fans of left-field cinema – a list that clearly ignores 'highbrow' audiences. Additionally, the 'Marketing Strategy' and 'Objectives' sections state that the film will be promoted on mainstream film and horror websites, as well as 'brand endorsed promotions with *Bizarre* or *Nuts*' (Optimum Releasing n.d.: 3). The targeting of 'lad' magazines – and their attached demographics – is further evidence that *Martyrs* was not being earmarked for the 'highbrow' educated audience that is traditionally associated with foreign-language cinema.

Nevertheless, the final object itself is more complex. The blurb states:

> *Martyrs* is an incredibly disturbing experience that goes beyond the constraints of an average horror/thriller and into the dark psychological depths of human drama and suffering. Extremely terrifying, utterly believable, provocative and ultimately tragic, *Martyrs* is one of the most unforgettable films you'll ever witness.

While hyperbolic at times, the passage positions the film as a challenging and difficult narrative rather than the simplistic horror text the marketing campaign calls for. Additionally, the near feature-length (eighty-five minutes) 'Making Of' documentary provides a level of context not often afforded to films of this type (for example, *Frontier[s]*'s 'Making Of' is sixteen minutes long, while *Satan*'s is twenty-six minutes long). As a result, the featurette permits what Catharine Grant calls 'constructed intimacy' (2008: 110). Essentially, this feature – and others of its type – assists the creation of the auteur figure by providing a platform on which a director can perform a particular persona, allegorise their film and talk directly to their audience. In this sense, the paratext hybridises the film, actively opposing the press release's plea for a more direct approach to identity formation. Interestingly, by presenting a complex narrative image that poaches art film marketing techniques, or at least extreme art film marketing techniques, the product more explicitly exploits the extreme art film trend, which was well established at this point. Thus in the case of *Martyrs*, European-ness becomes a desired shorthand for extreme kudos

and draws the film closer to the extreme art tradition even as the dominant critical opinion casts it in a largely different manner.

However, this attempt to exploit associations with the extreme art film tradition is clearest upon the release of *A Serbian Film*. Hugely controversial on release due to the ways in which it identifies and breaks cultural taboos (including rape, incest, necrophilia and paedophilia), the text has become a benchmark for European excess, finding a sizeable audience due to its notoriety. Largely and loudly disliked by critics, the film's extremities were chiefly seen as gratuitous by an unamused critical sector. Yet the DVD and Blu-ray release, handled by Revolver Entertainment, looks to play down this reputation and uses the blurb and special features to instigate a process of redemption. Firstly, Revolver Entertainment uses the trace of films like *Requiem for a Dream* (Aronofsky 2000), *Videodrome* (Cronenberg 1984) and *Irreversible* as comparison points and cultural touchstones. Despite retaining no official relationship to these texts, Revolver Entertainment mentions them in order to plunder the more stable and culturally validated reputations they maintain. This helps the distributor to validate their release, an approach accelerated across the special features. An introduction by director Srdjan Spasojevic – a tactic itself steeped within the traditions of art cinema and its celebration of the auteur – is used to promote the allegorical significance of the narrative and assign the director a more respectable status. Offering several metaphorical readings of his film, the director ultimately suggests that the experience of viewing *A Serbian Film* mirrors the harshness of contemporary reality, justifying the acts as artistic stimulants rather than superfluous excesses. A twelve-page booklet 'from horror critic Alan Jones' (who also appears next to the directors in the ten-minute Q&A *Filmmakers Insight*) furthers these metaphoric readings. Jones once more calls upon the trace of more culturally recognised extreme narratives such as *Salò, Or the 120 Days of Sodom*, *Antichrist* and *Irreversible* to help justify the film's transgressions in line with those seen within the art sector. The paratext therefore, through various agents including filmic surrogates, Alan Jones's authorial voice and a constant foregrounding of the film's 'meaning', becomes what Mark Parker and Deborah Parker term an object of 'reorientation' (2004: 14).

Without a doubt, the paratext of *A Serbian Film* embodies the idea that commercial objects can be used to repair or transform a film. Although *A Serbian Film* was widely denounced, its paratextual form characterises it as a misunderstood text which retains metaphorical significance. As ever, I am not suggesting that this is incorrect, or that there are 'better' ways to present the film. Instead, what is important for my exploration of the extreme art film's paratextuality is the manner in which the hybridised

marketing tactic assessed so far becomes a paratextual dressing in and of itself, sufficiently elastic and flexible to be applied to texts that can only muster weak claims to artistic lineage. Neither *A Serbian Film* nor *Martyrs* appeared at art film festivals, nor can they fall back onto previous auteur reputations or successes. Furthermore, their respective distributors offer little in the way of 'highbrow' credentials and their critical receptions placed them beyond the tradition mapped in this work. While at times the films use textual, formal and visual experimentation to challenge the viewer and obscure the gratification process, they certainly 'enjoy' the infamous reputation afforded them more than the likes of *Romance*, *Trouble Every Day* and *A Hole in My Heart*. Instead, power is given to the paratextual image-maker, who retrospectively conjures a sense of validation by borrowing art film marketing techniques and dressing their products in recognisable patterns. Similar to the 'retrosploitation' industry mapped in Chapter 3, this process further complicates ideas surrounding the paratextuality of extremity, as rather than exploitation techniques 'dumbing' down the product, art film traditions are used to upscale the status of a narrative – making it seem chic, exotic and complex. Thus the commercialisation of extremity is not a one-way process of showcasing a film's basest components in a hope that it will attract an alternative audience. Rather, it is a complex practice whereby producers of paratextual material can opt to complicate, hybridise, hide and obscure extremity by using the figure of the auteur, the trace of national production or the academic voice. In this sense, simply noting a film's gory content or sexual nature is not enough. Audiences – both those of the 'highbrow' and 'lowbrow' – want the transgressions to mean something, to have some allegorical message and to be an extension of a director who has something to say. Thus the oversimplified denouncements present within the critical discourse fail to account for the varied and shifting nature of the paratextual field, the different factors that motivate commercial branding and the changing desires of the targeted demographics. Importantly, Michael Haneke and Lars von Trier – the focus of the following chapters – see their films circulate within this ever-changing landscape, whereby extremity is becoming both increasingly accessible and attractive to a mainstream-audience sector, and more convoluted across the paratextual realm.

CHAPTER 7

Michael Haneke: Glaciation, Legitimacy and Transgression

This chapter will position Michael Haneke as part of the extreme art cinema tradition mapped so far and explore the way his paratextual identity partakes in the history of taste slippage and cultural crossover that has been this work's focus. This change from the comparative structure used in Chapters 4 and 5 seeks to respond to the industrial changes outlined in Chapter 6. However, it is not only these cultural and aesthetic shifts that are of significance. Mark Bernard notes that whilst violent films were marginalised on VHS, the aura of quality surrounding DVD and Blu-ray instantly welcomed them into the mainstream and its systems of consumption (2015: 57). This escalated the frequency with which audiences were met with images of extremity, nominalising their appearance both internally within the text and externally upon the paratext. Accordingly, this chapter looks at how Haneke's commercial image is constructed within this increasingly extreme filmic environment, noting the ways it is filtered through the traditions of art cinema, exploitation cinema, mainstream American genre cinema and excessive European horror cinema.

Michael Haneke: 'Respectable' Extremity

Michael Haneke has established himself as one of Europe's leading auteurs, with two of his last three films – *The White Ribbon* (Haneke 2009) and *Amour* (Haneke 2012) – claiming the Palme d'Or at Cannes. An award soaked with 'highbrow' significance, the Palme d'Or serves as a definitive sign of critical and cultural validation and gifts Haneke's filmography an aura of prestige and eminence. This acclaim, as is perhaps expected, is echoed within the critical discourse, as Haneke enjoys a largely positive reception culture. David Bordwell's notion of the conceptual field – whereby critics use a series of items, cues and stylistic features to interpret a film and position it within particular cultural frameworks (1993: 101) – is significant for understanding Haneke's relationship to

the critical sphere. Bordwell states, 'we don't just see meanings, literal or interpretive; the critic constructs meaning' (1993: 103). As these constructed meanings become published, they evolve into loaded and publically circulating interpretations, with the ability to shape the audience's feelings towards a certain text. Unlike the majority of extreme art filmmakers, who struggle to achieve a harmonious critical image, Haneke's work is consistently endorsed and afforded readings which ultimately lead to even greater respect and status. This is significant, as these reviews, interviews and articles are becoming increasingly aligned with the DVD and Blu-ray product. Whereas Gérard Genette calls these documents 'epitexts' due to their existence outside of the paratextual object, the extra storage capacity of the DVD and Blu-ray disc has allowed these items to fuse with the main paratextual body and obtain a closer relationship to the primary text. Thus the potential influence these frames of understanding may have on an item becomes increasingly likely and, as we have already seen, these documents often inform paratextual designs and marketing directives. In the case of Haneke, the relationship between the critical discourse and the commercial product informs his paratextual presentation, as the more positive and stable the critical response, the easier it becomes to sanction extremity within a 'highbrow' setting. This suggests that the paratextuality of the director would rely on traditional, 'highbrow' signifiers that seek to attract an art-house demographic, as the more the product is validated, the harder it becomes to sell it as extreme, countercultural and rebellious. Indeed, this line of enquiry informs much of this chapter's discussion.

An example of Haneke's overwhelming critical support can be found in the work of Robin Wood, who insists 'all of Haneke's films [. . .] take as their starting-point our contemporary predicament: the desensitization and dehumanization of modern life lived beneath the monstrous umbrella of corporate capitalism' (2007: 45). Roy Grundmann lavishes further praise on the director, insisting that Haneke's films evoke:

> The alienation of the individual in the modern world, people's inability to communicate, a loss of the capacity for giving and receiving love, the brutalization of the young, society's constant need for distraction, and the steady rise of violence of the mundane as well as the spectacular kind. (2007: 6)

In fact, the inability of critics to recognise the allegorical depth of Haneke's cinema has been seen as evidence of an intellectual bankruptcy within the scholarly field (Sharrett 2003: 28). Interestingly, Haneke instigates and monitors this approach, using interviews to allegorise his outputs and confirm his auteurism. As Matthias Frey notes, 'Haneke has always

insisted in interviews that his films are about the coldness of Western bourgeois society, the representation of violence through media and an interrogation of the real' (2006: 34). The interview 'Family is Hell and so is the World: Talking to Michael Haneke at Cannes 2005' (Badt 2005) corroborates Frey's claim, as Haneke discusses his use of extremity, claiming 'the society we live in is drenched in violence. I represent it on the screen because I am afraid of it [. . .] all my films deal with issues that I find socially relevant' (Badt 2005). The subjective nature of the statement allows the director to lay the foundations for the kind of critical approach outlined thus far. In essence, Haneke offers clues and indications to the critical field, making it easier for journalists and scholars to recognise his use of extremity as part of a broader form of social critique.

As time passes, this grows until it becomes a circular motion of critical authentication, irreversibly affecting the ways Haneke's cinema is culturally approached and commercially presented. Importantly, I am not suggesting that these readings of Haneke are invalid, or even that they need revision. Instead, what is important is the rarity of this type of unwavering critical legitimisation. The reception culture enjoyed by Haneke opposes those suffered by the majority of directors working within the extreme art film tradition, wherein critics are all too quick to denounce the symbolic qualities of extremity and cast it as 'meaningless gimmick'. Alternatively, Haneke is cast as a social commentator, who transgresses taste barriers in order to expose and examine contemporary civilisation. He is not read as a sensationalist looking to 'cash in' on provocative images. As a result, Haneke can be read as the respectable face of extreme art film, a status instigated by a critical consensus of his auteurist values and sustained by a series of precise and exacting scholarly readings.

However, even though positioning Haneke within the environs of 'high' culture is customary, ignoring the overlap between his use of extremity and those of his extreme art cinema contemporaries is problematic. While not seeking to discount the above literature, it is clear that Haneke is aiming to debase the conventions of cinematic representation in the same manner as many of his extreme contemporaries. Oliver Speck states that within Hollywood narratives, brutal violence occupies the same space as other thematic aspects, such as comedy (2010: 45), and is hence stripped of its impact. However, Haneke's minimalist approach contradicts the excesses present within these depictions (Wheatley 2012: 208) and as such denies the audience pleasure or gratification. This refusal to indulge the viewer is apparent within *Funny Games* and its American remake of the same name (Haneke 2007). In both narratives, when Anna (originally played by Susanne Lothar and then by Naomi Watts) finally shoots and

kills her torturer Peter (Frank Giering/Bradley Corbet), the audience is afforded a sense of reprieve and is encouraged to revel in her triumph. However, Peter's accomplice Paul (Arno Frisch/Michael Pitt) simply rewinds the footage, denying the audience their gratification while forcing them to question their own lust for violence. This denial of pleasure compares to the thematic traditions of the extreme art film continuum mapped throughout this book and other academic works. For example, the reversed narrative of *Irreversible* prevents the audience from achieving a satisfying catharsis, as the act of revenge takes place without a narrative context to justify the bloodshed. Similarly, the extremity that closes out Bruno Dumont's *Twentynine Palms* comes after prolonged spells of inane conversation and narrative lulls. Historically, *Salò, Or the 120 Days of Sodom* stripped sadomasochism of its fetishistic furnishings by having the prisoners naked at all times, whilst, as considered in Chapter 4, *Weekend* forces the audience to question their attraction to Mireille Darc (Loshzitky 1995: 146).

This denial of audience satisfaction motivates Haneke's centralisation of the emotional aftermath of the extreme act. For example, whilst *Benny's Video* (Haneke 1992) contains a murderous act of violence, it is not the climactic end of the narrative as it would be in many horror films (Wheatley 2012: 210), but rather a catalyst which initiates an exploration of middle-class morals. Again, within *Funny Games*, the audience do not see Paul and Peter shoot Anna and George's (Ulrich Mühe/Tim Roth) young son Georgie (Stefan Clapczynski/Devon Gearhart). Instead we are left to witness the parents' reaction to the killing, as the tragedy of the night's events begins to dawn on them. Lastly, and perhaps most obviously, *The Piano Teacher* (Haneke 2001) uses pornography's generic memory (Chareyron and Gural-Migdal 2011: 58) to show Erica Kohut's (Isabelle Huppert) slow descent into depression, rather than indulging in the excess of the industry itself. This depiction of emotional turmoil is again prevalent in the cinema of Gaspar Noé, Catherine Breillat, Claire Denis and others. Yet, more striking perhaps is the manner in which the depiction of dramatic aftermath affords Haneke's cinema an affiliation to Linda Williams's concept of the body genre. Williams defines a body genre film as one which portrays the human form 'caught in the grip of intense sensation or emotion' (1991: 4), citing horror, pornography and the melodrama – all 'lowbrow' genres – as chief examples. In essence, the depiction of the body on-screen motivates a similar reaction within the body of the audience, creating a physical relationship between screen and viewer. For the most part, this manifests as fear, sexual stimulation or crying. Although the violence within Haneke's narrative is not horrific

or gratifying enough to sit comfortably within the horror genre, and the various sexual transgressions foreground disgust over pleasure, the disturbing scenes of emotional trauma correlate with Williams's findings on the melodrama. Williams states that the portrayal of emotion on screen within the melodrama initiates a comparative response within the audience and can often be read as gratuitous (1993: 3). The clearest example of the melodrama's 'gratuitous emotion' within Haneke's filmography appears within the aforementioned *The Piano Teacher*. As the centre of the narrative, the audience is forced to identify with Kohut, therein accompanying her throughout the repressive journey she undertakes. Catherine Wheatley insists:

> The rises and falls in the destinies of its characters, from the sublime to the ridiculous, seem in many ways to characterise melodrama [. . .] The earliest definition of melodrama was a dramatic narrative in which musical accompaniment marks emotional effects. (2006: 119)

Therefore the slippage between 'high' and 'low' traditions that defines extreme art cinema rests at the heart of Haneke's work. Whereas the level of fluidity present within the cinema of Noé, Breillat and Dumont is harder to find within the filmic catalogue of Haneke as much of the violence happens off-screen (Speck 2010: 172), Lisa Coulthard states:

> By focusing on a multitude of actions and reactions, Haneke places acts of physical, interpersonal violence alongside other forms of violence that are less overt, obvious or visible: emotional and psychological abuse and humiliation, the killing of animals, marginalisation and alienation, suicide. (2011: 181)

Furthermore, whilst Speck's claims remain important, moments of on-screen extremity, which employ the realist frame common within the majority of extreme art narratives, occur within Haneke's catalogue. For example, the suicide of Majid (Maurice Bénichou) in *Caché* (or *Hidden*, as it was released in the British market) (Haneke 2005), the rape of Kohut in *The Piano Teacher* and the shooting of Peter in *Funny Games* all comply with the shock tactics that are central to exploitive modes of representation. Thus despite his continued and almost uncontested placement within the 'highbrow', Haneke retains the same cultural duality that defines most of the filmmakers associated with the extreme art film canon. Therefore the question that remains is whether this duality informs his paratextual shelf-life. Does the commercial image of the director distort, or at least create a counterpoint to, this omnipotent critical persona? Is his extremity allegorised and justified as it is in the critical sphere, or does it become a

gimmick – merchandisable sensationalism acting independently from his controlling authorial voice?

Funny Games*: Tartan Video and Artificial Eye*

Nikolaj d'Origny Lübecker insists the original *Funny Games* – which details the unprovoked attack of an affluent family by two well-spoken killers – is the epitome of a feel-bad film which seeks to assault the viewer and warn them against seeking pleasure in mediated violence (2015: 33). Wheatley's ideas further this affiliation, as she claims the film should be recognised as part of the realist horror tradition, wherein the essence of the horrific lies within human relationships and the collapse of a false social order (2012: 214). Combined, these pieces highlight the film's hybridity, wherein social commentary is fused with moments of brutal violence poached from the horror tradition. This combination of 'high' and 'low' has subsequently come to define the epitexts that encircle the narrative, as critics wrestle with the film's stark contrasts. As is so often the case with the work of Haneke, the film was supported in certain sectors of critical discourse, where its mediations regarding screened violence became illustrative of the ways cinema can be used as a platform for intelligent communication (Grundmann 2007: 7). Crucial to this reading is Haneke's use of Bertolt Brecht's Verfremdung technique, which allows him to directly implicate the audience in the on-screen actions and question their role as voyeurs. In this sense, the film becomes a platform through which larger issues can be discussed, debated and brought into the public consciousness. This reading partakes in the tradition outlined earlier, and bestows Haneke's film with an intellectual weight which potentially elevates it above its art-horror peers.

Certainly, this is a valid reading of the text, and has often proven useful to scholars and audiences alike. However, other sectors of the critical sphere were less inclined to justify the extremities of *Funny Games*. David Grossvogel's work suggests the film turns in on itself, becoming exactly what it is trying to comment upon: a gratuitous, sadistic excise (2007: 37). Wood's article 'Michael Haneke: Beyond Compromise' (2007) furthers this line of criticism, as the author states '*Funny Games* is clearly a minor work, the least of the films Haneke has both written and directed, a deliberately limited "chamber" piece with little of the social/political resonance of the other four' (2007: 53). Coding *Funny Games* as an idiosyncratic horror film (2007: 54), Wood's comments represent the dualistic nature of the film's reception culture; a culture which in some ways ostracised the film from the channels of validation so often afforded Haneke's work. I am not

concerned with supporting one reading over the other, or even suggesting one is more useful. Instead, I am interested in how this duality influences the paratextual presentation of Haneke's most extreme, controversial and therefore unstable film. The conflicting dialogue between auteurism and extremity suggests the product could come to straddle several disparate cinematic environs simultaneously, depending on which iconographical signifiers are favoured upon the paratextual object.

In the UK, *Funny Games* has been distributed on DVD three times by two different companies: Tartan Video, who released a standard edition in 2004 and then a collector's edition in 2006; and Artificial Eye, who released a standard edition in 2009. Artificial Eye's brand identity was explored during Chapter 4's discussion of *Weekend*, however Tartan Video – discussed at various points in Chapter 6 – has yet to be investigated in detail. Founded in 1984, the company continues to maintain distribution rights for some important texts (most notably the 'Bergman Collection' discussed in Chapter 3), yet currently trades under the name Palisades Tartan. However, as Chapter 6 suggested, it is the company's original incarnation – particularly in the early days of the DVD – that was so fundamental to the distribution of extreme cinema within Britain. While Chapter 6 illustrated Tartan Video's prevalence within the distribution of European extreme cinema, it was its 'Asia Extreme' label which truly cemented its cultural legacy. Although it has been accused of orientalism (see Emma Pett's work [2013; 2017]) due to its selective release strategy, which focused on violent East Asian films such as *Ring* (Nakata 1998), *Audition* (Miike 1999), *Battle Royale* (Fakasaku 2000) and *Oldboy* (Park 2003), the company's association with these Asian texts showered the Tartan Video brand with a valuable extreme cachet. Chi-Yun Shin confirms this, stating that the 'Asia Extreme' sub-branch became an instantly recognisable brand (2008), a symbol of a certain kind of cinematic experience. Pett, in her primary research on the 'Asia Extreme' sub-label, verifies this, claiming the Tartan imprint was a sign of 'something a bit different' (2017: 39) – an indicator of both quality and uniqueness. I would be inclined to suggest that the credentials built up through the release of these Asian texts – or for that matter those within their 'Terror' or later 'Grindhouse' sub-branches – bleeds through to the rest of the catalogue, showering the more traditional art films with an additional level of transgressive appeal.

This meant Tartan Video – much like Janus Films (discussed in Chapter 3) – were able to combine an extreme reputation with an art film sensibility, and push their films towards a demographic made up of cult cinema fans and traditional art-house audiences (Dew 2007: 57). Mirroring existing

accounts of art film audiences, whom Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover noted are composed of educated patrons and paracinematic voyeurs (2010: 8), Tartan Video used consistent paratextual designs to simultaneously assure a 'highbrow' audience that the transgressions contained within the narratives were culturally valid, and a 'lowbrow' demographic that the images were suitably scandalous. Therefore the panelled design aesthetic, and the Tartan Video name as a whole, became a loaded symbol, carrying guarantees of artistic validity, cultural worth and extremity.

Funny Games benefits from this distinct set of associations, as it ensures those familiar with the Tartan Video brand that the film is both an esteemed example of cinematic art and a counter-cultural piece of transgression. The standard release of Haneke's film – which as expected adopts the traditional panelled design used throughout Tartan Video's catalogue – centralises a still from the film wherein Arno Frisch's Paul looks directly at the audience (see Figure 7.1). Frisch's monopolisation of the cover allows for an interesting interplay between the audience and Haneke's cinematic universe, as the actor also played Benny in *Benny's Video*. Trading off the trace memory of both Haneke and Frisch, the cover rewards those 'in' on the reference with a measure of sub-cultural capital. While this may seem like a potentially insignificant detail, the existence of this citation further evidences the spilt demographic of Tartan Video, exposing their audience as one who would gain pleasure from these types of exchanges. Additionally the image has been altered in order to heighten its horrific appeal, as a 'ripped' red band crosses the eyes of Frisch. The horrification of the cover is continued in the selected typography, which uses an edgy red and black colour scheme to hint at the film's transgressive nature. This colour scheme serves this purpose well, allowing the cover to trade off a particular tradition even in lieu of obvious extreme imagery. Due to the colour scheme and the positioning of Frisch, the cover inevitably recalls certain 'serial killer' horror films, where the male killer becomes the focus of the film's paratextual presentation. Seen on the DVD covers of *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* (McNaughton 1986), *American Psycho* (Harron 2000) and *Ted Bundy*, this practice allows Tartan Video to invoke a reading not necessarily present within the text itself.

The cover uses journalistic quotations to further encourage this horrific reading. Although the quotations from both *Time Out* and the *Daily Telegraph* perform within the remit of traditional legitimisation, respectively stating 'brilliant, radical, provocative . . . it's a masterpiece' and 'as unsettling as it is brilliant', the statement from *The Independent* more directly engages with the rhetoric of horror cinema and its modes of

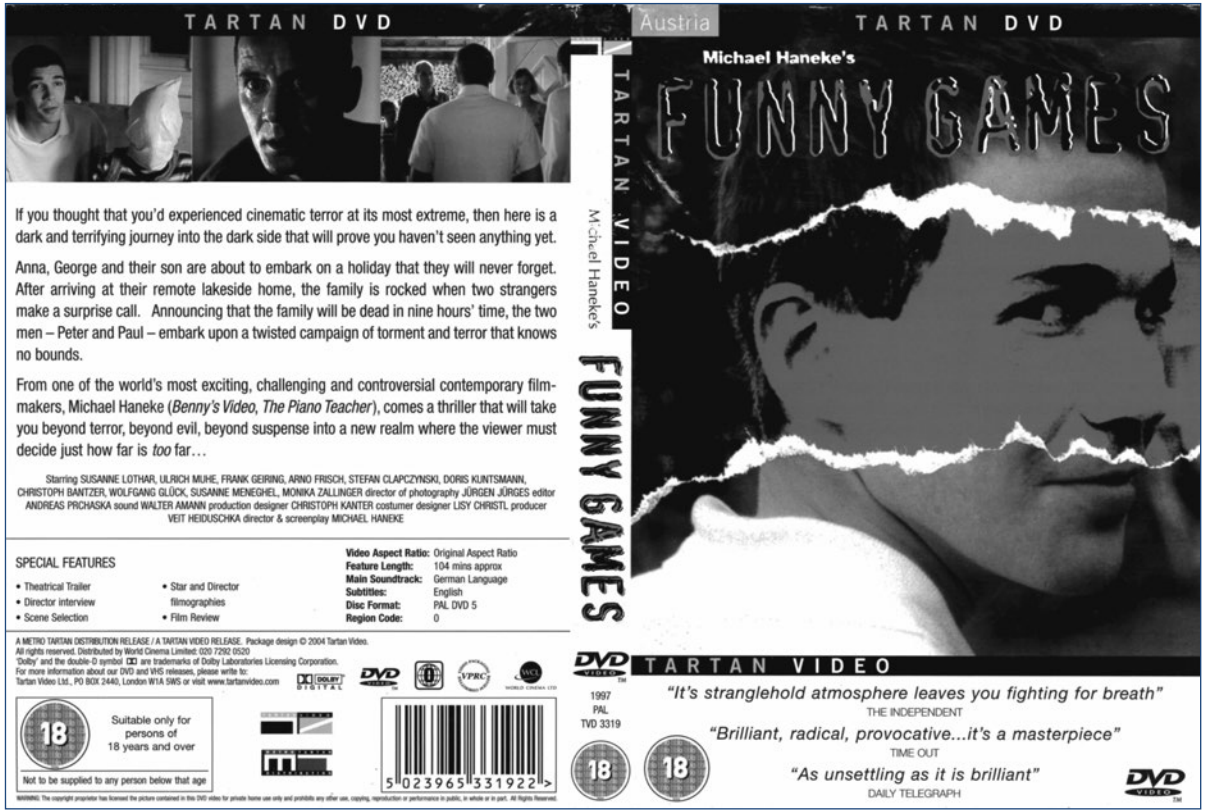

Figure 7.1 Tartan Video's *Funny Games* DVD artwork. (Source: © Tartan Video.)

address. The statement renders the viewing experience as one that must be endured and suffered, insisting 'its stranglehold atmosphere leaves you fighting for breath'. By employing an aggressive dialect which likens the viewing experience to an act of violence, the quotation advertises the transgressive nature of the narrative and reinforces the 'serial killer' brand identity instigated by the cover art. Of course, this tone contradicts the more traditional art film dialect of the other quotations, illustrating the dual demographic that Tartan Video attracts and the ways the company aims to appease both parties. The split – two more 'highbrow' quotations and one which directly speaks to 'lowbrow' audiences – indicates the emotive power of ballyhoo and hyperbole. Essentially, it suggests a single quote in this vein is enough to establish a certain 'idea' about the cinematic experience. Whereas it may take a few examples of critical praise to convince the viewer of a product's value, the bluntness of this kind of address and the challenge it lays down to the individual consumer mean a single line is enough to advertise the transgressive nature of the content.

Yet the subtleties of these techniques, and their reliance on a carefully pitched balance between 'high' and 'low', is all but forgotten during the film's blurb. The textual passage resolutely employs the hyperbolic vocabulary of horror cinema, with the opening line stating 'if you thought that you'd experienced cinematic terror at its most extreme, then here is a dark and terrifying journey into the dark side that will prove you haven't seen anything yet'. This recalls the promotional traditions of the circus as it promises the audience an unseen spectacle which will surpass anything they have ever witnessed. It also echoes the direct nature of *The Independent*'s statement, as it positions the film as a test of the audience's threshold for violence. This approach is continued within the subsequent paragraphs, which state that the family is commencing 'a holiday that they will never forget' wherein the strangers will 'embark upon a twisted campaign of torment and terror that knows no bounds'. The latter quote infers that *Funny Games* will advance the horror spectacle, taking it to new heights of depravity and wantonness. This is continued right up until the closing statement, which insists the film is 'a thriller that will take you beyond terror, beyond evil, beyond suspense into a new realm where the viewer must decide just how far is *too* far . . .' (emphasis in original). Again, Tartan Video is actively goading the consumer into watching the film, setting it up as not only a test of will, but also as a cultural artefact that needs to be judged. In this sense, the audience is positioned as cultural gatekeepers, responsible for deciding whether the narrative does go '*too* far . . .', and what the ramifications of this may be. In truth, that final part of the sentence – 'how far is *too* far' – is significant for other reasons.

It frames *Funny Games* as a narrative which intentionally encourages the progression of cinematic violence, placing it in competition with a series of horror narratives which vow to deliver a similarly terrifying experience. Ultimately this inverts Haneke's allegorical message and the film's warning against the dangers of mediated extremity. In other words, the commercial object renders *Funny Games* as the type of film Haneke is looking to challenge and critique, forcing it to masquerade as a conventionally violent text which raises the bar for cinematic violence, rather than one that forces the audience to question why they find images of violent extremity pleasurable.

Notably, when approaching the release from a historical viewpoint, Tartan Video's decision to code the film within the parameters of horror is in keeping with the cultural and commercial image of its distributor. At the time of the release, Tartan Video's brand identity was characterised by its relationship to cinematic extremity, as the continued success of the Asia Extreme sub-branch – which came to make up over a third of their entire catalogue by 2005 (Dew 2007: 54) – had firmly endeared them to a paracinematic demographic. Furthermore, if we recall the timeline discussed in Chapter 6, it is clear that the film's DVD meditation comes at the height of extreme art film visibility. In this sense, Tartan Video use the paratextual object to adjust and tweak the film's persona, squeezing it more comfortably into the zeitgeist of the time. As such, Tartan Video – in the style of so many 'lowbrow' distributions – place financial security above all else and ignore the film's allegorical message in order to milk filmic fashions and trends.

An argument can be made that Haneke's position as an auteur filmmaker had not been fully established by 2004, making an 'exploitifaction' of his most extreme work to date more palatable than it may seem in the current climate. However, the critical success of *Caché* cemented the director's place as one of Europe's leading auteurs, bestowing his brand image with additional commercial weight, drawing power and 'highbrow' validation. Significantly, this had ramifications on paratextuality of *Funny Games*, as the authorial status of the director became more prominent across its subsequent releases. Indeed it is Tartan Video's own collector's edition, released a year after *Caché* and two years after their original release of *Funny Games*, which initiates this process. Although the cover retains some of the horrific symbolism of the standard edition, opting again to focus on the digitally reddened eyes of Frisch's Paul, the typography is simpler and less generified. It also uses the success of *Caché* as a shorthand for Haneke's new status, stating the product is 'from the director of "*Hidden*"', while allowing the director's name to stand out on

the mainly white background. The renovation of *Funny Games* through the director's subsequent successes is continued on the back of the box. Even though the backdrop is made to look like strips of gaffer tape, an aesthetic decision which encourages the audience to link this film to the widely popular 'torture porn' cycle, the blurb is reworked to underscore the importance of the director. It opens by stating 'Michael Haneke has now established himself as one of the most important directors in Europe, continually astounding audiences and critics alike with his icy and at times cynical analysis of today's society', and closes by reaffirming the general importance of *Caché* to film culture. The change in approach is significant – particularly when the timeframe is considered – as it shows the speed with which traditional auteurism can impact the paratextuality of extreme cinema.

Although the Artificial Eye edition, released the following year, continues to move *Funny Games* further away from the domain of horror, a 'lowbrow' shadow is still present upon the object. For example, the Artificial Eye spine detail – itself a marker of validity – is turned from green to black, suggesting the darkness of the text. The subtle horrification of the product is continued as the light blue background is made to look scratchy and worn. This 'beat-up', DIY aesthetic makes the product look more edgy, transgressive and rebellious, and aligns it with a series of 'lowbrow' genre products which still seek to present themselves as seedy and anti-establishment. In truth, the ghost of horror marketing is clearest in the central image's depiction of a captive Georgie. Depicted with a pillowcase over his head and face, the image's representation of a bound and uncomfortable victim is reminiscent of several horror-film covers, including *Hostel: Part II* (Roth 2007), *The Hills Have Eyes 2* (Weisz 2007) and *Borderland* (Berman 2007). In adopting this design aesthetic, and centralising one of the most startling images present within the narrative, Artificial Eye partially forego their identity as a provider of 'high' culture, choosing instead to trade off the controversial images surrounding torture, terror and child abuse.

However, the image of the kidnapped youth is counterbalanced by the type of authorial branding more familiar to the company's demographic and their cultural reputation. In the first instance, the film is included as part of the larger 'Michael Haneke Collection', which also saw the re-releases of *The Seventh Continent* (Haneke 1989), *Benny's Video* and *71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance* (Haneke 1994). As a result of belonging to this collection, the cover is able to decorate itself with a header that reads 'the Michael Haneke Collection'. This allows the extremity of *Funny Games* to enjoy the safety of Haneke's auteur legacy and revel

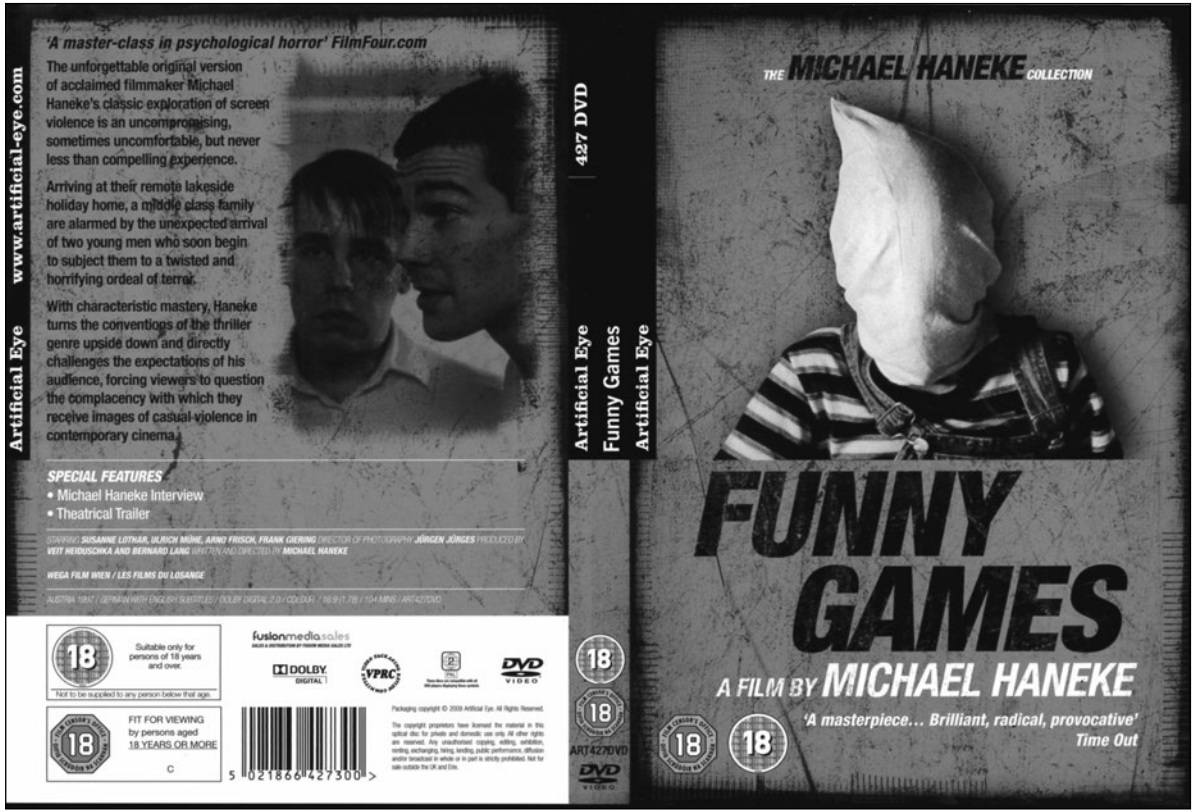

Figure 7.2 Artificial Eye's *Funny Games* DVD artwork. (Source: © Curzon Artificial Eye.)

in the 'highbrow' nature of his reputation. In regard to the changes that have occurred across the three products, the commercialisation of the auteur present on this most recent offering is far greater than that of its predecessors, indicating the increasing economic and cultural worth of the Haneke brand.

As is so often the case, the blurb plays a central role in determining the feel of the product and the type of experience it is hoping to produce. Whereas the original Tartan Video release applied certain colours to hint at the film's relationship to horror before using the blurb to confirm its placement within the genre, the Artificial Eye blurb builds on the foundations of the second Tartan Video release to firmly entrench the film within the traditions of art cinema. Stating that *Funny Games* is uncompromising and uncomfortable, the blurb secures the film within a cultural remit of validity by calling it a 'compelling experience'. This differs vastly from the 'stranglehold atmosphere' promised by the first Tartan release and illustrates the cleansing and sanitising nature of Haneke's auteurism. In order to advance this further, and strengthen the director's brand all the more, the passage describes the narrative as 'Michael Haneke's classic exploration of screen violence'. This statement gifts Haneke direct ownership over the narrative – it is, undoubtedly, his classic exploration of screen violence. In doing so, the product protects against the potential negativity of transgression, using auteur theory as a shield; an armoured defence against a reading that seeks to sensationalise the product. Though the second of the three paragraphs states that the two men subject the family to a 'twisted and horrifying ordeal of terror', employing some unmistakably hyperbolic phrasing, the third and final paragraph claims the film is directed with 'characteristic mastery', before again foregrounding the film's message at the expense of its generic coding: 'Haneke turns the conventions of the thriller genre upside down and directly challenges the expectations of his audience, forcing viewers to question the complacency with which they receive images of casual violence in contemporary cinema'. Consequently, the relationship the cover art establishes with horror cinema is muted by a sustained declaration of the film's artistic importance, allegorical depth, and position within an important canon of work.

However, it is wrong to assume that the transgressive nature of the cover image does not deliberately blur and fragment the cultural identity of the film. Artificial Eye knowingly hybridise their release, and invite the potential of a reading based on a simpler lust for violence and bloodletting. This aspect of the marketing – in which the film is sold through an at times misleading narrative image – is reflected upon by Haneke himself. During an additional featurette contained on the disc, Haneke states: 'I told my

producer, "If the film is a hit, it'll be a hit alongside a misunderstanding". Because today the film, especially in English-speaking countries [. . .] The DVD is extremely popular, and I'm a bit afraid of that'. All of these releases, in differing ways, effectively encourage the misinterpretation that worried Haneke. They consciously use certain images, textual passages and external quotations to position *Funny Games* within the consumption space it endeavours to challenge, fully aware of the economic benefits this could bring forth. While the Artificial Eye release avoids some of the more overt tactics used by Tartan Video, it is easy to suggest that it exploits the very images Haneke is trying to critique.

Artificial Eye's 'Michael Haneke Trilogy'

The Artificial Eye 'Michael Haneke Trilogy' box set, released at the same time as their re-mediated *Funny Games*, is comprised of Haneke's first three features: *The Seventh Continent*, *Benny's Video* and *71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance*. Once again, the release is a remediation of an earlier Tartan Video product and is clearly a sign of Artificial Eye wanting to capitalise on their relationship with the director. In reference to the review of the company undertaken in Chapter 4, and the more general processes of exchange that characterise film distribution, the volume of Haneke products released in this short period allow Artificial Eye to strengthen their ties to a celebrated auteur. This allows them to adopt part of his culturally validated status, bestowing them with additional cultural prestige and value. That being said, the product itself serves as a prime example of a commercial artefact in potential conflict, showcasing a tension between commercial narrative image and internal narrative reality.

Before considering the paratext, it is necessary to assess the three films which make up the 'Glaciation Trilogy'. Haneke's debut feature *The Seventh Continent* was based on actual events and sees a typical nuclear family commit suicide after destroying all of their material belongings. Notably, *The Seventh Continent* introduces the themes that continue to typify Haneke's career: alienation; dissatisfaction; and discontent. *Benny's Video*, the second film within the trilogy, offers an exploration of the media-effects debate and the morality of the bourgeois. The narrative sees Arno Frisch play Benny, a disconnected and media-obsessed teenager who murders a young female friend with a bolt gun. Rather than face up to his crime, his affluent parents hastily cover it up in an effort to preserve their lifestyle. Significantly, *Benny's Video* is the most extreme of this loose trilogy due to the death of a pig (fanatically watched by Benny in a grainy home video) and the murder of a young girl (which occurs off-screen).

Nonetheless, the film is distinctly less transgressive than *Funny Games*, *The Piano Teacher* and the majority of contemporary extreme art films. The final film, *71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance*, is the most formally extreme of the three and rejects the more traditional narrative arcs of *The Seventh Continent* and *Benny's Video*. Comprised of seventy-one sequences and multiple storylines, the narrative follows a lonely pensioner who has been alienated from his daughter; a young Romanian's illegal journey to Austria; a bourgeois couple's struggles with adoption; a family void of intimacy; a solider stealing guns from the army's weapon bank; and a student who in the film's conclusion breaks under societal pressure and fires a handgun randomly into a crowded bank before committing suicide. Something of an amalgamation of Haneke's earlier ideas on social estrangement and media violence, the film works to fortify Haneke's role as a social commentator. Significantly, while *71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance* has transgressive themes, the extremity once more occurs off-screen, denying the audience the thrill of the transgressive spectacle whilst affording the social message optimal space.

The subtlety of these films is significant when assessing the narrative world projected by the release. As has been the case throughout this book, the forthcoming analysis is not in any way suggested to be a critique of Artificial Eye, nor is it undertaken to propose that there is a 'correct' way to present these difficult and complex films. Instead, it is concerned with understanding how the audience is made aware of the potential extremity of the box's content. When this is kept in mind, the following assessment does not take as its focus a judgement of the distributor's choices, but rather how these decisions relate to the prevailing themes of the surrounding scholarship. Does the box set lavish the nearly omnipotent director with further praise, or does it seek to capitalise on the moments of extremity included within the films? In truth it is the latter as, much like the fates suffered by Luis Buñuel, Jess Franco and Roman Polanski, Haneke's brand identity is made to compete with a potently overpowering force. In those earlier case studies, the secondary brand came in the form of the female actresses, whose reputations as 'sex symbols' sensationalised the auteur product and made it more exciting, transgressive and forbidden. However, this is not the case here, as rather than a symbol of sexuality, the 'Michael Haneke Trilogy' focuses upon a symbol of violence and disgust: a pig's head. Complete with bleeding head wound, seeping snout and closed eyes, the clearly violent, abrasive and marginal image was originally created for the slip case and has no narrative reference point (see Figure 7.3).

The auteurism of the director competes directly with the pig's head on the cover. While the head is clearly the focal point, it is propped up by a

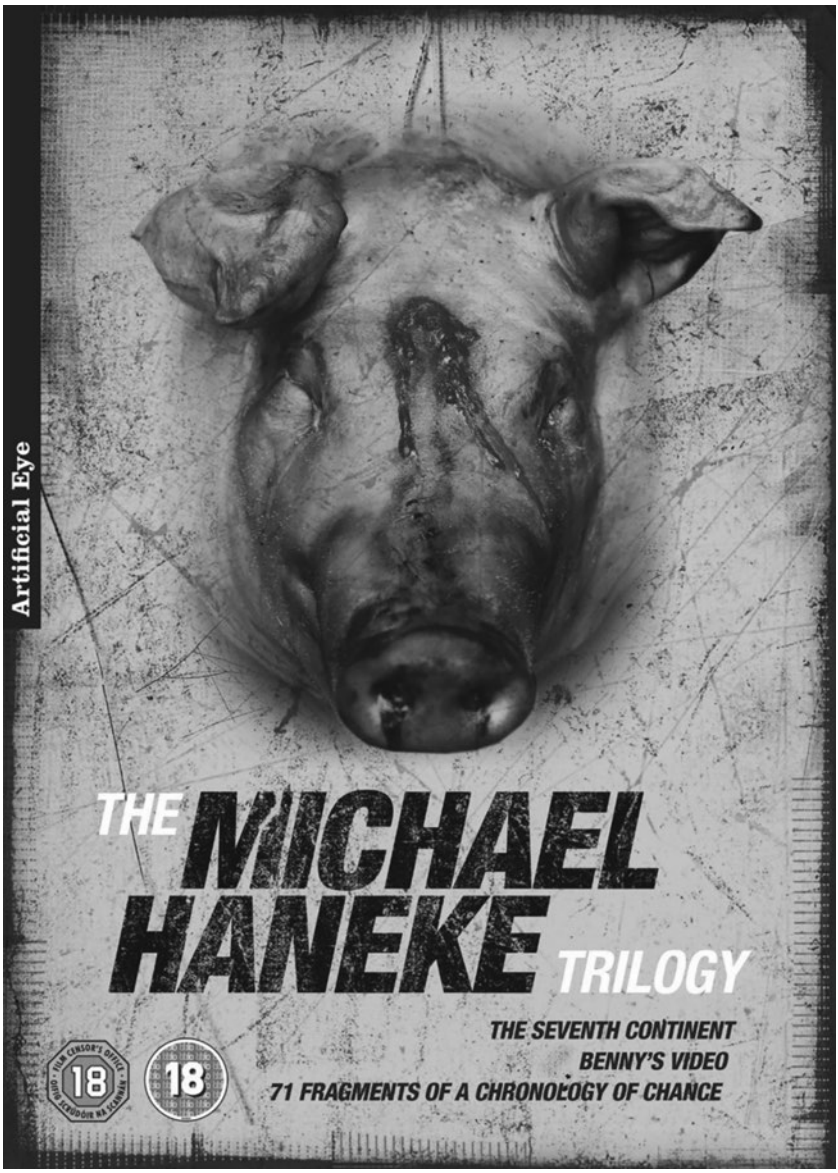

Figure 7.3 The 'Michael Haneke Trilogy' DVD artwork. (Source: © Curzon Artificial Eye.)

large title: 'The Michael Haneke Trilogy'. Ignoring the more widely used 'Glaciation Trilogy' moniker, Artificial Eye choose a more auteuristic label, allowing them to directly trade off both the success of the director and the concept of auteurism. Yet there is an important offshoot of this,

as the immediacy of Haneke's name shares with the pig head mars his 'highbrow' status, soiling it as it is drenched by the horrific nature of the dead animal. Of course, when considering the impact of this interchange, one must consider which marker is more persuasive and potent. Indeed, one could argue that the authorial status of Haneke legitimises the pig head, framing it within the remit of art cinema. Within this reading, the shocking nature of the deceased animal is softened by an understanding of Haneke's status as a director of cultural worth. Herein it is no longer a marker of disgust, something to turn away from in repugnance; rather an image that requires further deliberation and demands a more sensitive reading. Yet I would argue that it is more likely that the emotive impact of the image renders this more thoughtful approach ineffective. Therefore the extreme image remains just that – extreme.

It would be wrong, however, to assume that the pig head is completely gratuitous, as it does reference the opening sequence of *Benny's Video*, wherein Benny enthusiastically watches the amateur footage of the animal's slaughter. His repeated interaction with this material early within the narrative confirms his fixation with violent imagery and the tape is later shown to his young female friend just before her murder. This justifies, to an extent, its centralisation on the box set, suggesting that it is not completely superfluous. Nonetheless, the recorded butchery acts more as a catalyst for an exploration of ethical duty and morality, as the film is more concerned with the moral ambiguity of the bourgeoisie than the actual footage Benny consumes, or even the murder he commits. More noticeably, the dead pig clearly misrepresents the other films contained within the box set, as neither the death of livestock nor any act of overtly extreme violence is seen within *The Seventh Continent* or *71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance*. Consequently, *Benny's Video* is the only text that can support artwork which exploits such aggressive and controversial cultural iconography. By using an image which is indicative of only a small part of a much larger trilogy, the paratext forces the narrative worlds of all three films to become homogenised under the perceived violence of a single text. As such, the collection is bestowed with an extreme currency which despite failing to accurately illustrate the narratives, remains a potent commodity within several alternative demographics.

Unsurprisingly, this process can only occur due to the offensiveness of the dead pig, which acts, in the first instance, as a symbol of violence and horror. Immediately, one thinks of kosher laws and the religious restrictions placed on the consumption of pork. In the Torah, the pig is explicitly described as unclean, while the consumption of its meat is forbidden in the Quran. It can further be suggested that the pig, as a living animal,

embodies Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject. Through its relationship to dirt, muck and waste – substances that thrust the human body into retching (Kristeva 1982: 2) – the pig lives a life opposed to our own. Subsequently the pig embodies ideas of revulsion and marginality, potentially forcing the audience into the types of sensorial response touched upon earlier. To further extend the image's abject qualities, and encase it within the discourses of horror and the horrific, the pig is shown to be dead. As Kristeva states, 'the corpse [. . .], that which has irremediably come a cropper, is cesspool, and death; it upsets even more violently the one who confronts it' (1982: 3). As such, the image of death, centralised and front-facing, shocks and defiles the consumer as it seeps and oozes bodily fluids. Therefore the pig, both through its life and its actualisation here in death, signifies a moment of abjection that incites the horror of disgust and abhorrence, heightening its ability to cast the films housed under its watch as extreme.

The animal's relationship to these themes has not gone unnoticed by filmmakers, especially those working within the horror genre. Over time, the pig has become a fundamental part of the genre's lexicon. This has been discussed elsewhere, particularly within Barbara Creed's fundamental essay 'Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection' (1986). During her discussion of *Carrie* (De Palma 1976), Creed notes that 'women's blood and pig's blood flow together, signifying horror, shame and humiliation' (1986: 52), articulating the way in which the pig, and its by-products such as blood (but also faeces and muck), are intrinsically related to notions of abjection and horror (both culturally and within the cinematic frame). Certainly, other narratives have aided this process, further entrenching the animal within the lexicon of the genre. *Deliverance* (Boorman 1972), albeit not a traditional horror narrative, features a rape sequence which roots the pig within discourses of fear. During the scene, Bobby (Ned Beatty), an urban man visiting the rural space for a canoeing trip, is told to squeal like a pig as he is sodomised by a 'local'. Through this, his cries of pain become linked to the noise of the animal, sexualising the creature within a framework of forced sodomy, while casting its squeal as a sign of terror. Furthermore, *Pigs* (Lawrence 1973), aka *Daddy's Deadly Darling*, features a group of flesh-eating pigs who help dispose of Lynn's (Toni Lawrence) murdered victims. Later, within the exploitation horror film *Motel Hell* (Conner 1980), the homicidal farmer wears a decapitated pig's head as a mask during the final stand-off. Notably the killer's pig mask has been the focus of the film's DVD/Blu-ray releases (first by ILC Prime and later via Arrow Video), further strengthening the links between the genre and the animal. The pig's relationship to horror and the abject

stretches beyond marginal exploitation horror narratives. *Hannibal* (Scott 2001), the high-concept sequel to *The Silence of the Lambs*, features a particularly gory scene containing even more flesh-eating pigs.

This relationship between horror and the pig shows no signs of slowing. More recent horror films such as *Pig Hunt* (Isaac 2008), *Pig* (Mason 2010), *Porkchop* (Hardiman 2010), *Madison County* (England 2011) and *Piggy* (Hawkes 2012) foreground the pig as a symbol of horror both textually and paratextually, further engraining the animal within the cinematic signifiers of the genre. Although these latter films were released after the box set, and therefore could not have influenced the aesthetic decisions of Artificial Eye, their circulation within the home entertainment sphere still impacts the shelf life of the artefact. Even within the contexts of contemporary Euro horror, the pig motif is an ever-present trope. Within Fabrice du Welz's *The Ordeal,* Marc Stevens (Laurent Lucas) witnesses the village locals indulging in sexual intercourse with a pig; a semiotic warning of their 'backwardness'. Furthermore, *Taxiderma* (Pálfi 2006) – a Hungarian extreme horror narrative – features a child born from a sexual relationship between a man and a pig, an act that is once again viewed with disgust by the audience. Finally, *Frontier[s]*'s farm setting ensures various pig carcasses are visible as the victims escape from their neo-Nazi capturers.

Yet within the modern era, the principal and most potent use of the pig-head likeness is contained within the *Saw* franchise (Wan 2004; Bousman 2005, 2006, 2007; Hackl 2008; Greutert 2009, 2010; Spierig and Spierig 2017). Since its debut in 2004, *Saw* has had six sequels, released every year on Halloween until 2010. With the eighth instalment released in 2017, the franchise is a clear forerunner in the critically disliked (Edelstein 2006; Weitzman 2007) yet commercially successful 'torture porn' sub-genre. The *Saw* films follow a standardised narrative formula which allows optimum time for elaborate trap-based sequences of death and torture, which are set up by the films' antihero antagonist Jigsaw (Tobin Bell), or, in later additions, his various disciples. At times, Jigsaw has donned a pig costume comprised of a long hooded robe, dark black wig and pig mask. As is so often the case with these horror icons, the costume of the killer has gone on to perform a pivotal role within the film's merchandising directive. Replica pig masks and full adult-sized Halloween costumes have been made in the 'pig face' likeness, whilst NECA (National Entertainment Collectables Association), a leading American action figure and collectables manufacturer, have produced *Saw* action figures that portray Jigsaw in full pig regalia. Moreover, aside from collectables aimed at the fan community, the pig mask costume was a major component in the marketing and promotion of both the fourth and eighth instalments. In regard to the

former, one of the posters portrays a figure dressed in the red robe and pig mask. Set against a dark background which has a similar scratchy effect to that seen on the 'Michael Haneke Trilogy' box set, the poster includes the traditional *Saw* typeface in red letters and the tagline 'It's a Trap' in block white capitals. The pig mask, while not the only focus of the poster, is still unmistakable and continues the strong relationship between the animal and the genre. The latest instalment continues to trade off this longstanding association, simply portraying the pig mask hanging on the wall, with the tagline 'Become Jigsaw' below it.

I am not suggesting that Artificial Eye aimed to copy the *Saw* franchise. It would be difficult to even ascertain whether they were at all directly influenced by this series of films. However, invoking a trace memory embedded within the horror genre normalises the complexity of Haneke's cinema and eases its transition into the more widely accepting and commercial framework of popular horror. In this sense, Artificial Eye succeeds in inflating even a small amount of textual extremity, blanketing the entire release in a narrative image that relates to only a small part of a single film. Unquestionably, this showcases the continued potency of extremity as a commercial signifier and manner in which it can be used to lure a particular kind of audience. However, it would be wrong to discount the other readings the pig head offers. Indeed, certain sectors of the audience could interpret the image within a particular literature tradition, as the pig has been a reoccurring motif in several important works of fiction. The two instances that perhaps prove most useful to consider are that of *Animal Farm* (Orwell 1945) and *Lord of the Flies* (Golding 1954). Both pivotal pieces of contemporary literature, the two books prominently feature pigs or their likeness within narratives that ultimately reflect the key issues of Haneke's cinematic canon. As is perhaps well known, George Orwell's *Animal Farm* places the pig at the centre of strictly constructed political metaphor. In Orwell's book, the farm becomes a micro-society, wherein pigs act as the dictatorial leaders of a fascist state, physically and politically undermining the rest of the farm's population. If the head present on the cover of the Artificial Eye release is read through this Orwellian lens, its decapitation becomes the embodiment of a liberal stance, a victory over the far right and its ways of being. Clearly, due to the cultural validation of both Orwell and *Animal Farm,* this reading enables the cover to locate the film within the legitimised space of 'high' culture.

William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* also uses a smaller setting to make statements about society at large. Following a group of schoolboys who become stranded on a deserted island, the book details their existence as they build shelters and hunt for food. Over time, they split into two

definable groups, with the book becoming a symbolic examination of political leadership and the inborn nature of violence. Eventually the strained social structure collapses and violence consumes the boys, as Jack's 'hunters', charged with slaughtering a wild pig for food, overpower Ralph's more democratic leadership. Within the book, the pig – both as a living creature and a decapitated trophy – operates as a central motif within the formation of Golding's metaphorical message. As a living indigenous creature, the pig is both a key source of food and an artefact by which the boys can measure and declare their masculinity, whilst in its decapitated form it encapsulates their irrationality and innocence. However, despite the fact that the pig itself is clearly important, *Lord of the Flies* as a whole relates neatly to the overriding messages of Haneke's cinema, especially this early trilogy. Golding's narrative is predominantly concerned with questions involving the nature of violence and the dangers of leaving children unattended, as the boys are quickly consumed by brutality in a similar manner as Benny.

Fundamental to noting the importance of these 'high' cultural traces is the way in which images of pigs have appeared sporadically on the covers of both *Animal Farm* and *Lord of the Flies*. Working in opposition to the associations brought forth by its relationship to 'lowbrow' horror cinema, this process grounds the pigs' likeness within the discourses of legitimised literature and cultural worth. In a manner which opposes the reproduction of horrific pig imagery, the consistent re-publication of both novels, alongside their status within culture, elevates the image of the pig, proposing Artificial Eye do not simply exploit a current horror tradition or cash in on the commerciality of extremity. However, it is clear that while these 'high' cultural readings are present, they require a more advanced level of cultural decoding than the horrific reading. In order to correctly decipher the image within the rubrics of these literary traditions, a consumer must retain an understanding of both books and their allegorical messages. Furthermore, these links would have to be supported by a comprehension of Haneke's core cinematic concerns. Clearly this is a relatively complex process and would arguably be rare. It is more likely, due to the emotive power the dead-pig image retains, the saturation of the *Saw* franchise prior to the release of the box set and the proximity this DVD will share with other horror narratives within retail space, that the horrific connotations of the pig head will dominate audiences' comprehension of the Artificial Eye product. In essence, the kneejerk reaction the image encourages favours the conveyance of a 'lowbrow' reading.

Hence despite offering a secondary reading, it remains clear that the Artificial Eye 'Michael Haneke Trilogy' strongly implies a narrative image

related to horror cinema and more specifically the 'torture porn' sub-branch, generating certain expectations regarding the visualisation of gore and extremity. To certain sectors of the market, notably those who do not place the pig-head image within the prevailing literary tradition, the paratextual image's cine-cultural meaning grafts a series of inaccurate promises to the product. Therefore, by actively quarantining itself within a discourse of extremity, the paratextual object creates a conflict between narrative expectation and narrative reality. To return to the cultural triangulation model, it becomes clear that despite having both a 'high' cultural reading due to the use of a literary trace and a rejectionist 'low' cultural reading relating to the use of abject imagery, the cover also presents a 'middlebrow' identity. The pig's connection to popular horror cinema allows the product to masquerade as 'acceptable' within an increasingly extreme mainstream. Herein the film fluidly slips between three cultural sites, transforming a trilogy of subtly extreme narratives into a scandalous, yet consumable, product.

Conclusion

The commercial identity of Haneke is a prime example of slippage and crossover, as his films are marketed using the cultural and filmic dressings of exploitation and horror cinema while simultaneously harbouring a 'high' cultural meaning through the ongoing promotion of the auteur figure. This affords them the ability to shift between several consumption spaces, increasing profitably yet ultimately altering the film's cultural implications. That being said, his home entertainment identity has shifted once again in more recent times, as the extremity of his past is becoming increasingly underplayed. Instead, these newer paratextual offerings seek to establish Haneke as a bastion of the artistic tradition, a standard-bearer within 'highbrow' film culture. Even though the Artificial Eye release of *The White Ribbon* credits Haneke as the director of *Funny Games*, invoking the trace of his more violent narratives, the cover asserts a strong sense of cultural legitimacy. Next to the sole image of a tearful youth, the sleeve proudly notes that the film was nominated for two Oscars and won both a Golden Globe and the Palme d'Or. Furthermore, the cover is adorned with a quotation from the *Mail on Sunday*: 'Haneke is probably the best in the world at his craft'.

A similar strategy is employed on the cover of *Amour*, which was also released by Artificial Eye. A single quotation on the cover, from *Time Out*, reads 'a masterpiece', and a large gold band, made reflective to heighten its sense of prestige and exaggerate its relationship to the precious metal,

lists the film's BAFTA wins and Oscar nominations. Again, the Palme d'Or win is centralised as the artwork focuses on the faces of the film's lead protagonists. The blurb on the back cover looks to settle the film's status, stating 'the second film to win Michael Haneke [. . .] the converted Palme d'Or award and hailed as his finest work to date, *Amour* has secured its place as a modern classic and amongst the greatest films ever made'. Undoubtedly Haneke's auteurification is clearest on the release of Artificial Eye's 'The Films of Michael Haneke' box set. Released in 2011, the box set collects Haneke's entire filmography up to *The White Ribbon* and declares the director a 'visionary filmmaker' and 'one of modern cinema's undisputed masters'. Using a black and white picture of Haneke as its cover artwork, the product undeniably capitalises on and further endorses the status of the director, rejecting the dualism of the earlier releases in favour of a conventional art film marketing strategy. Therefore it can be assumed that auteurism still retains a commercial appeal within the current filmic context, and even within an increasingly extreme mainstream, traditional art film signifiers are still applied to a director that can, and has, been associated with transgression. In fact, an argument could be made to suggest that due to the increased visibility of extremity within the mainstream, auteur marketing, and the guarantee of quality, retains a heightened commerciality.

What can be concluded from this discussion is that the paratextual image of Haneke – while finding greater stability more recently – is less homogenised and harmonious than the critical reception he enjoys. Within the scholarly sphere, the director is roundly celebrated, removed from discussions of extremity and championed as a modern auteur. Yet within the commercial space, Haneke's image is more open to interpretation. Distributors have at times shunned his official capital in favour of design aesthetics which trade off the visual pleasures of the horror genre, or sensationalise his filmic outputs in ways rarely seen elsewhere. Of course, it would be going too far to say that Haneke sanctions this approach, or indeed that it has had a prolonged effect on his cultural identity, yet is does illustrate the economic validity of extreme material. It also once again points towards the significance of the paratext as a platform for debate, construction and reinvention. Occurring outside of the pressures of critical and academic spheres, and working in servitude of completely different aims, paratextual image-makers are perhaps free to invent and interpret filmic identities in ways afforded to few others. This makes them interesting, important, and potentially problematic.

CHAPTER 8

Lars von Trier: Provocation, Condemnation and Confrontation

Antichrist's prologue contains both hard-core sexual penetration and beautiful slow-motion cinematography. Just from these opening minutes, it is easy to see that von Trier's narrative embodies the confrontational and aggressive nature of extreme art cinema. Described as an unwatchable film (Grønstad 2011: 194), *Antichrist* comes towards the end of the 'New Extremism' boom and represents something of a shift in representations of cinematic extremity, both aesthetically and paratextually. For this chapter, three mediations of *Antichrist* will be investigated in order to illustrate the changing commerciality of cinematic extremity.

Lars von Trier: Art Film Provocateur

Von Trier can be regarded one of the foremost auteurs within contemporary art cinema, with Stig Bjorkman, author of *Trier on Von Trier* (2004), describing him as a 'breaker of new ground' (2009: 16). Bjorkman's statement is useful, as even a quick overview of the filmmaker's filmography highlights his innovative cinematic approach – an approach valued highly within the 'highbrow'. Narratives such as *The Idiots*, *The Five Obstructions* (Leth and von Trier 2003), *Dogville* (von Trier 2003) and *Nymphomaniac Vol. I* and *Vol. II* make use of inventive filmmaking techniques which foreground the control and artistry of their director. Additionally, von Trier has won multiple awards at Cannes, claiming the Palme d'Or with *Dancer in the Dark*, the Grand Jury Prize with *Breaking the Waves*, the Jury Prize with *Europa* (1991) and the Technical Grand Prize with *The Element of Crime* (1984). These accolades, due to the pre-circulating cultural capital attached to the festival circuit, endorse von Trier's films as 'high' taste, marking him as a figure of value. However, von Trier's presence within this legitimised space is unstable and fraught with tension. Unlike the reliably consistent forms of authentication which surrounded Haneke, the critical discourses that enclose the work of von Trier are less

uniform, and typified by debate, opposition and contradiction. This challenging relationship with the art film sector and its systems of value can be read as a symptom of the public persona von Trier projects. Often seen as a deliberately antagonistic figure who likes to bait critics and audiences alike, von Trier has been labelled by many as a provocateur. Although this moniker has been externally applied to the director by the literature surrounding his work, it can be said that he is increasingly conscious of its existence and seeks to fulfil the part bestowed unto to him.

In essence, *Antichrist* can be read as a filmic manifestation of this label. Throughout the film, von Trier succeeds in collapsing the boundaries between 'high' and 'low', combining hard-core sex and extreme violence with well-established signifiers of art cinema. The aforementioned prologue features sexual penetration alongside black and white photography, painterly uses of slow motion, and an operatic musical score. Of course, this hybridisation demands a reaction in ways that have become synonymous with the work of von Trier. Yet *Antichrist* goes further than the other parts of the director's catalogue. Adopting handheld camera work that is simultaneously reminiscent of the director's Dogme 95 days and contemporary horror narratives, von Trier ends a torture sequence with an erect penis ejaculating blood, before showing the lead protagonist mutilating her genitals with a pair of scissors. Not often seen within the confines of the festival circuit – even with its own increasing exhibition of extreme cinema – these images of sexualised violence contrast with the values of the art sphere, complicating the director's ability to be recognised as an auteur within the 'highbrow'.

The dualistic nature of the film is furthered by its cultural reference points, which include filmmakers and playwrights such as Carl T. Dreyer, Henrik Ibsen, August Strindberg, Ingmar Bergman, Stanley Kubrick, Luis Buñuel, and Andrei Tarkovsky – to whom the film is dedicated (Simons 2015: 4). However, to suggest this combination of philosophy, sex and taboo imagery is a novel innovation within the cinema of von Trier is to ignore its consistent appearance throughout his filmography. As outlined in Chapter 6, *The Idiots* provided one of the earliest adoptions of hard-core sex within a non-pornographic production. Moreover, even though the sexual scenes present within both *Breaking the Waves* and *Dogville* are void of penetration, the explicitness of the themes – including sexual degradation and rape – still work to transgress even the most flexible boundaries within the 'highbrow'. Additionally, the emotional extremity of *Dancer in the Dark* and the taboo subject matter of *Manderlay* (von Trier 2005) expose the director's commitment to pushing the limitations of acceptability. More recently, *Nymphomaniac Vol. I* and *Vol. II* featured

multiple sequences of hard-core sex, actively using and reframing many key pornographic motifs such as sadomasochism, bondage, 'interracial' threesomes and fetish, without, as Andrea Sabbadini suggests, spilling over into pornography (2016: 368).

It is indeed this commitment to extreme ideas and visuals that generates possible conflict and tension within certain areas of the art film audience. Predominantly, this can be measured through the denouncements and criticisms that swamp von Trier's films during their festival exhibitions. The director's films have often been cause for scandal and outcry, and as I have already discussed, these regularly develop into paracinematic endorsements; promises to certain demographics wanting to find the most extreme narratives. Whilst this is significant, what is most interesting about the director's involvement with the festival circuit are the ways in which he uses the space as a performative stage. Von Trier has increasingly turned these public events into promotional opportunities, and stages on which he can perform his provocative persona. Obviously, most festival attendees are entrenched within the customs of art film culture; a mind-set that carries certain expectancies and habits regarding filmic content and behaviour. Von Trier, fully aware of these governing principles, deliberately challenges them, setting himself apart from the rest of the field by deliberately breaking and defying the 'rules' of the space. As these events operate outside of the cinematic frame, they will be approached here as epitexts, which influence and become attached to a given film in similar ways to critical and scholarly literature.

As established in Chapter 2, film festivals rest at the epicentre of legitimate filmic activity, and hence exist as a closed, 'high' cultural space; a micro-society which plays a crucial role in the creation and sustainment of an international art cinema scene (de Valck 2012: 35). Cannes, the undisputed figurehead of the festival network (de Valck 2007: 120) and the most important festival space (Broe 2011: 33–4) has, coincidentally, been the nucleus of von Trier's 'performances'. Significantly, the festival audience – comprised of journalists, film critics and privileged cinephiles – can legitimise an exhibited film, pathing its way towards a culturally elevated status (Maule 2008: 168). Strong reviews, awards or word-of-mouth acclaim arising from the festival site allow a film to borrow from the widespread validity of the event and often facilitate a film's entrance into the 'highbrow' psyche. However, if a film does not meet the expectations of those in attendance, it could be rejected – a process common to the hostile environment of Cannes (Turan 2002: 25). This limits a film's ability to attract buyers within the attached market-spaces, and can be a distinct blow for any commercial aspirations the property may have. Thirdly a film

can, through the employment of transgressive and extreme tropes, cast itself as controversial and scandalous (de Valck 2007: 155). Evident within the festival performances of many extreme art texts – including those of von Trier – this process is fundamental to understanding the dual role festivals play as both a site of art film validation and instigator of a more paracinematic reputation. Hampus Hagman, in his article 'Every Cannes needs its Scandal: Between Art and Exploitation Cinema in Contemporary French Film', suggests that many French extreme narratives are branded by a 'gross-out' or 'walk out' factor (2007: 37). Although this repels certain sectors of the audience, it is, to others, more appealing than conventional, 'high' cultural legitimisation. *Irreversible* became defined in this way, as it was said to have induced nausea and sickness within the audience (Sterritt 2007: 307). Instantly these reports become hyperbolic promises to an audience who want to test themselves against a film others could not handle and are thus potentially as 'valuable' as traditional praise. In other words, the controversy prompted by the extremity – or at least stories of extremity – naturally develops into series of marketable promises and is often used to entice those demographics not welcome within the 'highbrow' space of the art film festival.

Marijke de Valck terms this cycle the value-adding process and states it occurs 'in pre-planned occasions and ritualised ceremonies [. . .] [or] attained in the elusive process of selection for mediation and guerrilla endeavours of various actors' (2007: 33). The value gained from these events evolves into 'news-worthiness', which consequently translates into economic value and distribution deals outside of the festival network as the films enjoy additional coverage (de Valck 2007: 128). Although capital gathered through notoriety is often stigmatised, it still has a distinct value, as de Valck states:

> The positive or negative nature of media exposure [is] not that important. Media coverage can always be valuable because it puts films on the agenda. Film critics [. . .] have the power to establish favourites on the media agenda, which are independent of competition results, and thus contribute to the buzz that will help the film travel the festival circuit successfully. (2007: 161)

Additionally, the scandalous activities undertaken within these pre-organised live environs mark the festival space as culturally relevant (Ruoff 2012: 17), giving it additional value and importance within the cultural arts more generally.

Von Trier's actions – whereby the director himself engineers controversy – shows an awareness of how valuable this type of coverage is. He intentionally goads the media, ensuring maximum coverage for his

work inside and outside the festival space. This enables him to operate as both a validated auteur in competition at Cannes and as a paracinematic maverick who challenges the system and exists outside of its limitations. An example of von Trier at his aggravating best came during the Cannes press conference for *Antichrist*. Prior to addressing the press, the film had already stirred controversy due to its representation of hard-core sex and extreme violence. As the following statements by Peter Brunette, Todd McCarthy and Owen Gleiberman indicate, the film already had grounds to gain additional value based on the outrage of the press: 'with his latest offering, *Antichrist*, Danish bad-boy director Lars von Trier is in no danger of jeopardizing his reign as the most controversial major filmmaker working today' (Brunette 2009: 94); 'Lars von Trier cuts a big fat art-film fart with "*Antichrist*". As if deliberately courting critical abuse' (McCarthy 2009); and 'Lars von Trier, once a gravely exciting artist [. . .] latest fake outrage, is an art-house couples-therapy torture-porn horror film' (Gleiberman 2009). These comments, appearing across a variety of epitexts (ranging from *Entertainment Weekly* [Gleiberman], to *Variety* [McCarthy] and *Film Journal International* [Brunette]), are illustrative of the value critical notoriety holds within the contemporary art film climate and the important role it can come to play.

Nevertheless, von Trier's actions at the press conference supplemented this already controversial reputation. Following a question that demanded *Antichrist* be justified due to its extremity, von Trier replied that his work was the 'hand of God' and that he is the 'best film director in the world'. This retort made the conference a newsworthy 'happening', increasing the film's chances of visibility outside of the closed festival space. The additional coverage is clear within the article 'CANNES 2009: Stupid, Adjective' (Peranson 2009), as author Mark Peranson never mentions the Palme d'Or-winning *The White Ribbon*, yet discusses *Antichrist* and von Trier at length. Predictably, his comments were not favourable, but the condemnation of the film bestows it with a valuable secondary capital grounded in disgust and outrage. In essence, any coverage is good coverage, as it offers the product greater visibility within an increasingly competitive market. Furthermore, two articles considering the following year's festival, by Edward Lawrenson (2010: 56) and Robert Lightning (2010: 68), mention the lack of '*Antichrist*-style' controversy, illustrating both the film's permanence and controversy's importance to the festival circuit at large.

However, von Trier's comments at the *Antichrist* conference are easily dismissed as an 'off-the-cuff' joke, and therefore do little to overshadow the notoriety of the film's content. Indeed, for evidence of the extent to

which von Trier is able to use conference proceedings as a promotional platform, we need to look no further than *Melancholia*'s (von Trier 2011) press conference. Significantly, *Melancholia*, due to its lack of transgressive content, would not have been able to hit the scandalous heights of its predecessor. Furthermore, although it had been celebrated by critics within the festival space, with Foundas Scott claiming that it was the most warmly greeted von Trier film since *Breaking the Waves* (2011: 62), the film was unlikely to win any major honours. Finally, it was not branded by the 'walk out' or 'gross-out' credentials that are so important to the festival 'lives' of extreme art films. Subsequently, *Melancholia* was set to endure a less sensationalist and therefore widespread critical reception, somewhat fading into the noise of the event. However, during the press conference, von Trier turned the localised event into a global news story through the performance of a self-knowingly controversial monologue, in which he discussed Adolf Hitler, Judaism and his own Nazi 'beliefs':

> I really wanted to be a Jew, but then I found out I was really a Nazi [. . .] what can I say, I understand Hitler. But I think he did some wrong things, yes, absolutely, but I can see him sitting in his bunker in the end [. . .] I sympathise with him a little bit yes. But not, come on, I'm not for the Second World War, and I'm not against Jews, [. . .] I am of course very for Jews . . . no not too much because Israel is a pain in the ass [. . .]. Ok I'm a Nazi. (*The Telegraph* 2011)

These comments, as Sara Vilkomerson states, came to overshadow all other aspects of the film (2011). More significantly, the performance, which exploited the memory of Europe's greatest tragedy and aligned the director with one of history's most abhorrent figures, resulted in an oppositional yet linked process: *Melancholia* gained notoriety and exposure outside of the festival space, while von Trier was banned from the Cannes Film Festival.

Highlights of the press conference were uploaded onto YouTube by telegraphtv – *The Telegraph*'s official YouTube channel – on 18 May 2011 under the title *Lars von Trier's 'Nazi' gaffe at Cannes Film Festival as he jokes about Adolf Hitler.* The video had been viewed 1,116,656 times and received 1,935 'likes' and 568 'dislikes' (*The Telegraph* 2011) (information gathered 28 November 2017). Furthermore, the video has the second-highest number of views for a Cannes film festival press conference, only behind the conference for *Mad Max: Fury Road* (Miller 2015) (Festival de Cannes 2015) – itself a 'happening' due to Tom Hardy's dismissal of a journalist's sexist comments (information gathered on 28 November 2017). Therefore it is clear that 'the local performances during the Cannes Film Festival acquire[d] global value by means of media exposure' (de

Valck 2007: 118), rapidly increasing the viewership from a set of privileged attendees to a global audience. While the film has nothing to do with Nazism, Kirsten Dunst's proximity to von Trier during the speech, and the replication of the video across the internet, has intertwined the artefacts. The director's intentions cannot be known, however it is clear that the comments created a marketable scandal which in turn engulfed a film lacking the natural ingredients to achieve infamy. Via the exploitation of Europe's greatest modern tragedy, von Trier guaranteed his film greater exposure within a competitive market sector.

Although von Trier's comments worked to attract attention to *Melancholia* through channels of disrepute, they simultaneously damaged his credibility as a director of 'value'. While being banned from the Cannes Film Festival brands him as 'too extreme' for the festival space and further endorses his maverick status, it also denies him the 'high' cultural credence affixed to an exhibition slot within the festival's programme. Through an inability to show films at Cannes, von Trier is instantly ousted from a preeminent 'high' cultural space. Whilst it could be inferred that extreme art cinema, due to the nature of the texts, does not require additional coverage or capital, Tina Kendall notes that the prestige of the festival is vital to safeguarding extremity as it promises a prospective audience that the transgressions take place within the narratives that are auteur-driven and culturally relevant (2011: 43). Moreover, David Andrews suggests that due to the durability of certain festival spaces (of which Cannes stands as one of the most 'durable'), just getting into the space itself, regardless of winning an award, provides useful capital and coverage (2013: 181). In essence, Andrews suggests that it supplies distributors with an 'alibi' through which they can justify any release (2013: 80). Consequently, through his banishment, von Trier is unable to safeguard his cinema within the existing legitimacy of the Cannes Film Festival, and therefore is incapable of penetrating an important sector of the art film demographic who direct their consumption via festival credentials. Although the director is welcome at other festivals, the key finding here is the manner in which von Trier turns from director to self-promoter, driving up interest in his films and selling them to audiences not through their content, but through his unpredictability.

Antichrist: Chelsea Films and Artificial Eye

The now defunct Chelsea Films, who released *Antichrist* in 2010, capitalised on this controversial reputation. The smallest part of the Curzon Artificial Eye conglomerate, Chelsea Films were responsible for releasing

the likes of *Sand Sharks* (Atkins 2009), *Airborne* (Burns 2012), *Dragon Wasps* (Knee 2012) and *Piranhaconda* (Wynorski 2012). These 'mock-buster' narratives – which aim to replicate the American blockbuster tradition, and often feature sub-par special effects, poor acting and illogical narratives – are marketed towards a casual demographic, wherein their lower price-point sees them consumed alongside more popular 'A' pictures. The CEO of Curzon Artificial Eye, Philip Knatchbull, admits that Chelsea Films was developed for this very purpose as it provided the company with an additional revenue stream based on 'mid-level locomotives' while allowing them to 'protect the legacy and core values of Artificial Eye' (Macnab 2007). Perhaps due to their subordinate position within a larger company, Chelsea Films operated without a website and instead advertised through free social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook. An analysis of the company's activity on one of these sites – Twitter – provides important insights into the size of the label and its cultural standing. Chelsea Films's Twitter page, @ChelseaFilmsDis, has posted 178 tweets (the last one coming on June 13 2014) and has 324 followers as of 28 November 2017 (Chelsea Films 2017). When these figures are compared to Artificial Eye, we can see that Chelsea Films represented a far smaller venture. Posting 6,240 tweets and retaining 35.4K followers as of 28 November 2017 (Artificial Eye 2017), Artificial Eye's reach and frequency, a key aspect of marketing (Friedman 2006: 291), eclipses its sister label. This is perhaps to be expected due Artificial Eye's status within the British distribution sector. However, even when compared to 88 Films, a small-scale (in terms of the workforce) exploitation label, vast differences can still be noted. 88 Films, tweeting from @88_Films, has posted 4,138 tweets, boasting 5,552 followers as of 28 November 2017 (88 Films 2017). Although it could be claimed that this comparison is unfair due to Chelsea Films no longer being an active label, the lack of activity while they operated remains indicative of the size and ambition of the imprint.

It is further evidence of the label's connection with its demographic, as Twitter provides a bridge between distributor and audience. This linkage proves particularly important within the 'lowbrow' space Chelsea Films was operating within, as it allows sub-cultural capital to take root and blossom. Ultimately, Chelsea Films were envisioned as a low-level distributor that sacrifices artistic legitimisation, cultural sophistication and sub-cultural kudos for quick economic gains. Without doubt, this market directive draws parallels to the exploitation distributors of the past and the commercially aligned legacy they have left behind. However, as suggested above, the company failed to garner any real sub-cultural credibility

within the paracinematic sector. Unlike the other currently active exploitation distributors such as Arrow Video, 88 Films or Shameless Screen Entertainment, Chelsea Films did not release seminal genre films or exploitation 'classics'. Nor did they attempt to actively engage with their demographic. Rather, their straight-to-DVD releases and their simplistic paratextual presentations lacked sub-cultural prestige (the company was not concerned with lavish special editions like many other distributors of the 'lowbrow'). This excluded them from the processes of cultural exchange outlined throughout this book, as the films they released offered little in the way of legitimacy whilst their branding failed to authenticate the individual film.

Obviously this has an impact on the paratextuality of *Antichrist*. Unlike many of the other products considered throughout this book, the film does not benefit from the cultural reputation of its distributor. In other cases, the inner text has profited from the existing status of its distributor, instantly marking it as extreme, 'highbrow', transgressive, 'cool' or worthy. In this case, *Antichrist* is presented in something of an unadorned state, neither 'high' or 'low', worthy or offensive. In many ways, the straight-to-DVD nature of Chelsea Films' catalogue actually juxtaposes the festival prestige of von Trier's film, and his long-standing, albeit tentative, association with the art film sector. Collectively, it can be suggested that the association von Trier's film shares with Chelsea Films misrepresents it, bestowing *Antichrist* with a conventional and casual filmic identity which masks both the complexities of the narrative and its extremities. However, the company did serve an important purpose for Curzon Artificial Eye. The film's residency within the Chelsea Films library allowed the larger company to financially benefit from the release of the extreme text while protecting their own 'legacy' within the 'highbrow'. Moreover, the lack of cultural attachments retained by Chelsea Films enabled the product to talk more directly to a horror-film demographic who may have been put off by Artificial Eye's branding and previous associations. Seen as so important to the discussions held elsewhere within this work, the logo's distinct connection to the 'highbrow' taste culture could be seen as detrimental to the success of von Trier's film, as it potentially operates as an undesirable marker of a complexity. As it stands, the lack of cultural footholds offered by Chelsea Films – in either the 'highbrow' or 'lowbrow' – allows the film easier access to a casual horror film consumer not concerned with collecting cultural capital or proving their fandom. In many ways, the film's placement on this label presents it as 'normal' – free from the complex structures assessed throughout this work and therefore more palatable to casual audiences.

It is therefore no surprise to see that the Chelsea Films cover is simplistic and direct in its use of horror signifiers, opting to use standard templates of representation in order to smooth its transition from complex festival film to typical horror entity. The cover art – identical on both the DVD and Blu-ray release – features a pair of rusty, bloody scissors placed on a white background (see Figure 8.1). Blood splatters appear prominently on the bottom of the sleeve, with several sporadically positioned in the midsection of the cover. The title, matching the typography used throughout the film, is the largest text visible and is split into 'Anti' and 'Christ' by the scissors, with the names of Willem Dafoe (He) and Charlotte Gainsbourg (She) appearing in black either side of the handles. Von Trier's name, slightly larger than those of Gainsbourg and Dafoe, is indicative of the art/exploitation fusion that characterises the film's narrative, as the authorial status of the director is often missing from contemporary horror paratexts and certainly those typically released by Chelsea Films. However, the mass of horror semiotics dilutes the potency of an auteurist reading, as the auteur trace is heavily disguised among conventional horror signifiers and more powerful visual reference points.

The reasons the cover works so efficiently in attaching recognisable signifiers to the film are numerous: firstly, the scissors themselves act as a hyperbolic statement as they evoke a set of pre-conceived expectations related to *Antichrist*'s most infamous sequence of extremity – the female character's genital self-mutilation. The scene was the stimulus for much of the film's additional coverage and was largely condemned by many critics as gratuitous and misogynistic. Naturally, this disapproval repels a certain demographic – particularly those within the 'highbrow' – to whom critical validation is key to viewing decisions and consumption habits. However, it simultaneously elevated the film's exploitative value, encasing it further within the swell of scandal and outrage so valuable to paracinematic communities. The Chelsea Films cover speaks directly to the latter, transforming the infamy achieved within the critical sector into the film's most potent selling point. Indeed, within the isolation and promotion of the scissors, Chelsea Films are able to capitalise on a wealth of existing opinions, amassing the film's largely negative critical identity and combining it with its commercial projection. The simplicity of the cover also works to effectively deter audiences that need 'high' cultural reassurances regarding extreme material, as it fails to offer any 'high' cultural footholds. Rather, the cover dares the audience to partake in a viewing exercise based on excess, extremity and exploitation.

Additionally, the scissor's positioning on a stark white background conjures the market imagery of 'slasher' cinema. Defined by the

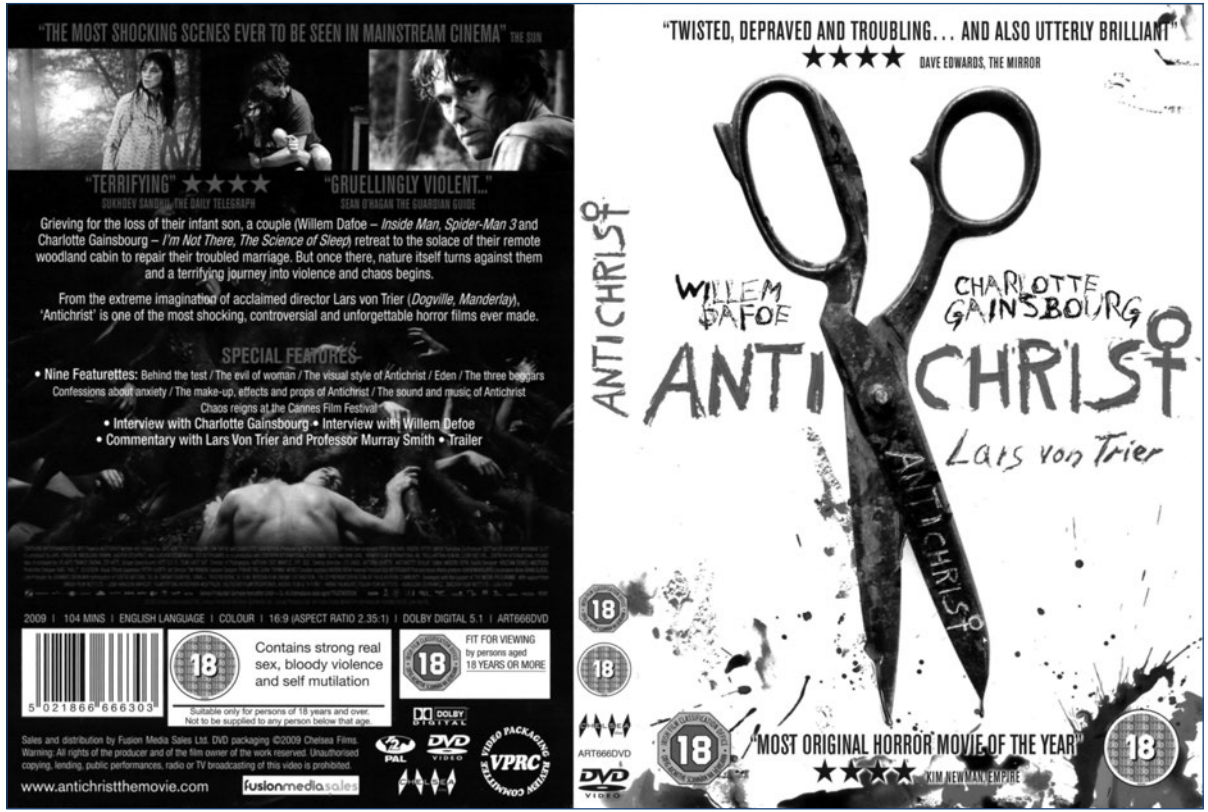

Figure 8.1 Chelsea Films' *Antichrist* DVD artwork. (Source: © Curzon Artificial Eye.)

'stalk-and-slash' premise, whereby a killer tracks down and slaughters victims in increasingly brutal and creative ways, the 'slasher' sub-genre encourages the audience to celebrate moments of violence and gore. Unlike extreme art cinema, it offers a largely uncomplicated viewing experience. The weapons used by the killers within these franchises often take on a symbolic value and are regularly isolated and repeated across promotional material and merchandise. Jonathan Gray discusses this within his work on paratexts, stating that there is a relatively standardised formula for horror film posters, with the majority depicting the implement of murder (2010: 53). The commonality of this particular paratextual aesthetic – and the ease in which it could be reframed upon other products, and even cut across cultural divisions – can be observed with a brief look at one of the most accomplished 'slasher' franchises: *Friday the 13th* (Cunningham 1980; Miner 1981, 1982; Zito 1984; Steinmann 1985; McLoughlin 1986; Buechler 1988; Hedden 1989; Marcus 1993; Issac 2001; Nispel 2009). Focusing on the murderous actions of Jason Voorhees, the franchise is much favoured among horror fans and remains a well-loved property. The series' sustainability – whereby it has enjoyed numerous sequels, remakes and reboots – has led to a variety of paratexts being produced, including posters, DVD artwork, action figures and replica costumes. In essence, these entities come to solidify the weapon's relationship to the films, the sub-genre and genre at large. In terms of an emblematic weapon, the franchise's reoccurring antagonist has become synonymous with the machete, yet part of the film's pleasure is derived from its ability to incorporate a vast variety of day-to-day tools and objects into the sequences of slaughter.

Due to its popularity, the *Friday the 13th* franchise has been distributed many times on DVD. In 2009, the same year *Antichrist* hit shelves, parts *II* to *VIII* were released by Paramount Home Entertainment. Presented in uniform jackets, the DVD sleeve is both reminiscent of the horror artwork of the past and of Chelsea Films' *Antichrist* cover. Balancing familiarity and curiosity, each cover centralises a single object on a white, blood-splattered background. Due to the surrounding blood stains, each cover shapes the audience's expectations and excitement for acts of violence and brutality – just as the scissors do with the Chelsea Films cover. In order to further intensify this anticipation, each cover focuses upon a different implement, which in turn references a particular scene within the narrative, most commonly one in which Voorhees slays a victim with the advertised object. The cover of *Friday the 13th Part II* shows a pickaxe; *Part III* a pitchfork; *Friday the 13th: The Final Chapter* a corkscrew; *A New Beginning* a pair of garden shears; *Jason Lives: Friday the 13th Part VI* portrays the traditional machete; *Part VII* a meat cleaver; and

Friday the 13th Part VIII: Jason Takes Manhattan centralises an axe. Each film's title is presented in the franchise's standard typeface, giving the collection a sameness which further secures the aesthetic template within the patterns of the sub-genre and its particular cultural values. Essentially, Chelsea Films borrow from, or at least evoke, this established iconography, pirating both its colour scheme and focusing on the implement of violence. Therefore the scissors are transformed into a 'franchise weapon', whereby they act as a loaded symbol connotative of a certain type of pleasurable violence.

By drawing attention to these artefacts, I am not claiming the Chelsea Films release was directly inspired by Paramount Home Entertainment's design aesthetic. Indeed, the centralisation of a weapon and the distinct similarities of the colour scheme is present across many mainstream horror paratexts, including *Texas Chain Saw Massacre 2* (Hooper 1986) and *Hit and Run* (McCallion 2009). Instead, I am suggesting that the Chelsea Films *Antichrist* cover conjures the memory of popular horror in order to exploit its commerciality and position it within a particular market category. Unsurprisingly, the product's catalogue number and selected quotations continue to appropriate a mainstream horror marketing aesthetic. The catalogue number, which is habitually selected at random as an industrial process relating to the manufacturer's library index, is offered here as an additional paratextual feature. The code – ART666DVD – creates a coequal reference to the narrative's deliberately confrontational and provocative approach to religion, while serving as something of an 'Easter egg' for eagle-eyed consumers. This kind of micro-detailing is common within fan-orientated discourses due to the pleasure these 'in-jokes' provide to an information-hungry audience. In this example, the detail provides further evidence of the type of audience Chelsea Films is targeting and the preferred reading of the product as a whole. In support of this, the quotation on the front cover claims the film is 'the most original horror movie of the year'. Unaccompanied, this remark undeniably brands the film as horror, yet its author, Kim Newman, heightens its appeal to horror film aficionados. As both a producer of horror fiction and a prominent horror film journalist, Newman is a figure of considerable standing within the horror community. His involvement here, and his prominent placement on the front of the paratext, enables his sub-cultural legacy to be grafted onto the release, further endorsing the film's entrance into the horror realm whilst heightening its appeal within certain sectors of the audience.

The release continues to force *Antichrist* into a pre-existing horror film ideal on the jacket's reverse. Described as 'a terrifying journey into

violence and chaos' (a statement which trades off the conventions of horror film plot structures, wherein the characters' chances of survival become increasingly bleak), the film is also said to be 'one of the most shocking, controversial and unforgettable horror films ever made'. These statements underplay the complexities of the narrative, opting instead to sell the film as an unrivalled and terrifying thrill ride in the classic horror tradition. It also curtails the film's relationship to art cinema, which although strained, should not be discounted. The film did appear within the 'highbrow' space of the art film festival prior to this release. Interestingly, the auteuristic legacy of von Trier is inverted, as *Antichrist* is said to be 'from the extreme imagination of acclaimed director Lars von Trier'. Whilst the word 'acclaimed' indicates a level of success and 'worth', the expression 'extreme imagination' not only implies marginality, but casts also von Trier as a horror film auteur rather than a director who works within the spaces of art cinema. This is significant as although it can be suggested that von Trier's films have been transgressive and taboo, claiming he has an 'extreme imagination' somewhat re-writes his directorial history. Of course, his films have always been challenging, but the rhetoric, which almost challenges the audience to enter the mind of the director, recalls the taunting tone of the circus barker. In essence, the statement aligns him more closely with the likes of John Carpenter, Wes Craven and Eli Roth than it does with Pier Paulo Pasolini, Ingmar Bergman and Jean-Luc Godard. In isolation, this may have little impact on the overall understanding of the object, yet when combined with the mass of other horror signers, the collective direction of the paratexts offers a single-minded view of a complex text.

As is perhaps expected, all the quotations on the cover's reverse support this reading of both film and director. A quotation from *The Sun*, which carries its own 'low' cultural status and is suggestive of the demographic the release is aiming to attract, states *Antichrist* presents 'the most shocking scenes ever to be seen in mainstream cinema'. Important here is not only the hyperbolic 'ever to be seen' statement, but also the way in which the quote places *Antichrist* as a piece of 'mainstream' cinema. Here, the film is removed from the marginal spheres of art film, extreme cinema and exploitation film and is instead placed within 'mass' and 'popular' culture. 'Mainstream' further connotes a normative viewing experience, which is rarely offered by von Trier, and is certainly not provided by *Antichrist*. This shift into the 'mainstream' burdens the film with certain expectations, altering the type of viewing experience the consumer comes to anticipate. In doing so, *The Sun*'s review, or at least this selected portion of it, counters much of the critical and academic scholarship on the film,

which mostly allied with the 'unwatchable' tag given to the film by Asbjørn Grønstad. The remaining quotations use a similar mode of address, simply stating the film is both 'Terrifying' (*Daily Telegraph*) and 'Gruellingly violent . . .' (*The Guardian Guide*). Perhaps deliberately, the cover fails to mention the film's art-house credentials, its appearance at Cannes, or the authorial status of von Trier – aspects that would collectively provide 'high' cultural validity and enable it to circulate more comfortably within an art film sphere.

Evidently, the narrative world provided by Chelsea Films is an abridged view of a difficult and complex film. The design of the cover, selected quotations and hyperbolic blurb pushes *Antichrist* towards a mainstream horror ghetto, wherein it maintains an equivalent relationship to its new peers. Without a doubt, the film courts these readings and purposely evokes horror iconography. Yet it would be misleading to suggest it is the kind of horror experience this particular product advertises. Von Trier's film is equal parts art cinema and extreme cinema, and thus rests uncomfortably within this purely horror genre site. Nonetheless, the artefact as a whole suggests that Curzon Artificial Eye, owners of Chelsea Films, see *Antichrist* as a narrative that may challenge the core values of their primary demographic and brand as a whole. As claimed earlier, is appearance upon the Chelsea Films imprint quarantines it and places it in its own vacuum wherein the larger brand can benefit from its popularity without sacrificing its own 'highbrow' affiliations. However, this idea was complicated in 2011, when the film's residency with Chelsea Films ended and it was re-released under the Artificial Eye banner. Raising interesting questions regarding the cultural and commercial perception of the film, and the potential paratexts have to be instigators of change, *Antichrist*'s movement into the Artificial Eye catalogue suggests the film was being reclaimed as a piece of art cinema appropriate for 'highbrow' audiences. However, what must be considered more thoroughly is the extent to which this remediation can be seen as a genuine attempt to rebrand the film as a piece of art cinema and welcome it into the 'high' cultural sector, or as merely an effort by Curzon Artificial Eye to repackage and re-sell the same film to a different audience. Clearly neither outcome would be 'better', yet would have significant ramifications on the commercial coding of von Trier's narrative – and perhaps extremity as a whole.

Initially, the remediation of *Antichrist* suggests that the Chelsea Films release was something of a trial run, a way to test the water while protecting the Curzon brand and its claims to legitimacy. Its re-release via Artificial Eye instantly implies the company are attempting to reclassify the film, using their own associations to 'high' culture as a cleanser, washing away

the film's previous misdeeds. This could be read as a response to the changing status of the director following the release of *Melancholia* – which although caught up in the furore of the Cannes press conference was far less explicit and extreme than its predecessor. In a similar manner to the paratextual changes Michael Haneke's cinema enjoyed following the success of *Caché*, *Melancholia* – which was distributed by Artificial Eye and featured a cover dominated by a painterly image of Dunst (who played protagonist Justine) – seemingly ushered in a more widespread reacceptance of von Trier and his work. Notably this is evident on Artificial Eye's *Antichrist*, as the distributor uses the trace of the later film to amplify the former's relationship to the auteur tradition and dilute its transgressive reputation. However, this sense of tolerance is complicated through the cover image used, which is identical to that employed during the film's brief theatrical run (see Figure 8.2). It is useful here to examine how this design was received at this earlier stage as it provides insight into how a number of different sites – including Artificial Eye, retailers, the public and the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) – understand and respond to the artwork. The main image shows He and She having sex at the base of a large tree, as hands protrude from the roots. The implication of sex resulted in public complaints in 2009 when the poster ran in *The Times*, *The Guardian* and *The Independent*. According to the ASA website, complainants thought that 'the ad's imagery was pornographic, thought the depiction of a naked couple having sex was offensive and inappropriate for publication in a newspaper where it might be seen by children' (ASA 2009). Consequently the image can be marked as extreme and perhaps even distasteful. This of course aligns its reproduction on the DVD cover with the attention-grabbing and sensationalist traditions that define exploitation marketing, which have continually used forbidden and shocking images to mark their films as transgressive, rebellious and unfit for general consumption.

Debbie Rowland, the former marketing manager at Artificial Eye, offered a counter-argument. In an interview given to *Vice Magazine*, she stated that:

> [Artificial Eye] felt the image was extreme in nature, but so is the film and it really did reflect that. We didn't want to kid anybody into thinking it was a romantic comedy or a gruesome horror. And the image does have a shock factor (Godfrey 2009).

Although it is clear that the film was marketed as a 'gruesome horror' while under the Chelsea Films banner, this notion of 'truth', whereby the image reflects the extremity of the film and therefore does not mislead the consumer or misrepresent the product, remains fundamental to

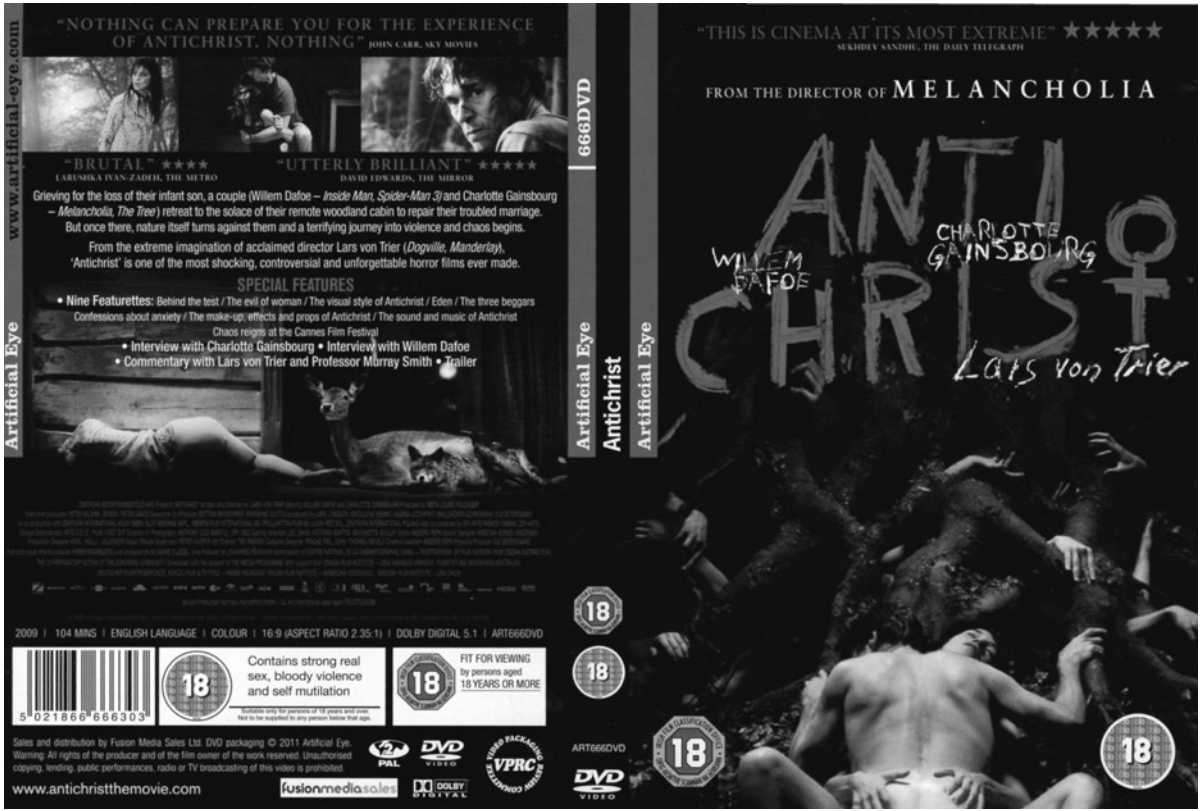

Figure 8.2 Artificial Eye's *Antichrist* DVD artwork. (Source: © Curzon Artificial Eye.)

understanding the paratextuality of extreme cinema. Notably the BFI's handling of *Salò, Or the 120 Days of Sodom* arguably used a similar method in their presentation of an equally difficult film. In essence, this idea of truthful representation – whereby cover art or posters could be read as hyperbolically sexual, violent or extreme (or all three) – suggests that ignoring these aspects within the marketing of these extreme films would prove problematic. I tend to agree. More importantly, this notion of honest representation appeased the ASA and they pressed no further action against the campaign.

Obviously, it is not that simple. While cover art such as the one present on the *Antichrist* product does 'represent' the violate nature of the product, it is unmistakably attractive to the 'lowbrow'. Thus the notion of truthful representation can be somewhat indefinite – both honest and hyperbolic, frank and attention-seeking. Again this is recognised within the ASA report, which notes that '[Artificial Eye Film Company] [. . .] as a result of the complaints, [said] they would ensure that the image of the naked couple was not used in any advertising for the DVD release of the film' (ASA 2009). Indeed, this explains the image that adorns the Chelsea Films release – and perhaps the film's temporary relocation to this secondary distributor. Yet it more importantly reveals that Artificial Eye knowingly employs an already controversial image on their re-release, deliberately evoking a pre-established level of proven infamy. Although the idea that the image honestly depicts the extremity contained within the narrative remains, its past status as a contentious design casts its reuse as hyperbolic. In truth, the exploitative potential of the design is increased as its replication on DVD and Blu-ray will see its reach and frequency dramatically amplified. In the first instance, this suggests that the original complaints made to the ASA have gone unheeded, but it also complicates the object's ability to amend and cleanse the film within the frameworks of art cinema.

The image does find a measure of redemption within the home video sector. While it is able to retain the controversial status it held on its previous exposure, the traditional Artificial Eye branding is far clearer on the DVD/Blu-ray cover than it was on the poster (or the advertisement based upon it) and as a result, the sexual content is somewhat diluted by a cultural awareness of the company's previous associations. This can work to reassure the audience that the sexual explicitness of the cover has artistic credence; a process of safeguarding supported by the trace of *Melancholia* and the auteuristic nature of the 'from the director of' phrase. Furthermore, the quotation by Newman is removed, distancing the release from the horror genre and blunting some of its appeal within that demographic. However, its replacement, and the only quotation on the

front of the cover, still relies upon a ballyhoo dare. Accredited to Sukdhev Sanfhu of the *Daily Telegraph*, the quotation states 'this is cinema at its most extreme'. Even though this could once more be read within the framework of truthful representation, as it touts the confrontational qualities of the narrative rather than the pleasurable nature of horror cinema, it also presents the film as an unrivalled test of endurance and stamina.

Ultimately this is supported by the aesthetic design of the back cover, which again uses an image of semi-nudity. This time the image features Gainsbourg's character lying on the floor of the cabin, nude from the waist down. Notably the design used on the front of the box, despite being defended as a fair demonstration of the film's content, was further justified due to its relationship to the fantastical. The ASA claimed the hands in the roots gave the image a dream-like quality which removed it from reality, thus diluting its explicitness (ASA 2009). However, this second image shows no dream-like element. Although Gainsbourg's character is positioned in close proximity to three animals (a doe, a fox and a crow), they do little to remove the image from reality and are certainly not as fantastical as the arms that propagate on the cover. Thus the nudity of the image, despite being semi-obscured by shadow, trades more willingly off the titillation attached to images of undress.

Perhaps more telling is the blurb, which is identical to the one that adorns the Chelsea Films release. As explored earlier, this passage firmly coded the film within the confines of the horror genre through the employment of hyperbolic terms such as 'extreme', 'violence', 'chaos', 'shocking' and 'horror'. This horror rhetoric is further supported by the quotations, which while different to those used on Chelsea Films' version, sell the film in a similar manner. A statement from John Carr of *Sky Movies*, a source which holds little of the 'high' cultural credence associated with Artificial Eye, reads 'nothing can prepare you for the experience of *Antichrist*. Nothing.' The repetition of 'nothing' underscores the extremity of the text and is common within the circus address of exploitation. This is continued within a statement from *Metro*, another populist publication, which simply reads 'Brutal'. The simplicity of these extracts encourages an emotional, kneejerk response – which while not completely unwarranted considering the subject matter of the film only provides a singular view of a multi-layered and complex product. Overall, Artificial Eye does little to authenticate the image of extremity used on the front cover, or the film itself, and akin to Curzon's earlier release, look instead to commodify the film's relationship to horror and the 'lowbrow'.

As noted elsewhere throughout this book, the contemporary home video product is polysemic in nature, and therefore the internal featurettes are

just as important to understanding the product as the external paratexts. What this final exploration will endeavour to evaluate is whether these additional features seek to provide context for the extremity present within both the text and the outwardly facing paratext, or further capitalise on the film's transgressive nature. The nine featurettes – *Behind the Test*; *The Evil of Woman*; *The Visual Style of Antichrist*; *Eden: The Production Design of Antichrist*; *The Three Beggars: The Animals of Antichrist*; *Confessions about Anxiety*; *The Make-up Effects and Props of Antichrist*; *The Sound and Music of Antichrist*; and *Chaos Reigns at the Cannes Film Festival* – are identical across both releases – an aspect that potentially undermines the later release's ability to redeem the narrative. Nonetheless, the sheer number of features aligns both releases with the 'retrosplotation' industry considered throughout Chapter 3, while proving Artificial Eye deemed *Antichrist* worthy of the 'Criterion treatment'. As has been noted at various points throughout this book, copious special features not only help to 'explain' the production process by offering consumers privileged insight, but also show the film to be one of worth and eminence, one that merits additional effort and labour. In essence, the number of additional supplements provided here suggest that Curzon Artificial Eye is looking to create a backdrop in which the film can be rationalised, and perhaps 'saved' from the ghetto it has so often been trapped within.

The first feature, entitled *Behind the Test*, fits comfortably within this rationale, showing von Trier as the typically controlled and artistically progressive director expected within the 'highbrow' cultural space. Throughout the short documentary, the director is shown organising several test sequences for *Antichrist*, therein establishing the text as a product of his artistic vision and innovation. Significantly, he is seen throughout the feature as a calm, professional filmmaker, creating a persona which is much more palatable to a traditional art film demographic than that offered during his Cannes performances. This also typifies the features *The Visual Style of Antichrist* and *The Sound and Music of Antichrist*. In both, von Trier is cast as an originator, an artistically advanced director able to mark a film with his distinct style. Notably, this sense of directorial artistry is further underscored by the content of *Confessions About Anxiety*, which confirms the personal nature of the film by detailing von Trier's much-publicised depression. Coding the film as a personal story, the feature is once more able to underscore von Trier's auteurism, control and vision. Unlike the 'extreme imagination' that was suggested on the Chelsea Films cover, these four features combine to present the text as an artistically innovative, personally motivated piece of 'highbrow' filmmaking.

Yet *Make-up Effects and Props of Antichrist* promotes the film's most controversial aspects and therein supports the controversial images used throughout both external designs. During the feature, Morten Jacobsen and Thomas Foldberg (*Antichrist*'s special-effects coordinators) explain the film's special effects, playing particular attention to how they created Willem Dafoe's fake leg, the still-born deer foetus and the replica labia used during the clitoris-mutilation sequence. While this isolates and repeats the key moments of extremity outside of their narrative context, it also recalls the types of special feature common within the horror film market. Of course, fans of horror enjoy seeing how their favourite moments of blood-letting and gore were created, with certain special effects personnel – for example Tom Savini – becoming stars in their own right. The home video market taps into this directly, providing audiences with the information they desire in the shape of these explanatory documentaries. Common within the remediated exploitation films that have been the focus of this work, they continue to prevail within contemporary examples, including *Hatchet* (Green 2006). A retro-inspired modern horror franchise, *Hatchet*'s DVD contains a bonus feature which shows how the narrative's various sequences of bodily destruction were created. During this feature, entitled *Guts and Gore*, the sequences are discussed and explained by the cast members, supplying the viewer with greater capital by revealing insider information and 'tricks of the trade'. *The Make-up Effects and Props of Antichrist*, although seemingly circulating within a different taste economy, serves a similar purpose, illustrating the paratext's, and by extensions the film's, relationship to modern horror marketing modes.

Undeniably, *Antichrist* is a difficult and challenging text, which offers unique problems in regard to its commercial presentation. Consequently we see the film cast within a suspended space, slipping between taste economies due to a hybrid of marketing styles. Whilst the cover and paratextual featurettes at times recalled the traditions of auteur branding, the objects ultimately heighten the film's potency as a horror text. Through the generic coding of the cover, the linguistic register employed throughout the blurbs, the tone of the selected quotations and certain special features, *Antichrist* is manipulated to fit an economically viable, yet simplistically problematic, commercial image. Indeed the film's position within the art discourse is at times deliberately repressed in order to capitalise on its most 'accessible' attributes and make it attractive to a middling demographic. Artificial Eye's decision to rely heavily on the semiotics of horror cinema is understandable. Genre marketing models allow a distributor to offer an attractive, commercially viable product to a proven

audience sector. In this case, and perhaps the others assessed throughout this book, it also provides a way to present problematic films in a manner which can be handled and understood by the consumer. In other words, the images are simply a shorthand, a known code which is understood by a consumer who has previous knowledge of the film's ingredients. In this way, cover art does not necessarily have an adverse effect on the film's cultural understanding, as it is rationalised by a consumer who is well-versed in the tactics of the industry and takes certain representations with a grain of salt. However, these readings can only occur within those consumers who enter the home video market with a pre-established understanding of the film, as they are able to pick through the levels of meaning and discount symbols that do not match their pre-existing idea of the text. To others, jacket art and blurbs do shape expectations, as they prepare the audience for a certain type of experience. In this sense, their larger ramifications on the film itself, and its persona within the public sphere, must be appropriately interrogated.

The Film4 Extreme Season and *Antichrist*

The Film4 Extreme Season, curated and hosted by Mark Kermode, was screened between 22 and 29 March 2012. The season was composed of eight titles from Europe, Japan and the US, culminating in the uncut television premiere of *Antichrist*. Here it will be used as a platform to evaluate whether the presentation of the film within the home entertainment sector has irreversibly influenced the understanding of the text, while addressing the impact different paratextual materials, such as television programming, can have upon the cultural persona of extreme art cinema. To facilitate this investigation, two different sections of the season's accompanying video packages will be evaluated: the season's general introduction and *Antichrist*'s individual introduction. However, before addressing the season specifically, it proves valuable to assess briefly Film4's part in the cultivation of extreme cinema within Britain. Between 1997 and 2005, the channel featured a separate strand entitled Film4 Extreme, which, as the title infers, focused upon the screening of transgressive cinema. Additionally, up until 2015, the channel sponsored FrightFest, Britain's premier horror film festival, which has exhibited several landmark European horror titles, such as *Switchblade Romance* and *Martyrs* (The Horror Channel is the festival's current sponsor). The channel's involvement, both past and present, with notions of cinematic transgression, lends legitimacy to this season, as they are seen as worthy gatekeepers for this kind of information and content. This of course helps

to validate it within certain demographics, bestowing the season as a whole with more power and influence.

The other films screened as part of the season were *Love Exposure* (Sono 2008), a four-hour long Japanese film about religion, love and voyeurism; *Bug* (Friedkin 2006), an American production directed by William Friedkin; *Naked* (Leigh 1993), the story of a rapist drifter; *Fight Club* (Fincher 1999), a high-budget adaptation of Chuck Palahniuk's novel of the same name; and *Import/Export* and *Dogtooth*, both analysed as part of the historical context mapped in Chapter 6. This scheduling demonstrates a distancing from the francocentric canonisation of extreme cinema which dominated many early critical dialogues and thus supports the transnational approach adopted by this book. More importantly, the season as a whole suggests that a general re-examination of extreme cinema was taking place at this time, as the mass availability of the channel is representative of an increasingly high level of cultural acceptance. Finally, it houses *Antichrist* alongside a series of extreme art narratives rather than horror texts, and thus counters the positioning of the Chelsea Films release and the horrific overtones present throughout the later Artificial Eye edition. Here, films within the season share, trade and borrow cultural capital from one another, allowing *Antichrist* to paratextually distance itself from horror cinema.

A short montage of clips from the films involved in the season plays before the general introduction. Noticeably, the first clear sight of extremity comes from *Love Exposure*, allowing the season to instantly invoke the memory of East Asian extreme cinema, which, as alluded to elsewhere within this book, has become the hegemonic representative of extreme cinema within the UK. The montage uses the image – which features a girl standing in a blood-soaked room – as shorthand, trading off both the nostalgia attached to images of Asian extremity within the British market and their repute within the paracinematic demographic. The season also relies on the (sub-)cultural capital of Kermode, who – as established in Chapter 5 – remains a dualistic character within British film criticism, an amalgamation of academic legitimisation, mainstream authentication and sub-cultural capital. His ability to drift between various roles is significant and mirrors the individuals discussed by Scott Balcerzak in his work on DVD commentaries, where he notes 'the most desirable commentary from a marketing standpoint would thus float between the "academic" and the "fan" to attract the widest categorization of cinephile possible' (2014: 25). In reference to Balcerzak's ideas, Kermode floats between modes of address, authenticating the films within several cultural sites as he positions them within scholarly contexts, mainstream schemas and

paracinematic frameworks simultaneously. Although this could be read as a cynically commercial move, it more meaningfully demonstrates that the channel's conceptualisation of extremity is founded upon a balance of paracinematic rebellion, artistic legitimacy and commercial appeal, paralleling parts of the fluid taxonomy established throughout this book and elsewhere.

This overlapping discourse is present throughout Kermode's performance as the season's curator, as his language and delivery is a combination of academic reasoning and 'low' cultural ballyhoo. Kermode states that the films 'explore strange ideas in radical new forms', adding that the season features 'directors with a unique distinctive style following no rules but their own' (Film4 Extreme Season 2012). This readily sparks the thoughts of innovation and advancement so familiar to the discussions that have come to dominate art film history, validating the use of extremity within the confines of 'high' cultural. However, as is so often the case, legitimisation is offset by the introduction of more hyperbolic language. When talking about Film4's exhibition of *The Evil Dead*, Kermode states 'and of course it was the Film4 extreme team who finally got Sam Raimi's notorious splatter comedy *The Evil Dead* through the censors intact in all its limp lopping gut chomping glory' . The final part of the statement employs the verbal pattern of the circus barker, painting violence as an uncomplicated and pleasurable experience that has to be seen to be believed. This shifting register is continued within the description of *Antichrist*. Kermode describes von Trier's text as 'one of the most controversial movies in years' and an 'art-house horror film' (Film4 Extreme Season 2012). Although the former citation operates within the mores of hyperbole, the latter is harder to assess. Undoubtedly the mention of the horror genre echoes the narrative world promoted throughout the film's home entertainment profile. However, the addition of 'art-house' changes the expectations of the viewer, obscuring a purely generic reading. Throughout the film's tangible identity, horror iconography was rarely substantiated by that of art cinema and thus Kermode usefully highlights the way many extreme films use, invert and revise genre conventions through certain art film frames. Consequently, Kermode's rhetoric – a combination of populist tones and academic reasoning – more appropriately reflects the complicated and fluctuating nature of extreme art cinema.

Antichrist was the climax of the season and thus its very scheduling works to verify its transgressive nature. The film's positioning as the crescendo to a series of extreme texts is immediately justified by Kermode's opening introduction: 'we bring you one of the most controversial, confrontational [. . .] films of recent years, Lars von Trier's headline-grabbing

magnum opus *Antichrist*'. Kermode then proceeds to openly judge the film and its director, stating 'his films divide audiences, people love them and loathe them often at the same time, but they rarely ignore them', before proudly claiming that he personally hated 'the critically lauded *Breaking the Waves*' (Extreme with Mark Kermode 2012). While he notes that he liked both *Dancer in the Dark* and *Dogville*, his subjectivity makes it more difficult to cast the film within the traditions of art cinema, which are innately linked to academic scholarship's values of personal distance and detachment. The dualism continues as Kermode states the film shares a thematic affiliation to *The Evil Dead*, which if taken at face value could be seen as problematic. Yet, it does highlight a deeper lineage between the differing cinematic forms of art and exploitation, which has been at the centre of this study. Importantly, Kermode's stance has been supported in the academic environ, with Grønstad stating that the film can be approached as an art-horror fusion (2011: 198). By extension, it would also be hard to deny the film a place within Joan Hawkins' art-horror template (2000) and David Andrews' cult-art category (2013).

Significantly, Kermode moves on to critique the press's critical fixation with the most shocking aspects of the film, claiming it ignores *Antichrist*'s densities. It is this constant back-and-forth between validation and judgement, 'highbrow' endorsement and 'lowbrow' ballyhoo, that is so interesting. In essence, it works to establish the film – and the category of extreme art cinema as a whole – as an important hybrid of approaches worthy of cultural reconsideration and critical attention. The season provides a flexible perspective of the film which highlights its ability to slip between established categories, and Kermode continually wrestles with the best way to discuss and frame these difficult films. As such, the paratextual identity of *Antichrist* offered on TV seems more aware of the complexities of extreme cinema, more successful in articulating its intricacies and more accommodating of its contradictions. Overall, the season provides a more accurate description than that presented throughout the home entertainment arena and opens up an important dialogue regarding the very nature of the extreme art cinema.

Conclusion

The elasticity of Film4's conceptualisation of extremity reflects the nonconformist nature of the text. As noted, the film combines the iconographies of art and exploitation, creating a shifting and divisive experience as it moves between elements of slow cinema, 'high' cultural allegory, explicit sex and brutal violence. Within this, art and exploitation become

actively interchangeable and fluid, meaning a generic definition is incapable of capturing its indefiniteness. However, regardless of this shifting visual register, the tangible object seems to remain fixed and unmoving. Significantly, unlike many of the extreme art films considered throughout this work, the commercial image of *Antichrist* is not confused, conflicted or particularly multi-pronged. It is, in essence, firmly generic, as it draws on the iconography of the horror genre. This is perhaps clearer within the Chelsea Films release, but certainly Artificial Eye's later remediation does little to quell this reading.

Although it can be suggested that this conceptualisation of the film is fitting, as *Antichrist* deliberately cites several horror archetypes, it remains overtly simplistic. While, as stated, a generic reading of *Antichrist* is not completely alien, neither is an art film conceptualisation. The film is directed by an established auteur, received awards at Cannes (Best Actress for Charlotte Gainsbourg) and features several formal and visual experimentations which complicate normative viewing practices. In fact, the American release, handled by The Criterion Collection, promotes this reading far more openly. The cover, while relying on dark colours, is less overt in its use of horror signifiers and simply shows a pair of legs, the title and von Trier's name. The blurb, rather than depending on the rhetoric of horror, states the film 'is no mere provocation', opting instead to call it 'profoundly effective'. Certainly, neither approach is 'right', however The Criterion Collection's edition has a greatly different effect on the way the film is presented to the audience and the manner in which extremity is framed as an aesthetic and thematic mode. In a more general sense, The Criterion Collection release shows that *Antichrist*'s difficult relationship to the 'highbrow' can be presented in the commercial arena and does not need to be subjected to suppression and concealment. Of course, this in itself is evidence that the paratextual object is both a site of taste conflict and platform for change.

CHAPTER 9

Conclusion

By investigating the tangible commercial object, my work has offered a more comprehensive extreme art continuum then those studies that have been constrained by historical and geographical restrictions. Seeking to reflect on the discoveries of this analysis, this conclusion will address the limitations of the book's Eurocentric focus, isolate several reoccurring trends which typify the paratextual portrayal of extreme art cinema, and explore the changing status of the DVD and Blu-ray market following the rapid advancement of digital streaming.

New Movements in Extreme Art Cinema

As has been discussed throughout this book, extreme art film has often been regarded as 'new', with terms such as 'new brutalism' (Austin 2008: 114) and 'the New French Extremity' (Quandt 2004: 127; Hagman 2007: 37) limiting the ways scholars read both historical and contemporary examples of cinematic transgression. Through the implementation of a more historically mobile pan-European lens, this book has begun to readdress these boundaries. My work has drawn attention to the ways art and exploitation cinema are informed by the hybridisation of 'highbrow' and 'lowbrow' traditions, allowing for the often isolated contemporary extreme works to be more readily assimilated into a longstanding history of cultural crossover. The meeting of these two sites is characterised by communal portrayals of a sexualised or violently deconstructed body and the implementation (either intentionally or accidentally) of experimental visual registers which challenge the audience's passivity. By using this as a backdrop for a paratextual study of the extreme art film object, this work has drawn together a series of under-explored films (at least within a context of extreme cinema) from different historical, national and cultural contexts.

Yet even though this history of exchange and slippage is fundamental to charting the development and sustained relevance of the extreme art

film tradition, the majority of art and exploitation narratives fall outside of this collision point. It was never the intention of this work to suggest that all art films portray extreme violence or sexual content, or equally that all exploitation narratives illustrate self-reflexivity, a counter-aesthetic or intellectual engagement. Indeed, the taboo art films of Pedro Almodóvar, or the visually excessive texts of the Cinéma du Look, lack the visceral extremity of their extreme art cinema peers. Likewise, there are many exploitation narratives that actively oppose the use of challenging narratives and experimental visuals due to the way they impact the product's commerciality. Extreme art film, as I have defined it, is highly selective and only includes the films that exist at specific intersections between 'high' and 'low' culture. In so doing, I remain cautious not to undermine the important divides that exist between the 'high' of art and the 'low' of exploitation. Indeed, it is only through recognising the ways these divisions continue to create rifts within the cinematic continuum that one can isolate the points in which they actually come to meet. It is these convergences that produce films which are shockingly violent and experimentally artistic, ones which appear both at Cannes and on 'sick film lists' and horror movie blogs, texts that both bore and excite, stimulate the mind and the body, and texts which through their hybridity challenge categorisation structures, assault audiences and collapse the boundaries of taste.

Further areas of exploration can be developed. For example, German director Rainer Werner Fassbinder, like so many extreme art filmmakers, centralises the body, both within the cinematic frame and by challenging the viewer's capacity to respond (Chirico 2010: 38–40). This hostile mode of address is clearest within *In a Year of Thirteen Moons* (Fassbinder 1978), as Fassbinder exposes the often hidden process of mechanical animal slaughter, confronting the audience with images they may deliberately choose to ignore. By forcing the audience to consume images of real death, Fassbinder assaults the audience's aptitude for passivity. Interestingly, parts of his filmography have been released by Arrow Academy, the art film strain of Arrow films, and thus sister label to Arrow Video. As with other cases considered throughout this work, this relationship is potentially curious, as it frames the director in a certain manner, possibly furnishing his work with greater paracinematic credence. Another film worthy of consideration is Andrzej Zulawski's *Possession* (1981), which has been underplayed in discussions of extreme art cinema, not least here. *Possession* is perhaps the embodiment of taste slippage: screened at Cannes in 1981 – wherein Isabelle Adjani won Best Actress – and placed on the Director of Public Prosecutions obscene film list during the 1984 video nasty scandal. Belonging to both the 'high' of the festival space and the

'low' of the list, Zulawski's combination of visual experimentation and gory special effects frames *Possession* as a text of some importance to the genealogy of extreme art film.

There are other directors and films – from both 'high' and 'low' cinematic traditions – that are deserving of further exploration within the more expansive and fluid histories outlined within this book. Indeed, similar extensions can be made to the pan-European lens itself. Although I have positioned cinematic extremity as a transnational aesthetic, capable of transcending geographic borders and impacting production practices across disparate production sites, I have limited myself to Europe. In itself, this scope ignored comparable productions happening across a trans-global spectrum, most notably East Asia. East Asian examples of extremity, defined by the distribution practices of Tartan Video (for more detail see Emma Pett's 'Transnational Cult Paratexts: Exploring Audience Readings of Tartan's Asia Extreme Brand' [2017]) resemble many of the European narratives examined in this work, and therefore could lead to important findings in regards to the paratextuality of extreme art cinema. Undoubtedly, cinematic extremity has been and continues to be produced globally and important developments have already occurred across the Americas. For example, the films of Alejandro Jodorowsky – particularly *The Holy Mountain* (1973) – and Carlos Reygades's *Post Tenebras Lux* (2012) can be read as chief examples of Latin American extreme cinema. Moreover, it is hard to ignore the increasing prevalence of extremity within the American 'Independent' scene. Certainly, the term 'Independent' is fraught with issues, but there remains little doubt that a growing number of non-Hollywood American narratives are displaying tendencies that have defined the practices outlined throughout this book. Narratives such as *Shame* (McQueen 2011), *The Killer Inside Me* (Winterbottom 2010), *Only God Forgives* (Winding Refn 2013) and *Killer Joe* (Friedkin 2011), along with earlier releases such as *Happiness* (Solondz 1998), *Crash* (Cronenberg 1996) and *Secretary* (Shainberg 2002), share the key aesthetic and thematic traits of their European counterparts. For example, *Shame* shows several scenes of de-eroticised sex (Gilbey 2012: 52), while within *The Killer Inside Me*, Casey Affleck's Lou Ford beats his lovers in a manner comparable to the realist, graphic extremity that underpinned Gaspar Noé's *Irreversible* (McGill 2010: 40). These sequences fuse with narratives that tackle issues such as rape, domestic abuse and paedophilia, and come to represent an ever more visible sub-category of a globally orientated extreme continuum.

Unquestionably, these American texts are vital to understanding the future of extreme film, and particularly its paratextuality. *Shame*, *The Killer*

Inside Me and *Only God Forgives* all feature 'celebrity' actors (McGill 2010: 40–2), whose careers in the mainstream have shaped their public personas. For instance, the cast of *The Killer Inside Me* includes the aforementioned Affleck alongside Jessica Alba and Kate Hudson, and thus offers a very different star image to the likes of *Anatomy of Hell* and Virginie Despentes and Coralie Trinh Thi's *Baise Moi* – which featured pornographic actors and actresses in the lead roles. *Shame*'s Michael Fassbender (who plays sex addict Brandon) also fits the 'celebrity' model, as he starred in American blockbusters such as *300* (Synder 2006) and *X-men: First Class* (Vaughn 2011) prior to starring in McQueen's film, while Ryan Gosling found fame in *The Notebook* (Cassavetes 2004) before taking the lead role in *Only God Forgives*. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the cover art of all three releases focuses on the face of their respective 'celebrity' actors and actresses. This has ramifications for the ways audiences engage, comprehend and consume contemporary forms of filmic extremity, as the 'celebrity' status of the performers stabilise and sanitise the transgressive nature of the narratives. Of course, the star persona of these individuals has the potential to change the meaning of the film in the same manner as the paratextual symbols discussed thus far. However, rather than make the film seem complex, 'highbrow', inaccessible, valid, violent, offensive, erotic, scandalous or shocking, these paratextual images, drenched in mainstream acceptance, make extremity safe, palatable and orthodox. Even though further work must be undertaken in order to more thoroughly examine the impact of these changes, it is clear that when presented through the filter of star culture, cinematic extremity becomes loaded with additional layers of meaning which vastly alter its cultural persona.

There are issues with proposing a trans-global extreme art aesthetic. Increasing the boundaries of the category could potentially create unworkable conditions of study, as it would introduce an insurmountable number of variables. For example, it would dramatically cut across geographic borders, potentially negating important social–cultural differences and distinctions. Yet these same intersections are continually blurred throughout the production, exhibition and consumption stages of film culture, while geographic definitions, such as European extreme cinema, increasingly fail to truly reflect the contemporary filmic landscape. Indeed, narratives such as *Trouble Every Day*, *Twentynine Palms* and *Nymphomaniac Vol. I*, and *Vol. II* use English-speaking actors and casts from a range of nations, yet have often been defined as European modes of extreme art cinema, not least within this work. Thus, a trans-global approach embodies the consumption habits of modern consumers, whereby film-streaming websites collapse national boundaries in a hope of becoming more attractive to a

progressively globalised world economy. Moreover, the grouping would not look to suggest that these films were all the same, but rather propose that they are drawing from a shared tradition wherein extremity operates as a form of artistic address.

Extreme Art Paratexts: Reoccurring Narrative Images

The paratextual methodology that underpinned this work was motivated by the critical tendency to draw superficial relationships between the transgressive nature of extreme art films and the economic imperatives that define modern cinema. In response, this book has presented primary research and analysis into how DVD and Blu-ray artefacts manage the identities of these slippery narratives and the extent to which transgressive textual materials are turned into marketable advertisements. During these closing stages, I want to return to some of the main commonalities present throughout the case studies. By reflecting on these findings, I will be able to ascertain the frequency with which internal extremity is externalised and made the focus of the films' commercial cycle. Moreover, I can see whether there are reoccurring patterns, or whether each film's paratextual representation needs to be considered on a case-by-case basis. In order to facilitate this, two key areas within the objects' characterisation – the type of cover art used and the tone of the written passages – will be briefly revisited.

In regard to the artwork used, all bar *Weekend* became typified by a visual representation of extremity. The centralisation of sex, in regard to *Salò, Or the 120 Days of Sodom*, *Isla the Wicked Warden* and *Antichrist*; or violence, in the cases of *Cannibal Holocaust*, *Antichrist*, *Funny Games* and the 'Michael Haneke Trilogy', defined the public identity, and therefore commerciality, of these films. Moreover, many of the films discussed throughout Chapters 3 and 6, including the Luis Buñuel box set, *Romance* and *Anatomy of Hell* followed similar design patterns. Ultimately, the commonality in which taboo and transgressive images are used upon the DVD jackets of extreme art films suggests that extremity serves a commercial purpose when these films enter the marketplace. Although it would be more difficult to claim that the directors of extreme art films knowingly exploit this trend in their textual application of extremity – in other words, it is hard to know whether directors place extremity within their films because they have seen how successful other films have been in capitalising on it – the extent to which extreme imagery is used is hard to ignore.

To revisit the discussions held in Chapter 8, this could all come down to distributors wanting to offer a truthful reflection of their narrative. In

this sense, honesty is the motivating factor rather than money or commercial stability. Yet as stated, this reading is reliant on the objects only being handled, approached and consumed by an audience already aware of certain factors – such as the legacy of the director, the trace of the distributor handling it, the cultural 'worth' of the text itself, its potential counter-cultural ethos, or the details of its allegorical messages. Equally, it could be because these films feature so much extreme material, making it near impossible to find a visual representation that avoids themes of violence of sexual transgression. It could also be down to needing to create a definable product, which can be handled and understood by the consumer. As stated throughout this work, these films are complex and challenging, and therefore difficult to market. As such, the use of images of sex, violence and bloodshed simply allow the product to trade off the familiarity of the audience, and offer an industrially recognised way to present difficult material. Nonetheless, it is clear that in certain instances distributors shrewdly select the most extreme image possible, seemingly in order to capitalise on their proven economic desirability. Seen in the releases of *Salò, Or the 120 Days of Sodom*, *Antichrist* and the 'Michael Haneke Trilogy', extremity becomes amplified and exaggerated on the paratext. This lends further credence to the notion that extreme textual material is a valuable asset to the paratextual image maker, and something that can be quickly turned into a sellable commodity.

A less stringent concentration on transgression was offered by the products' various written passages. Whilst verbal hyperbole was used to mark the texts as controversial, exciting or 'unseen', the phrasing was often diluted by a promotion of traditional art cinema elements. Ballyhoo techniques were balanced against auteuristic praise, recognition of festival status, external critical legitimisation or a promotion of national capital. This hybridity, whereby textual passages acted as a counterpoint to the visual extremities of the cover art and thumbnail stills, is fundamental to understanding the commodification of extremity. By balancing hyperbole and prestige, many extreme art film artefacts cleanse and validate the extremity of their cover art, informing a potential art-house crowd that the transgressions of the text are not gratuitous, rather culturally significant. Nonetheless, the subtlety of this balance allows the paratextual items to attract a dual demographic, as the textual elements are not powerful enough to completely dilute the sensationalism of the visual transgression. This challenges the widespread understanding that extremity functions as a gimmick, as it is clear that extreme art films are not merely presented as a simple spectacle of extremity. Instead, it is a complex process whereby the home video object becomes a site on which the barriers between 'high'

and 'low' culture are eroded. 'Lowbrow' images of sex and violence are off-set against 'highbrow' signifiers of value, while ballyhoo promises are countered by auteurist brands and critical praise. Therefore rather than just becoming a commercial signifier, extremity's presence on the DVD/Blu-ray artefact is part of a wider practice of cultural straddling, wherein it is framed and reframed as the consumer moves between the different sections of the paratextual object.

The investigation of exploitation cinema exposed equally significant findings. Through the in-depth exploration of both *Cannibal Holocaust* and *Ilsa, the Wicked Warden*, and the general overview provided in Chapter 3, it became apparent that despite foregrounding the conventions of hyperbole, these commercial productions borrow and adopt artistic dressings. Contemporising the histories of slippage outlined by the likes of Joan Hawkins (2000), Mark Betz (2003) and Kevin Heffernan (2004), these findings suggested that extremity itself is not as powerful a commercial draw as it is often claimed to be. Throughout my book, films that have previously been defined by their relationship to the extreme are seen to forego these readings in favour of auteur branding, academic contextualisation and historic authenticity. Consequently, contemporary consumption is marked by a constant reassessment of 'high' and 'low' taste, as both the industry and audiences breach taste barriers at will.

Indeed, the marketing approach used within the contemporary climate is part of a longstanding tradition whereby hard-to-define films are dressed in a mixture of traditions cherry-picked from both 'high' and 'low' cultural customs. To revisit Betz's work on cultural triangulation (2013), it became clear that Artificial Eye's *Weekend* DVD placed the brand of Godard and the critical legitimisation of the narrative at the triangle's apex. In doing so, the product was able to speak directly to an art-house audience familiar with Godard, his films and cultural status. However, this was supplemented by certain instances of hyperbolic language which hinted at the extremity of the narrative. Therefore, as the object presented itself to the 'highbrow', it tentatively courted the 'lowbrow', showing itself to be an auteurist product with transgressive aspects. Conversely, both the Chelsea Films and Artificial Eye versions of *Antichrist*, a narrative which shares the same genealogy as Godard's film and is certainly a development of the extreme art film form, saw a suppression of its artistic heritage and a promotion of its extreme content. Herein, exploitation traits inhabited the apex of the cultural triangle, however the presence of certain distributor branding (in the case of the Artificial Eye release) and von Trier's authorial imprinting saw part of the advertised extremity tempered by the presence of legitimised signifiers. Due to the prominence of this malleable cultural

triangle, it is apparent that despite certain reoccurring patterns, the narrative images affixed to extreme art products adapt and transform depending on the film, the ambitions of the distributor and the pre-circulating cultural history of the narrative ingredients. Consequently, taste distinctions in the modern era – perhaps due to the ever-increasing availability of information and the changing status of cinematic extremity – can be read as more porous than ever, simplifying the process of cultural borrowing yet simultaneously complicating the ability to pinpoint the exact role extremity performs in the market.

The Changing Environs of Home Viewing

As noted in Chapter 2, the growth of film streaming websites such as Netflix and Amazon Prime Instant have impacted the popularity of tangible viewing formats, as consumers move from ownership to access (Given 2015: 26). This shift – demonstrated in one sense with the closure of bricks-and-mortar rental chain Blockbuster – is vastly changing the way audiences interrelate with paratextual artefacts. Jock Given notes that fewer people in the UK owned physical media in 2014 than in 2005 (2015: 28), while Winston Wheeler Dixon argues that these internet-based platforms have now become the dominant mode of visual delivery (2013: 2). Dixon's ideas are supported by statistical information found within the *Financial Times*, which reported that in January 2014 Netflix's 44 million subscribers were responsible for around 30% of American downstream traffic during peak periods (Garrahan 2014). Three years later, the company's global expansions saw these subscription numbers rise to 93.8 million (Kinahan 2017). It is these figures which encourage the likes of Dixon to claim the DVD now exists as a niche product within the field it once dominated (2013: 1–3).

Yet Given warns against overstressing the relevance of these sweeping statements, claiming they ignore the extent to which ownership is a deeply embedded cultural practice driven by a range of social, cultural and personal factors (2015: 27). While in the Introduction I was careful not to discount the casual consumer, and note that an uneven concentration on fans and collectors ignores large consumption sites within the industry, the dawning of the digital age will perhaps see tangible collections return to the domain of the cinephile. Due to their committed, stable and relatively predictable consumption practices, it would be fair to suggest that the physical market, while losing ground to digital spaces in terms of 'mass' consumption, will continue to rely on the 'social work' objects carry out within these particular communities and the additional meanings they

can come to acquire. Indeed, as Ian Woodward suggests, objects stand for particular features of a person and assist the performance of an identity (2007: 137). As such, DVD/Blu-ray, as a single object or extended collection, becomes a vessel through which a person can present their 'self' to an outsider. The types of film owned, the way they are arranged and the place they inhabit within the domestic space tells you much about the owner. The importance of the 'work' these objects do does not simply stop with the arrival of digital streaming. In many ways, the fact that these lived experiences are yet to be replicated within the digital space means they remain an important part of the tangible product's aura. Of course, owners can choose to organise their digital archives in certain ways, but in the most part individual agency is surpassed by remotely controlled algorithms or restrictions within the platform itself.

Certainly, objects do more than inform identity. They can also allow for certain memories to return and take on new meaning. Paul Martin argues that collecting is often about reverting to the safety of the past (1999: 32) and unquestionably we can see the important role nostalgia has played in the re-emergence of the vinyl record market. In this sense, the continued relevance of the filmic object to certain filmic communities is easy to predict. In many ways, it can be suggested that the dawning of the digital era allows these objects to take on even greater significance within these dedicated consumption sites. As Jean Baudrillard claims in *The System of Collecting* (1994), an object that has given up its function becomes more open to interpretation by the subject (1994: 7–8), and thus potentially more desirable. Therefore, if streaming marginalises the disc to the extent certain scholars have suggested, we can assume that the object's lack of functionality could actually increase its collectability. In fact, the items may become rarer as they become further removed from 'mass' culture – harder to 'hunt' and 'capture'. Within this protracted movement, the tangible home video artefact does not lose its relevance, or its influence over the primary text. Rather it shifts, transforms and brings forth new meanings to different audience sectors.

As this book has shown, collectors are currently enjoying the bounties of a flourishing sell-through market, as certain films continue to 'live on' and thrive upon tangible mediums. There is of course little doubt that the industry is aware that certain audiences will continue to want special editions, with their supplementary features, extra sleeves and collectable art cards. However, Paul Benzon suggests this concentration on paratexts is a defensive move on the part of the film industry, claiming 'the DVD seems to protest too much its own impending obsolescence, reflecting anxieties about its position within both the market economy and media history more

broadly' (2013: 93). Indeed, we need to look no further than the strategies of many contemporary exploitation and art film distributors for evidence of these 'protests'. Companies such as Arrow Video, Eureka! Masters of Cinema and The Criterion Collection show no signs of easing their tangible releases and continue to produce lavish objects with bespoke features. Mark Bernard goes slightly further than Benzon, insisting that Netflix has made these extra materials *passé* for their customers (2015: 193). Upon these digital platforms, consumption is streamlined and ease of access is favoured over content and extras. What must be considered therefore is what this means for the type of study I have conducted throughout this work. With the eventual demise of the tangible product and its focus on paratextual material on the horizon, does this mark the end for paratextual studies such as this?

The simple answer is no. Rather, the field must recalibrate, and prepare for an as yet undefined digital future. In upcoming studies, the focus will shift from additional documentaries, sleeve designs and bespoke packaging to 'recommended for you' lists, scrolling menus and algorithmic genres. In this sense, the streaming platform itself is a paratextual threshold worthy of further consideration. As the work of Maria Lindgren Leavenworth discusses, the websites themselves act as paratextual contexts (2015: 46), with Ellen McCracken insisting that aspects such as homepages and menus expand upon Gérard Genette's original idea (2013: 113). While certainly more open to change and fluctuation than traditional, tangible paratexts, the very construction of a site such as Netflix opens up a succession of research prospects for the paratextual theorist: a series of scrolling menus; a multitude of genres and sub-genres (Daniel Smith-Rowsey states there are nineteen umbrella genres and four hundred subcategories [2016: 66], while Alexis Madrigal [2014] and Emily Lawrence [2015] claim there are 76,897 possible 'altgenres'); 'more like this' lists; images, tags, blurbs, logos, algorithms and adverts; moving cover art; new rating systems; trailers; and opportunities to share viewing habits across social networking sites. Rather than the end, this is the beginning of a new age of paratextual study, where the lines between internal and external, text and paratext, are becoming further blurred.

Yet, the change does not have to be as dramatic as that. Netflix's content privileges that which has found previous distribution on DVD (Smith-Rowsey 2016: 69). As a result, the platform's homescreen is characterised by a scrollable grid of cover art, in essence miniature jacket sleeves – a simulacra of the traditional customs carried on from VHS. These images retain, in most cases, the same shape and proportions as traditional tangible covers, as well as key marketing ingredients such as

cast information, titles, bespoke typographies and so on. While slightly simplified and stripped back, these 'jackets' show how easily even the most traditional methodologies of paratextual research can be adapted during considerations of these new paratextual planes. Moreover, on a site like Netflix, each thumbnail image is coupled with a brief blurb, which describes the feature and provides hyperlinked cast information (allowing users to click on a director or actor/actress and see which of their other works are also on the platform). These images, and their associated blurbs, are then categorised into genres and coupled with comparable narratives, thus replicating the categorisation system used throughout bricks-and-mortar stores and websites such as Amazon.

Of course, as I have hinted towards elsewhere within this work, the digital sphere is more subject to change than the tangible market discussed throughout this work. This state of flux can cause issues, as digital artefacts may be deleted, altered or changed. However, as Leavenworth notes, any deletions or modifications impact the text and paratext equally (2015: 57). In the physical environment, discs can be lost; posters and art cards misplaced; boxes and sleeves damaged; additional booklets discarded; and so on. Within the digital space, the paratext is afforded an inseparable relationship to the primary text. If the film is removed from the platform, so is the paratext. If the film is placed in a new genre, or promoted in a different area of the site, the paratext follows. Moreover, there are traits throughout these streaming websites that suggest audiences are not quite ready to relinquish the principles of ownership. For example, 'likes', 'shares' and 'things I am watching' lists expose the ways audiences still seek to advertise their tastes through showcasing their viewing habits. In essence, these features become digital shelves, displaying artefacts that while not owned, are still in some way possessed by and connected to the consumer.

Therefore, paratextual theory is entering a new era. Theorists can look at the tangible market and its use of bespoke packaging, exclusive cover art, additional booklets or extra features. Similarly, they can explore the new meanings these objects take on in this quickly changing culture, charting significant shifts in style, consumption rates or collecting habits. Or they can look to the digital space, investigating the streaming platform itself and the many new paratextual zones it introduces; or the manner in which this new digital landscape recycles the modes of addresses used throughout the 'tangible era'. However, the lack of special features, and the removal of 'Making Of' featurettes, commentaries, additional documentaries, introductions, booklets, slip-cases, and on-disc interviews, is significant. Replaced by what Bernard describes as the 'convenience of streaming'

(2015: 193), the streamlined nature of delivery could potentially have significant ramifications on the cultural understanding of extreme art cinema. As has been highlighted throughout this work, many of these additional items provided an academic anchoring to the transgressions seen in the main feature, or externally facing paratext. Seen particularly within the release of *Salò, Or the 120 Days of Sodom* and *Cannibal Holocaust*, these supplemental materials enabled a greater comprehension of the primary artefact, and helped the consumer allegorise the extremity of the images. There is little doubt that these features changed the way extremity was thought about, and their removal from the digital space suggests extreme art cinema may lack the legitimising contexts so often the focus of my work.

Although extremity is making greater in-roads into the mainstream, extreme art cinema – and the art and exploitation histories it develops from – remains marginalised. Regardless of whether the film is consumed within a 'highbrow' or 'lowbrow' community – or one that combines or crosses over both – these reception cultures are defined by their exclusive nature, engaged viewing processes and rejection of mainstream aesthetics. With the shift to the digital platform, the inherent exclusivity of extremity raises interesting questions regarding the future of extreme cinema. Will the digital platform cater for these peripheral viewing cultures? Will these films lose their sense of exclusivity – and therefore part of their attraction – if they migrate to this new world? There are several differing opinions on how the newly forming digital platforms will impact the presentation and consumption of non-mainstream filmic material. Dixon argues that digitalisation will result in further marginalisation of the niche cinematic cultures, stating that classic narratives, including canonical art films, will cease to exist, while smaller titles do not hold the popularity needed to justify digitalisation (2013: 5–6). If Dixon's view is adopted, the digitalisation of filmic content sounds the death knell for extreme art cinema. Within this version of events, extreme art film will remain on the ageing tangible format, unable find an audience that could potentially become increasingly reliant on the convenience provided by streaming. However, others counter this argument and claim that film streaming actually provides greater opportunities for marginal filmic cultures. Dina Iordanova states the newly digitised world actually increases access to art cinema. She claims 'previously obscure rarities are now within easy reach; unseen treasures of the celluloid era and distant images rooted in the cultures of faraway lands are only a click away' (Iordanova 2013: 46). She further maintains that this wealth of material is getting richer by the day, alluding to the abundance of niche filmic material present across both paid

and free (such as YouTube and Dailymotion) streaming platforms (2013: 46). Moreover, Iordanova directly opposes Dixon by declaring that the DVD is a more investment-orientated enterprise and therefore presents more limitations than streaming (2013: 47), ultimately suggesting that niche material will blossom on the newer format.

Evidence to support these claims can be found on the UK's version of Netflix. Whilst subject to change, the platform's 'Art-house Films' genre currently houses parts of Artificial Eye's distribution catalogue, including *Son of Saul* (Nemes 2015). In the past, the platform's UK version has offered the likes of *Bicycle Thieves* (De Sica 1948), *Cinema Paradiso*, *Melancholia* and *Amour*. Perhaps more telling is the existence of streaming platforms such as the aforementioned BFI Player; MUBI – who offer a new, 'expertly selected' film each day of the month; and the American FilmStruck – who retain exclusive access to The Criterion Collection, a distributor who remains preserved within the 'highbrow' of art cinema. The site itself testifies to this status, claiming the Criterion Collection section offers 'the world's most important classic and contemporary films' (FilmStruck 2017). Furthermore, the success of extreme art cinema on DVD suggests it will continue to flourish within the digitised world. Again, evidence of this is present on UK Netflix, with Asian extreme film *Battle Royale* and Gaspar Noé's sexually explicit extreme art film *Love* (Noé 2015) currently on the platform. Viewers of the latter, which is placed in the 'Cult Films' and 'Romantic Films' genres, may see *Fifty Shades of Grey* (Taylor-Johnson 2015) suggested as a 'more like this' recommendation. Herein, Netflix's algorithmic groupings blur and distort the barriers of taste; an issue certainly worthy of further study in future explorations of extreme art films' paratextuality.

Unsurprisingly, similar trends can be found within the exploitation realm – which, as has been noted, has always operated as an inherently commercial business. Amanda Hess's exploration of modern-day exploitation studio The Asylum neatly uncovers how the economic imperatives of the industry are changing in the digital era, noting that the 'mockbuster' narratives made by the studio – including the likes of *Sharknado* (Ferrante 2013), *Transmophers* (Scott 2007) and *Pirates of Treasure Island* (Scott 2006) – are produced at the behest of streaming websites (2013: 21). This indicates that the low-budget industry will thrive within an increasingly digital world wherein content, and a perceived sense of new material, is essential to both the viewing experience and success of the format (Hess 2013: 22). Predictably, there are also streaming services devoted to exploitation films. For example, a large portion of Arrow Video's catalogue is housed on Shudder. Dividing their catalogue into 'Collections', Shudder

boast a 'Cult Masters: Eurohorror' sub-group, as well as a 'Giallo!' collection and a 'Bava-thon' section dedicated to art-horror director Mario Bava. Significantly, Shudder use original posters to advertise their different products, showcasing the sustained importance of nostalgia, history and authenticity within the commercialisation of European horror. Shudder, and its categories, prove once again that marginal film content will remain significant in the digital age, while creating new avenues of paratextual contemplation.

Thus the dawning of a new digital culture does not mean the end of the object, paratextual studies or extreme cinema. Instead, it suggests that these issues will enter a new stage of their cultural development and find new applications both in the minds of producers and of consumers. Naturally, even as we move through these changes, the intimate relationship shared between filmic texts and paratexts will remain. This bond between inner and outer material shapes the way cinema is read and consumed, as external forces have the ability to alter expectations, foster certain experiences and encourage particular readings. In regard to the discussion of extreme art film and its proposed gimmickry, the relationship is of even greater importance. Whilst it is clear that the transgressions contained within the narratives become commodified upon the various paratextual items, the broader context illuminates several underexplored issues. In the first instance, art cinema's employment and subsequent promotion of extremity belongs to a longstanding tradition that has defined audience engagement with the 'highbrow' product since the early 1960s. Often overlooked in studies of extreme art cinema, this history suggests that the commodification of extremity is not a result of the current economic circumstance, but in fact an enduring mode of representation. Interestingly, a different process is occurring in the 'lowbrow'. Exploitation distributors are becoming increasingly reliant on the marketing strategies of art cinema, particularly in their adoption of auteurism and the academic voice. Ultimately this complicates how we measure the commercial power of extremity. Clearly it is no longer the most desirable marketing signifier for the 'lowbrow', and its application within the 'highbrow' space is inconsistent and unpredictable. In essence, the commercial functionality of the 'extreme gimmick' is too open to change to appropriately measure. It depends on the ambitions of the distributor, the type of film being released, the pre-existing knowledge of the consumer, the demographic it is pushed towards, and the individual tastes of that audience. However, what is clear is that this is not simply an issue of extremity equalling visibility and money. Extremity – as a commercial symbol that advertises the nature of the text – is at times suppressed, highlighted, framed by

academic contexts, hyperbolically amplified, forgotten about, allegorised, revived, and exploited. If nothing else, its appearance in the paratextual realm is as complex, challenging and hard to define as it is in the texts themselves.

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