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Introduction: 42nd Street, and Beyond

Austin Fisher and Johnny Walker

In the heart of little old New York,

You'll find a thoroughfare.

It's the part of little old New York

That runs into Times Square.

—Title song, *42nd Street* (1933)

Up until the release of Lloyd Bacon's musical *42nd Street* in 1933, the movie's namesake had, for international audiences who had heard of it at all, been just that: one "part" of New York City. The film's title song, however, told of something much more colorful: an avenue where one could "hear the beat of dancing feet," find "sexy ladies ... who are indiscreet," and where "the underworld ... meet the elite." It was arguably here, within the confines of a Warner Brothers musical, where the first seeds of 42nd Street's global film mythology were sewn.

The pervasive image of 42nd Street as a hub of sensational thrills, vice and excess, is from where the focus of this book—"grindhouse cinema"—stemmed. It is, arguably, an image that has remained unchanged in the mind's eye of many exploitation

film fans and academics alike. Whether in the pages of contemporaneous fanzines or in more recent scholarly works, it is often recounted how, should one have walked down this street between the 1960s and the 1980s, one would have undergone a kaleidoscopic encounter with an array of disparate “exploitation” films from all over the world that were being offered cheaply to urbanites by a swathe of vibrant “grind house”¹ theatres. Nineteen-sixty-four would see the publication of perhaps the most famous grind house chronicle of all, Bill Landis’s since-lionized journal *Sleazoid Express*, which was committed to dissecting, theatre-by-theatre, the auditoria that exposed cinema-going audiences to sights they had hitherto never experienced: from hardcore roughies at the Globe to splatter films at the Rialto and mondo films at the Times Square.²

At its most basic level, this is a book about such films, their exhibition contexts, and the grindhouse mythology that—rightly or wrongly—has underwritten their legacy. It is a book about exploitation movies which, in most other contexts, would be scrutinized on the grounds that they are weird, zany and transgressive examples of globally-celebrated “paracinema,”³ that have been said to contravene industry movements and types and which have made “it their business to challenge” the

¹ For the sake of consistency, it is our practice throughout this volume to use the compound word “grindhouse” as an adjective to describe the culturally-constituted concept under investigation, but to use the separate words “grind house” as nouns when referring to the physical movie theatres that exhibited such films.

² Bill Landis and Michelle Clifford, *Sleazoid Express: A Mind-Twisting Tour Through the Grindhouse Cinema of Times Square* (New York: Fireside, 2002).

³ Jeffrey Sconce, “‘Trashing’ the Academy: Taste, Excess, and an Emerging Politics of Cinematic Style,” *Screen* 36:4 (1995): 371-393.

“routines” one might typically associate with mainstream film production and distribution.⁴ It has been commonplace for exploitation films—which span a broad range of genres, production contexts and historical periods—to be examined under the rubric of “cult,” to the extent that, as Ernest Mathijs and Jamie Sexton note, one “may form the impression that cult cinema is actually synonymous with exploitation cinema.”⁵ Yet, as the empirical work of Eric Schaefer, Kevin Heffernan, Richard Nowell, Peter Stanfield, and others, attest, there is more to exploitation cinema than cult criticism alone can account for.⁶ One might argue further that, while a lot of scholarship has sought to look beyond “cult,” it has nevertheless been “paracinema”—the ironic, transgressive “reading protocol” that Jeffrey Sconce identified as emerging from trash and cult film fan communities⁷—that has guided much academic study of exploitation

⁴ Ernest Mathijs and Xavier Mendik, “Cult Case Studies: Introduction,” in *The Cult Film Reader*, eds Ernest Mathijs and Xavier Mendik (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2007), 163.

⁵ Ernest Mathijs and Jamie Sexton, *Cult Cinema* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 145.

⁶ See, e.g., Eric Schaefer, *“Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!”: A History of Exploitation Films, 1919-1959* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999) as well as *Sex Scene: Media and the Sexual Revolution*, ed. Eric Schaefer (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2015); Kevin Heffernan, *Ghouls, Gimmicks, and Gold: Horror Films and the American Movie Business, 1953-1968* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007); Richard Nowell, *Blood Money: A History of the First Teen Slasher Cycle* (New York: Continuum, 2011); and Peter Stanfield, *The Cool and the Crazy: Pop Fifties Cinema* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015).

⁷ Sconce, “Trashing the Academy.”

cinema. As David Church has argued in his important recent book, *Grindhouse Nostalgia: Memory, Home Video and Exploitation Film Fandom*, such an approach invites the erroneous impression that “paracinema” refers, not to a mode of consumption, but to a group of films.⁸

Of course, the kinds of films our contributors discuss in this volume—which include, among others, US biker movies, Danish hardcore sex films and blaxploitation westerns—have either been ignored by mainstream discourse or dismissed on account of their unsavoury content and “trashy” production values, and, as a result, some are now celebrated in cult film circles for these very reasons. However, while there may be political advantages to championing exploitation cinema’s implicit differences to the mainstream, there is also a risk in assuming that *all* exploitation films are somehow imbued with such anti-mainstream, “cult,” status. To consider exploitation movies solely on the grounds of their alleged transgressions, or because they are curious cult oddities, in many cases risks undermining the historical and industrial contexts that birthed these films in the first place, or lays claims to cult recognition that, frankly, isn’t there. Not all of the exploitation films from the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s were made “beyond” the mainstream. In fact, many were made *because of* the mainstream, or *as part of* profitable cycles of films that were proving popular with theatre-going audiences. By the same token, there are many exploitation films (some of which are

⁸ David Church, *Grindhouse Nostalgia: Memory, Home Video and Exploitation Film Fandom* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 14.

examined in this volume) that have yet to receive what could be described as “cult” recognition of any sort.⁹

It is not our intention to disavow the usefulness of any such critical models; indeed, Alexandra Heller-Nicholas ably blends a “paracinematic” framing with a historically grounded study (of Australian exploitation cinema) in these very pages. Rather, our aim is to avoid the trap of uncritically buying into what Church summarizes as a “thoroughly romantic mythology of excess, hedonism and transgression,”¹⁰ which can so easily creep into academic work on exploitation films.

The mystique of the American grind house in the wake of the generic interplay of Quentin Tarantino and Robert Rodriguez has unquestionably contributed to this “romantic mythology.” Most overtly, their co-directed anthology, *Grindhouse* (2007), sought to embellish the romantic pastness of exploitation cinema-going, as Church has also recognized, by using the “digitally simulated appearance of celluloid print damage,” to recapture a sense of authenticity that is allegedly lost when old exploitation

⁹ The blaxploitation westerns discussed here by Austin Fisher are cases in point of films that appear to have been overlooked in cult discourse. As Johannes Ferle argues, Quentin Tarantino’s claims of originality for *Django Unchained* (2012), which is clearly indebted to these earlier films, are particularly surprising, given the director’s famed penchant for “cult” intertextuality (Johannes Ferle, ““And I would call it “A Southern””: Renewing / Obscuring the Blaxploitation Western,” *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies* 16:3 (2015): 295-298).

¹⁰ David Church, *Grindhouse Nostalgia*, 14.

films are “cleaned up” for “remastered DVDs.”¹¹ Celebrating the scuzzy imperfections of grindhouse cinema’s past constitutes one of several ways in which these filmmakers seek to “differentiate themselves ... from the cultural ‘mainstream’.”¹² It should come as no surprise that filmmakers whose careers have been largely predicated upon purposeful nostalgia for long-gone exploitation cycles should invest in such exercises. What is telling, and indicative of prevailing trends, is how scholarship has tended to coalesce around these very same parameters when discussing exploitation cinema. Across recent academic work, we find a similar kind of irreverence for the “mainstream”: one that is used less to challenge grindhouse mythology, than to prop it up.

For example, in his foreword to John Cline and Robert G. Weiner’s academic collection *From the Arthouse to the Grindhouse*, Chris Gore claims that:

Grindhouse films are never safe. They have the power to alter your perspective by exposing life’s brutal truths: the cruel consequences of a life of crime; merciless monstrosities terrorizing innocents in ways that will haunt your dreams and your nightmares; bizarre and strangely erotic fetishes that you’d never heard of and perhaps wish you’d never seen. You’ll even be exposed to the documentation of real death in horrific forms.¹³

¹¹ Ibid., 104.

¹² Ibid., 105. Glenn Ward’s contribution to this volume explores this issue further.

¹³ Chris Gore, “Foreword: Grinding Out a New Form of Entertainment,” in *From the Arthouse to the Grindhouse: Highbrow and Lowbrow Transgression in Cinema’s First Century*, eds John Cline and Robert G. Weiner (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2010), ix.

While Gore is not an academic, but rather the editor of the cult magazine *Film Threat*, his words here serve a clear scholarly purpose. A “foreword,” as a framing device, acts as a means of providing weight to (or perhaps “validating”) a book’s content, by harnessing the words of an authority: in this case, an expert on exploitation films. It is therefore notable that there is in Gore’s words a marked lack of specificity and a hyperbolic prose style when discussing “grindhouse films.” Far from clarifying the cultural significance of such historical practices of cinematic exhibition and consumption, his words serve further to obfuscate them, perpetuating the kind of idealized mythos that continues to enshroud the study of exploitation cinema. “Grindhouse films,” it would appear, do not need to be defined or contextualized, for it is assumed a reader will know what they are.

Consider also this quotation from the opening page of Ian Olney’s recent monograph *Euro Horror: Classic European Horror Cinema in Contemporary American Culture*, which explores the cult following of “golden age” European horror films, that has been “garnered since the late 1990s,” in the United States:

Between the mid-1950s and the mid-1980s, these Euro horror movies emerged from countries like Italy, Spain, and France in astonishing numbers and were shown in the United States at rural drive-ins and at urban grindhouse theaters of the sort that once filled Times Square in New York City. Grier, sexier, and just plain stranger than most British and American horror films of the time, they were embraced by hardcore genre fans and denounced by critics as the worst kind of cinematic trash.¹⁴

¹⁴ Ian Olney, *Euro Horror: Classic European Horror Cinema in Contemporary American Culture* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013), xi.

While Olney writes with more candour than Gore, he uses similar rhetorical devices to identify exploitation cinema's alleged capacity to transgress and destabilize cinematic norms. Euro horror, thus, is a "stranger" strand of horror. Such films, like the kinds Gore alludes to, are seen to be more extreme ("gorier, sexier") than other types of horror films, and, despite the fact that they were produced in "astonishing" numbers, were apparently only truly understood and appreciated by a committed "hardcore." Euro horror films, thus, have developed "cult" followings because of their transgressive content, and because they were originally exhibited in theatres of a "sort" that is alternative to the mainstream (i.e. drive-ins and grind houses). These films inhabit the fringes because of their content, but also, and crucially, because of their distribution trajectories, which, it is implied, exposed only a select, discerning few to their exotic thrills.¹⁵

To merely rehearse the "paracinematic" mythology of the US grind house in such a manner offers a blinkered view of exploitation film history, and it is our intention that this volume should go some way to redressing the balance. It is, for example,

¹⁵ On "Euro horror" discourse, see, e.g., Peter Hutchings, "Resident evil? The limits of European horror: *Resident Evil* versus *Suspiria*," in *European Nightmares: Horror Cinema in Europe since 1945*, eds Patricia Allmer, David Huxley and Emily Brick (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2012), 13-24; and, related, but in reference to Italian horror cinema specifically, David Church, "One on Top of the Other: Lucio Fulci, Transnational Film Industries, and the Retrospective Construction of the Italian Horror Canon," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 32.1 (2015): 1-20.

telling that the one chapter in this collection to consider European horror cinema (by Dean Brandum) revolves around the “infamous”¹⁶ Italian cannibal films: a cycle that, according to Olney, “quickly became notorious even among hardcore fans of Euro horror cinema.”¹⁷ Yet Brandum demonstrates that this cycle’s forerunner, *Man From Deep River*, was not necessarily seen as a marginal cult oddity, but was instead a mainstream smash when it played for a number of years in Melbourne, Australia. The crucial point here is that, while it has been tempting for academic writing to uncritically champion the allure of the grind house and all the cult pleasures it was said to offer,¹⁸ much work remains to try to distance ourselves from it, so that a fuller picture can be painted of exploitation film history. A more nuanced apperception of these films’ varied exhibition contexts is required, more fully to interrogate the cultural implications of “grindhouse” mythology.

Clearly then, “grindhouse” is a term that has traversed all sorts of cultural boundaries, and has a number of discernable functions. In one respect, it is used to refer to an original exhibition context for international exploitation films. In other respects, it is used as a lens—not unlike say, “paracinema” or “video nasty”¹⁹—through which

¹⁶ Ibid., 36.

¹⁷ Ibid., 191.

¹⁸ See Landis and Clifford, *Sleazoid Express*.

¹⁹ “Video nasty” is a term given to thirty-nine horror and exploitation films that were banned on video in Britain in the early 1980s. See Kate Egan, *Trash or Treasure? Censorship and the Changing Meanings of the Video Nasties* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007); on the term’s longevity in contemporary film cultures, see

otherwise disparate global exploitation film traditions can be delineated, compartmentalized, and made sense of.²⁰ Bill Landis's *Sleazoid Express* encapsulated this dual role, being at once a chronicle and myth-generator. While Landis (who was later joined by Michelle Clifford) may attest to the disparate audiences of cinemas such as the Times Square Theater—"Popeyes, inner city denizens, kids playing hooky, and bored Midnight Cowboys"—and even the disparities between the kinds of films that were screened there—"triple bills of westerns," "chop-socky flicks" and various "exploitation double bills on half-week runs"—such experiences and films are seen to have "grindhouse" in common, and are thus frequently homogenized under one universalizing rubric.²¹ This may partly explain why, in some quarters, "grindhouse

Johnny Walker, *Contemporary British Horror Cinema: Industry, Genre and Society* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 38-58.

²⁰ Church, *Grindhouse Nostalgia*, 75.

²¹ Clifford and Landis, *Sleazoid Express*, 154. Church has subsequently identified the importance of such fanzines to cultural history, for their editors "took up the mantle of researching, archiving and assigning value to a wide swathe of cinema history that had been overlooked or deliberately ignored by film historians, high-minded critics and various arbiters of cultural taste" (Church, *Grindhouse Nostalgia*, 13). Subsequently, these zines, and others like them, have been anthologized, widely discussed on the internet, or used by scholars as academic sources. The collusion of fannish idealism with scholarship has, in some respects, shaped the reception of exploitation films, and film history more broadly, in a very specific, romantic, way (Ibid., 5), whereby exploitation films constitute "a cinematic corpus tied together by a sense of pastness" (Ibid., 3). The New York "grindhouse," thus, is but one of many "spaces that can be

cinema” is thought of as a genre in its own right,²² which is now capitalized on by a host of international home media distributors. So, the UK distribution company, Tartan Films, can release the Canadian horror film *Black Christmas* (Bob Clark, 1974) and the very different Spanish “double bills” *Dracula: Prisoner of Frankenstein/The Curse of Frankenstein* (Jess Franco, 1972/1973) and *Devil’s Island Lovers/Night of the Assassins* (Jess Franco, both 1974) under the offshoot label “Tartan Grindhouse.” Online, the global presence of grindhouse can also be felt, as with the Grindhouse Cinema Database, which proclaims itself to be “the classic-international exploitation & cult film encyclopedia,”²³ and which runs features about films that have emerged from countries as diverse as the USA, the UK, Canada, Mexico, the Philippines, Australia, Italy, France, Germany and Spain. As Church has argued, the “grindhouse” brand is “a highly sellable commodity” in “a post-theatrical era in which the grind house as historical referent has vanished from the physical landscape.”²⁴ “Grindhouse” is therefore inherently global, transcending the various national contexts from which the term, and the films that grind houses exhibited, first emerged.

imaginatively inhabited,” “past spaces of consumption” that “can be nostalgically linked to particular time periods and audiences” including the “grindhouse era” (Ibid., 5).

²² Gore, “Foreword,” ix; Church explores the “genrification” of “grindhouse” in *Grindhouse Nostalgia*, 75-6.

²³ Available at www.grindhousedatabase.com/ (accessed December 29, 2015).

²⁴ David Church, “From Exhibition to Genre: The Case of Grind-House Films, *Cinema Journal* 5:4 (2011): 24.

This insistence on the phenomenon's transnational aspect notwithstanding, Jamie Sexton and Ernest Mathijs are justified in claiming, that, "the most recognized non-American exploitation films are those that established themselves in the American marketplace."²⁵ The specific "marketplace" in question is often that of the New York grind house, since Olney is certainly not alone in prioritizing the American exhibition context as the main inroad into the study of global exploitation cinema. Indeed, the same accusation might be levelled at this book and the geographical referent contained within its title. Our intention is not, however, to position the USA as an inevitable hub of cinematic consumption. Rather, it is to examine the particularities of a cultural moment during which disparate cinematic traditions, emerging from diverse backdrops, found themselves being exhibited and consumed side-by-side. We seek to look beneath the lurid marquees of the popular imagination, to investigate and contextualize both the "grindhouse" concept and grind houses themselves, and thereby to illuminate the complexities at work within the various national, local and sub-cultural contexts that surrounded the films and the theatres alike. The word "beyond" in this volume's title has not been merely inserted as a modish scholarly accoutrement pandering to a trend towards transnational cinema studies, but is instead a recognition that "grindhouse" is always already "beyond" 42nd Street.

The contributors to this volume therefore consider "grindhouse cinema" from a variety of cultural and methodological positions. Some seek to deconstruct the etymology of "grindhouse" itself, add flesh to the bones of its cadaverous history, or examine the term's contemporary relevance in the context of both media production and

²⁵ Mathijs and Sexton, *Cult Cinema*, 151.

consumerism. Others offer new inroads into hitherto unexamined examples of exploitation film history, including a number of international movie cycles, their production and exhibition contexts, and the audiences for whom they were intended. Ultimately, *Grindhouse: Cultural Exchange on 42nd Street, and Beyond* presents several revisionist histories, snapshots of historical moments that many of us thought we already knew, and the deconstruction of terms that are rife within the lexicon of global exploitation cinema studies.

To begin, Glenn Ward's chapter, "Grinding out the Grindhouse: Exploitation, Myth and Memory," investigates the development of the cultish mystique that retrospectively surrounds the term "grindhouse." Ward argues, building on recent developments in scholarship, that this term now mediates a craving for an age of lost exploitation cinema. By placing "grindhouse" within the academic field of "memory studies," Ward asks: which elements of this idealized cinematic past are preserved and curated, by whom, and for whom? The chapter analyzes the means by which "grindhouse" is mediated, approaching the term as an elusive, fluid category, which tends to be framed through inconsistent, occasionally disingenuous "cult" discourses that disavow the cultural and political complexities of this mode of cinematic distribution, exhibition and consumption.

Phyll Smith moves discussion on from the mythology of "grindhouse" examined by Ward, to the more tangible arena of grind house historiography. Smith's chapter, "Where *Did We Come In?* The Economics of Unruly Audiences, Their Cinemas and Tastes, from Serial Houses to Grind Houses," draws on original trade papers and news stories in what is perhaps the most rigorous assessment to date of the grind house's

earliest days. Exploring the original technical uses of “grind,” Smith traces the development of “grindhouse” as an industry-standard term, and, through an examination of the continuities and discontinuities that existed between grind house and “serial house” theaters, Smith constructs “a new, more comprehensive and accurate etymology” of “grindhouse” than we have been offered thus far.

Dean Brandum’s chapter, “Temporary Fleapits and Scabs’ Alley: The Theatrical Dissemination of Italian Cannibal Films in Melbourne, Australia,” is similarly concerned with exhibition contexts, but also considers the pervasiveness of grindhouse mythology as outlined by Ward. Taking Melbourne in the 1970s as his historical context, and the Italian cycle of “cannibal” movies as a case study, Brandum shows how “grindhouse” is a term commonly favoured to the detriment of historical accuracy. Indeed, films like *Man From Deep River*, Brandum reveals, proved to be mainstream successes when they played in major Melbourne theatres. While images of US grind houses are more pervasive in Western thought than those of the “temporary fleapits” of Melbourne—dubbed so by Brandum due to their programming of major Hollywood films one week, then exploitation films the next—the chapter stresses how US mythmaking cannot fully account for the original exhibition histories of global exploitation cinema.

Peter Stanfield, in the chapter “Run, Angel, Run: Serial Production and the Biker Movie, 1966-72,” examines how US film producers cultivated “biker movies” for young American audiences in the 1960s and 1970s. Biker-themed exploitation films, Stanfield argues, were broadly responsive to trends in mainstream cinema, and were precisely designed as commercial hits. In other words, these films, though clearly

“exploitation” movies, were not of the sort since celebrated in cult criticism for eschewing commonplace industry strategies. On the contrary, a marketing strategy focused firmly on the target audience was of utmost importance to the success of the “serial” films that Stanfield (following on from Smith) discusses, which provide insights into how the grind house provided a parallel economic model to “an atrophied Hollywood production system that had long lost the ability to regulate and promulgate itself.”

Continuing to focus on how grind houses mediated the USA’s love affair with automotive transport (now shifting from motorcycles to automobiles), Robert J. Read’s chapter “The Smashing, Crashing, Pileup of the Century: The Carsploitation Film,” explores grindhouse films whose *raison d’être* was the “excessive demolition of automobiles as pure destructive sensation.” Read’s argument positions this “carsploitation” cycle, which responded to contemporaneous big-budget car chases, as a symptom of both a move towards regional film production and a wider “mainstreaming” of low-budget independent film in North America in the 1970s. By focusing (as does Stanfield) on the fiscal pragmatism of exploitation film production as it tried to anticipate audience approval, Read positions these films as documents for sociological shifts in the USA’s engagement with automotive transport and associated escapist consumer dreams.

Richard Nowell then provides insight into an alternative model of exploitation film distribution and consumption, which was contemporaneous with the grind house, and therefore provides an important contextual factor for this volume’s remit: the US drive-in circuit. His chapter, entitled “Cars and Girls (and Burgers and Weed):

Branding, Mainstreaming, and Crown International Pictures' SoCal Drive-in Movies," analyzes the marketing strategies of Crown International Pictures for their purposefully middlebrow exploitation products. Nowell firmly locates the films in their historical moment, identifying how Crown responded to the consumption habits of their young target audiences. This chapter therefore challenges historians of 1970s American exploitation cinema to look beyond "grindhouse" mystique, and to consider the calculatedly anodyne and prosaic output of contemporaneous drive-in circuits. Nowell's chapter, as with Stanfield's and Brandum's contributions to this volume, thus equally challenges prevailing scholarly trends around "cult" cinema, by arguing that much "exploitation" did not seek to subvert the "mainstream," but was in fact entwined within it.

Kevin Heffernan, in his chapter "From "Sex Entertainment for the Whole Family" to Mature Pictures: *I Jomfruens Tegn* and Transnational Erotic Cinema," locates Scandinavian hardcore pornography within the context of the US grind house and the discourse surrounding "porn chic." Heffernan examines a transnational process by which the Danish adult film *I Jomfruens Tegn* (Finn Karlsson, 1973) found its way into American inner-city neighbourhood cinemas, when re-titled *Danish Pastries*. The chapter investigates how *Pastries*—a movie arising from Copenhagen's late-1960s status as a global centre of the sex industry—translated into the divergent cultural and legal contexts of the early-1970s US grind house circuit and, in the process, passed from a context in which it was considered "sex entertainment for the entire family" into a system of production, distribution, and exhibition entirely separated from mainstream popular entertainment. The film's American distributors, the chapter argues, were

exploiting what Heffernan recognizes as a US fascination with culturally homogenized notions of “Scandinavian” attitudes to sex.

Neil Jackson is also concerned with the contemporaneous discourses surrounding “porno chic,” albeit in the context of American hardcore or, rather, one of its biggest male stars. Jackson’s chapter, “‘Bigger Than A Payphone, Smaller Than A Cadillac’: Porn Stardom in *Exhausted: John C Holmes The Real Story*,” takes the documentary *Exhausted* (Julia St Vincent, 1981) as an inadvertent document of a cultural moment in which the adult film industry was on the cusp of profound transformation, and in it Jackson examines the discursive construction of porn actor (and, thus, grind house regular) John Holmes’s onscreen persona. *Exhausted*, as Jackson has it, is a “document of the relationship between the hardcore film industry and its potential consumers, as well as between filmmakers and their subjects,” therefore Holmes’s cultural status, analogous to that of a “cult” film star, acts as a synecdoche for the historical trajectory of an industry on the verge of crisis.

Alexandra Heller-Nicholas’ chapter, “From Opera House to Grindhouse (And Back Again): Ozploitation In and Beyond Australia,” returns us once more to Australia. In it, she explores the “Ozploitation” cycle: a series of films which, as with countless other examples of global exploitation cinema, have been reframed as “grindhouse cinema” due to endorsements from “gatekeeper” auteurs such as Quentin Tarantino.²⁶

²⁶ On Tarantino as a “gatekeeper auteur” see the essay where the connection was originally made: Leon Hunt, “Asiaphilia, Asianisation and the Gatekeeper Auteur: Quentin Tarantino and Luc Besson,” in *East Asian Cinemas: Exploring Transnational*

Heller-Nicholas identifies a tension in such films between a parochial vernacular and an international outlook, diagnosing white Australia's desire to position itself culturally as a part of the Western world. She thereby maps equivalent tensions in Australia's liminal postcolonial identity, through which oppositional, "paracinematic" taste cultures emerge organically from the national psyche. The Ozploitation film's ambivalent position vis-à-vis this moveable national identity (appealing simultaneously to domestic and US export markets) is seen to be a symptom of anxieties surrounding the influence of US popular culture in post-war Australia more broadly.

Austin Fisher reappraises the cultural significance of the blaxploitation westerns that played on urban film circuits in the early-to-mid 1970s, in his chapter, "Go West, Brother," identifying in such films as *The Legend of Nigger Charley* (1972) and *Boss Nigger* (1974) purposefully anachronistic transpositions onto the tropes of the Hollywood western. This chapter analyzes the blaxploitation western's black outlaw heroes as representatives of a 1970s urban sensibility, facilitating a particular mode of address and exploitation located firmly in the films' immediate distribution contexts, when US film producers were waking up to the lucrative returns on offer from the inner-city black market, and tailoring their products accordingly.

David Church then takes an alternative approach to exploitation cinema's engagement with the turbulent racial politics of the late 1960s and early 1970s (studies of which most commonly focus on the Black Power movement and, consequently, the blaxploitation film cycle), to investigate the contemporaneous trends of

Connections on Film, edited by Leon Hunt and Leung Wing-Fai (London: I. B. Tauris, 2008), 220-236.

“Indiansploitation,” which show a response within grind house circuits to the growing “Red Power” political activism amongst Native American groups. In these films about retributive violence by modern-day Native Americans, the chapter uncovers a transcultural flow within and between coexistent countercultures: just as the Red Power movement took inspiration from African American advances in self-determination, so the Indiansploitation cycle merged the tropes of blaxploitation with Native American themes to capitalize on the era’s tumults. What emerges is a complex snapshot of a cultural moment in US politics, whereby the appropriation of Native concerns for white countercultures, and the tensions between separatist and integrationist strands of the Red Power movement, carried over into exploitation cinema.

In the volume’s final chapter, “Sleazy Strip-Joints and Perverse Porn Circuses: The Remediation of Grindhouse in the Porn Productions of Jack the Zipper,” Clarissa Smith returns to the contemporary mythology of American “grindhouse,” and examines how, in the age of the mainstream “retrosploitation pastiche”²⁷—i.e. the work of directors such as Tarantino and Rob Zombie—contemporary pornography producers have sought to embellish the cultural mythology of grindhouse cinema and the theaters that originally exhibited them. Through an examination of director Jack The Zipper, whose films are “excessively stylish re-masterings of the experiences and memories of the grind house,” Smith shows how Zipper’s work fuses exploitation film aesthetics with “memories” of their original “screening places.” Smith demonstrates that, for herself as a researcher of the digital age, where images of sex are ubiquitous (even “mainstream”), the films of Zipper offer retroactive imaginings of a historical moment

²⁷ See Church, *Grindhouse Nostalgia*, 176-242.

where hardcore sex imagery remained on the peripheries and was enjoyed, so the legend goes, by “oddballs” and social “deviants.”

This introduction began by quoting the title song from *42nd Street*. It should now be clear, however, that this volume is about much more than a “part of little old New York.” The ostensibly “local” reference to 42nd Street in its title should not be thought of as a geographical or cultural limitation on its remit: quite the opposite. Tom Conley has described cinema as “the privileged geopolitical medium ... at once local and global.”²⁸ For our purposes, this now-legendary strip of downtown New York City acts as a conceptual stage on which to explore the ever-shifting meanings of “grindhouse,” as well as a symbol for how the historical exhibition and consumption of exploitation cinema illustrates the veracity of Conley’s words.

²⁸ Tom Conley, “Foreword,” in *Frontiers of Screen History: Imagining European Borders in Cinema, 1945-2010*, eds Raita Merivirta, Heta Mulari, Kimmo Ahonen and Rami Mähkä (Bristol: Intellect, 2013), x.

