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Paracinema and the Badfilm – a cinematic paradox.

A three-step approach to defining films considered "so bad, they're good".

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Sammandrag:
Denna avhandling är en narrativ litteraturgranskning angående ämnet paracinema och Badfilm (eng. *Dåligfilm*) vars mål det är att belysa denna subkategori av film som först beskrevs av filmvetaren Jeffrey Sconce (1995). Dessa filmer beskrivs ofta anekdotalt som "så dåliga, att de är bra". Detta hänvisar till den magkänsla en tittare slås av då hen ser en film hen vet att är traditionellt sett dålig men ändå njuter. Till och med så pass, at hen njuter av filmen på grund av att den är dålig. Denna essä beskriver en tre-stegs analysmodell för att underlätta förståelsen för vad paracinema egentligen är. Jag argumenterar för att en Badfilm är en text/subjekt entitet som består av följande tre element:

1. *En brist på färdighet*. Filmen är ett resultat specifika, ofördelaktiga produktions- och färdighetsdrag.
2. *Ett misslyckande i avsikt och brist på självmedvetenhet*. Avsikten med texten är mer eller mindre uppenbar, men den misslyckade utföringen förhindrar att avsikten realiseras.
3. *Ett aktivt tittarläge,* där publiken erkänner skaparens misslyckande och snarare än att förkasta texten, väljer att fira och konsumera den på olika sätt.

Målet med essän är att genom att använda den ovannämnda modellen beskriva vad en Badfilm är (Sconce, 1995), vad som ingår i skapelsen av en (Bartlett, 2015) samt att förklara varför (Dyck & Johnson, 2016) och hur (McCoy & Scarborough, 2014) dessa filmer avnjuts. Detta gjordes med hänvisning till både innehållsanalys, mottagningsstudier och sociologiska texter skrivna mellan åren 1969-2019.

Nyckelord:	Paracinema, Badfilm, Skräpfilm, Exploateringsfilm, Kultfilm, Konventionell, Bisarr
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Abstract:

This thesis is a narrative literature review on the subject of *paracinema*, and *The Badfilm*, that seeks to shed some light on this subsection of film, first described by the film scholar Jeffrey Sconce (1995). These films are frequently referred to as being "So bad, they're good" an adage which refers to the gut feeling a viewer gets when seeing a film s/he knows is traditionally bad but enjoying it anyway – going so far as to enjoying the film *because* it is flawed. This essay provides a three-step approach to defining a Badfilm and explaining what the adage really means. I argue that a Badfilm is a text/subject entity displaying all of the following elements:

1. *A Lack of Skill*. The text is a result of a combination of specific, unfavorable productional and skill-based traits.
2. *A failure of intent and a lack of self-awareness*. The intent of the text is more or less obvious, but the faltering execution prevents that intent from being realized.
3. *A participatory mode of viewership,* where the audience acknowledges the failures of the creator(s) and, rather than discard the text, choses to celebrate and consume it in different ways

The goal of this essay is to, through the use of the model, describe *what* a Badfilm is (Sconce, 1995), *what* goes into the making of one (Bartlett, 2015) as well as providing explanations as to *why* (Dyck & Johnson, 2016) and *how* (McCoy & Scarborough, 2014) these films are enjoyed. This was done by referring to both content analysis, reception studies and sociological texts written between the years 1969-2019.

Keywords:	Paracinema, Badfilm, Trash films, Exploitation film, Cult Cinema, Mainstream, Bizarre
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Tiivistelmä:

Tämä opinnäytetyö on narratiivinen kirjallisuuskatsaus koskien *paracinemaa* ja *Badfilmia* (eng. "*huonoelokuva*"), joka pyrkii valaisemaan tätä elokuvataiteen alaosaa, jota kuvaili ensimmäisenä elokuvatietäjä Jeffrey Sconce (1995). Näihin elokuviin viitataan usein sanonnalla "niin huonoja, että he ovat hyviä". Sillä tarkoitetaan tunnelmaa, jonka katsojalle tulee, kun hän tietää elokuvan olevan perinteisesti huono, mutta nauttii siitä silti – jopa niin pitkälle, että hän nauttii elokuvasta sen puutteellisuuden takia. Tämä essee tarjoaa kolmivaiheisen lähestymistavan Badfilmin määrittelemiseen ja selittämiseen. Väitän esseessä, että Badfilm on teksti/subjekti kokonaisuus, joka kostuu seuraavista elementeistä:

1. Taitojen puutteesta. Teksti on seuraus erityisistä, epäsuotuisia tuotanto- ja taitopohjaisia piirteitä.
2. Aikeiden epäonnistumisesta ja itsetuntemuksen puutteesta. Tekstin tarkoitus on enemmän tai vähemmän ilmeistä, mutta elokuvatekijöiden puutteelliset taidot estävät kyseisen aikomuksen toteutumista.
3. Osallistava katselutila, jossa yleisö tunnustaa tekijän (tekijöiden) epäonnistumiset ja valitsee sen sijaan, että hylkäisi tekstin, juhlistaa ja kuluttaa sitä eri tavoin.

Tämän esseen tavoitteena on tämän mallin avulla kuvailla, mikä on Badfilm (Sconce, 1995), mikä menee sen tekemiseen (Bartlett, 2015), sekä antaa selityksiä siihen, miksi (Dyck & Johnson, 2016) ja kuinka (McCoy & Scarborough, 2014) näistä elokuvista nautitaan. Tämä tehtiin viittaamalla sekä sisällönanalyysiin, vastaanottotutkimuksiin sekä sosiologisiin teksteihin vuosien 1969-2019 väliseltä ajalta.

Avainsanat:	Paracinema, Badfilm, Roskaelokuvat, Eksploitaatioelokuvat, Kulttielokuvat, Valtavirta, Bisarri
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FOREWORD

I have always felt the allure of the obscure, and perhaps forbidden, at least in my mind, forms of cinema (of course, not the **really** forbidden cinema like snuff films, pornography or commercials etc.). The dirty, the violent and the deviant - not only oppositional to the mainstream but to any notion of good taste and quality as concepts, and most of all, oppositional to any form of snobbery and elitism. The intellectual horror films of Takashi Miike, the poetically lewd films of John Waters, the cheap, exploitative films of Roger Corman and the ethereal avant-gardism of Stan Brakhage etc.

For a long time, this form of cinema seemed liberating, and perhaps, at first it was. It seemed there was a world of cinema beyond that of the commodified "mainstream". I soon discovered, through interaction with other cinephiles, that oppositional films are quite as easily commodified as anything the mainstream produces. These films are gatekept and deliberately mystified, so as to not let any "non-believers" in.

In initiated circles, knowledge of underground cinema is compared and constantly questioned: "Oh so you've seen *Blood Feast,* well so what? Have you seen *Blood Feast 2: All you can eat?* Only *true fans* have seen it!". Extensive referrals of more and more obscure genres and filmmakers are used as capital, to establish a canon, by which to abide – suddenly becoming precisely as dogmatic and draconian as what was originally opposed. An esoteric, elite community of mystics, declaring what different films are or are not. The joy of actually watching films devolving into meta-analysis and discussions on what film should be classified how. Perhaps when you've seen the most disreputable films that cinema has to offer, as an escape from the otherwise "boring" and already tired notions of good taste, nothing remains to be discovered? Like the adrenaline junkie who has climbed all the mountains. Twice. Of course, cinema can always be enjoyed in solitary confinement. But then, what is the purpose of the experience, if you cannot share it? Is it even real? This, of course is the nature of any "fandom". Social- and cultural capital is inherently a source of power, and power is alluring. What is left when you no can no longer find it in you to be surprised by the medium you chose to obsess over?

This essay is a reflection on a phenomenon that holds potential of being truly subversive. The technically inept and artistically failed films that, per definition, breaks all the rules of conventional cinema – and not in any romantic sense, not deliberate subversions of expectations. True, naïve, bumbling subversion, where you as a viewer cannot possibly, even with all your knowledge of cinema, predict what will happen or what it signifies.

1 INTRODUCTION

" (…) movies are so rarely great art, that if we cannot appreciate great trash, we have very little reason to be interested in them." (Kael, 1969)

The usual behavior for an average movie-goer is to seek out films that are artistically and aesthetically pleasing. Whatever someone's personal preferences may be, content-wise, there is usually a qualitative and cultural threshold that has to be passed for a movie to be seen as a quality film, or going even further, as a "real" film. There are technical expectations: the sound is expected to be mixed appropriately, the acting to be believable, the writing to be coherent and the whole thing to be filmed in a manner that looks "right". There are cultural expectations as well: it is expected that the content of the movie is relevant, that the film adheres to its genre, that contains only what has been promised beforehand, through the cultural contract of the genre. These sets of expectations are to be adhered to, for said film to be viewed as credible, marketable, and ultimately profitable. Every single mainstream movie is, of course, not made precisely according to these industry standards (and there are genre films that play on our aesthetic and artistic expectations) but following the standards is an effective way of guaranteeing satisfaction for the highest possible number of paying movie attendants, in a normalized population. Mainstream films are most likely focus tested rigorously pre-release to ensure a profitable circuit.

Most of the films that are distributed to mainstream theatres, are in one way or another, compelled to adhere to the rules of the industry. The number of sheer technical flaws in these high grade, professional movies are usually quite low, and even if there are any, they most likely slip by the untrained eye completely unnoticed. But perhaps there are some perceived flaws in the acting, screenplay or direction. Perhaps the film just is wholly unoriginal and uninspiring. Not flawed enough to deter the movie-goer from attending a screening, but enough to keep the film from attaining any critical merit or making any lasting cultural impact. Whatever it is, many films of the mainstream tend to fall in the "average" category and audiences tend to enjoy these films *in spite* of their flaws. Mostly forgettable and uninspired in spite of all the technical prowess and budget – a category which a marketing consultant most likely would find better than average, they would find it safe and profitable. As dull and predictable as the films of mainstream

Hollywood may be, they seem to be what the average global audience clamors for, most likely because the movies themselves are made to please as many people as possible, without alienating anyone. This might sound altruistic, but of course, it is the opposite. The movies of the mainstream are commodities to be peddled to an audience, to maximize profit. Not art designed to instill an emotional response, but a tranquilizer designed to lull them into the peaceful trance of the status quo (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1969).

There is, however, another world to be explored, just under the surface. A world of movies where "anything goes" and where the line between good and bad taste, between genius and lunatic, and between art and commodity is blurred. These types of movies go by many names: *Sleaze* (Hawkins, 1999)*, Trash* (Sarkhosh & Menninghaus, 2016)*, B-movie , Exploitation, Cult movie* (Mathijs & Sexton, 2011)*, Avant Garde* (Sconce, 1995) just to name a few. They include both some of the most critically panned, and critically acclaimed films ever to grace the silver screen.

Many of them made on an extremely small budget, these films contain, more often than not, poorly executed graphic violence, gratuitous nudity, drug use, nonsensical plots, poor acting and other exploitative elements, designed to instantly gratify by evoking strong, physical reactions. Although this seems to be a list of convincing reasons to leave these cinematic disasters alone, there is an alternative mode of consuming them. A mode where a film is enjoyed, not *in spite* of its perceived flaws, but *because* of them. Through this viewing protocol, named *paracinema*, a certain kind of film can be discerned. Films that, paradoxically, are referred to as being *"so bad, they're good" - the Badfilm* (Dyck & Johnson, 2016; Hye-Knudsen & Clasen, 2019; Sconce, 1995).

In this essay I intend to explore what makes a film a Badfilm and not just a bad film. How can a movie be so bad that it subsequently, "becomes good", and what does this paradoxical and already clichéd statement even mean? What does a Badfilm look like, and what are the qualities and merits of such a film? I will delve into some of the technical aspects of paracinematic filmmaking as well as the wider cultural aspects of taste.

I will examine not only *why* some people seem to gravitate towards films, that have been critically panned and culturally excluded, but also exactly *how* these masterpieces of bad taste and poor craftmanship can be enjoyed.

Many times, that which is broadly considered culturally "bad" or "low-brow" can tell us as much, if not more, about society and our cultural landscape, than that which is deemed "good" or "high-brow" (Hoberman, 1980). Thus, this essay is intended for both filmmakers as well as cinephiles that have yet to discover the value of counter cinema but are perhaps curious, or unsatisfied with what the "mainstream" has to offer. In the light of a steadily growing academic writing on the subject of paracinema and an increasing access to obscure media through the use of the internet, the up-until-now, esoteric, self-proclaimed anti-establishment cinema of Badfilms is more spotlighted than ever before – breaching the barrier between mainstream and underground going as far as being a tool for marketing. It is therefore timely to study a culture that has, for a long time been isolated and enjoyed by only a relatively few cinephiles and film scholars.

2   METHODS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This essay serves as a compilation and interpretation of some of the more cited writings on paracinema using Jeffrey Sconces 1995 article *Trashing the Academy: taste, excess, and an emerging politics in cinematic style* as a jumping of point – since it is widely cited as being the origin of both the concepts of paracinema and the Badfilm. Sconces work has since been expanded upon by other scholars, notably Mathijs & Sexton, Hawkins, Bartlett, Sarkhosh & Menninghaus amongst others. The objective of this essay is to tie the existing literature together into a single coherent definition of paracinema and the Badfilm. Practically, this means that texts found through searching databases, such as ResearchQuest, Wiley Online Library and Google Scholar, using the keywords "paracinema", "Badfilm", "Cult Cinema" and "Trash Cinema".

Since the matter of paracinema directly relates to the dialectical problem of film as an artform vs. film as a commodity, my methodology has relied upon the ideas of critical media analysis, more specifically, the ideas of the *culture industry* presented in the *Dialectics of Enlightenment,* (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1969). Where paracinema, in

this context, represents the tradition of film as art, and the mainstream represents film as commodity. The binary division of films into mainstream and other, is not one without its faults (more on that later). Paracinema and the Badfilm is a subject that inevitably has to consider what the notions "good" and "bad" represent, in this context, specifically the notions of "good" and "bad" taste. I regard this question through the ideas presented by Pierre Bourdieu in his seminal work *A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (1984).

Although a large part of this essay concern such thoroughly post-modern issues, as those of the culture industry (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1969), taste (Bourdieu, 1984) as well as the ironic consumption of art (Dyck & Johnson, 2016), another large part is devoted to a more hands-on, technical analysis of the "objective bad" (Hoberman, 1980) and what technical aspects can be interpreted as "objectively bad" (Bartlett, 2015).

Using the sources mentioned above as a framework, I aim to construct a narrative literature review (that is, a thorough and critical overview of the knowledge available on the subject), where some of the established writings on paracinema is condensed down, to create a cohesive outline of the phenomenon – and, more importantly, a concrete definition. The sources include a broad variety of different studies including autoethnographies, think-pieces, philosophical texts, content analysis, sociological writings, to provide a broad enough variety to cover both the technical aspects of filmmaking as well as the sociological aspects of audience reception. I mean to combine this existing knowledge into one cohesive narrative, which should be simple to understand – without going into the subjectivism of my own analysis of any Badfilm. I intend to limit myself to writing primarily concerned with the motion pictures of Hollywood – since it provides an ample resource of scholarly writing on a broad variety of films.

In this essay I intend to:

- Describe paracinema as a phenomenon.
- Define some of the inner workings of what makes a Badfilm.
- Answer *why* and *how* Badfilms are enjoyed.
- Lastly, deliver an applicable definition of what a Badfilm is.

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3 PARACINEMA AND THE BADFILM – *A BRIEF OUTLINE*

First of all, it should be pointed out that paracinema is not a genre of film, the way that a "western" or "sci-fi" is. Neither is it a mode of filmmaking, such as a documentary, an educational film or a news broadcast. Rather, it is a *mode of reading* that takes a, self-identified, oppositional stance against "an elite cadre of would-be cinematic tastemakers". Paracinema is "a counter aesthetic" that seeks to "valorize all forms of cinematic 'trash'" (Sconce, 1995). In simple terms*:* paracinema, is a mode of watching (that is, a conscious attitude of consumption, a sensibility) and appropriating neglected trash-culture films, reevaluating them and ultimately elevating them beyond their trash status, thus turning a "bad" film "good". Films that are revered after this reevaluation can be called Badfilms – this term does not try to mask or neglect the flaws of the film, but rather highlight them as a source of subversion and uniqueness. This description, however, does not yet provide a concrete description of *what* a Badfilm is (more on this later) – but it serves as a jumping off point.

Some films go through the paracinematic process of reevaluation to find great success. Films that are nowadays regarded as "masterpieces" by most accounts, such as David Lynch's "Eraserhead", Alejandro Jodorowskys "El Topo" or George Romeros "Night of the Living Dead" were once considered part of trash culture by mainstream audiences, fit only to be shown at midnight screenings (Hoberman & Rosenbaum, 1991). Since their release they have, through the passing of time and the ever-changing general taste in cinema, been redeemed, raising the question of what really counts as trash (Hunter, 2014). However, these films were never, neither technically inept nor directly exploitative in nature. The only reason they seemed to fall on the outside of the mainstream were because of the paradigms of the time and because of critical exclusion. They were, retrospectively, "misunderstood" or "before their time", the way many important pieces of art can be (Hoberman, 1980). These films are good examples of cult cinema.

At this point, it is well worth to draw attention to the words *trash cinema* and *cult cinema*. These vague cinematic categorical terms are inescapably linked to paracinema and the Badfilm. They are many times conflated, despite their differences. There is cause to briefly define these umbrella terms, which so often appear simultaneously with those of Paracinema and the Badfilm.

Very simply put, *Cult* cinema is a widely used term that denotes any movie that has a "cult-like following" – that is to say, an audience that frequently revisits and continuously enjoys a certain film. What this means, is that a film garners cult status through how the audience interacts with the film, not because of specific aesthetics or content. However, because the most rabid "movie-fans" (or perhaps "cultists" in this context) have historically been young, white men from big cities, an "average" cult aesthetic has emerged. But a cult film does not have to adhere to this aesthetic to be considered cult (Mathijs & Sexton, 2011).

According to Sarkosh & Menninghaus (2016) the concept of *trash*, when it pertains to cinema, "(…) commonly serves as an umbrella term for amateurishly produced, low-budget films which are incompatible with the standards of mainstream filmmaking." The concept is frequently used

A Badfilm (a paracinematic film that can be described by the adage: "so bad, it's good" or "good-bad"), the same way the cult films mentioned earlier, also has the nature of redemption, right there in the definition. However, the redemption and elevation of a Badfilm cannot happen *in the same sense,* because of its intrinsic properties. A Badfilm is decidedly *not* a cinematic masterpiece that has been neglected because of oppositional content, or a sense of being "before it's time" – it is unmistakably an artistical, aesthetical and technical failure. However, a Badfilm is not only valued and enjoyed *because* of these apparent failures (MacDowell & Zborowski, 2014) but also distinguished and identified by them (Bartlett, 2015).

But how exactly does a Badfilm fail?

4 THE ANATOMY OF DISASTER – *A LACK OF SKILL*

Many academic texts, studying the phenomena of paracinema, relate to the sociological theories of taste, distinction and cultural capital outlined by Pierre Bourdieu (1984), which is widely cited by film scholars. When it comes to paracinema and the study of cult films, taste (or rather, good taste) is not only a central issue when it comes to analytical theory but also central as a political ideology. Sconces seminal article "Trashing the Academy" (1985)– where he outlines his concept of paracinema – is not only an article about counter aesthetics but also about counter ideology, where the hegemony of the stagnant "Academy", which can be interpreted as the mainstream culture industry, is opposed by the underground, vital force of paracinema.

This ideological discussion around taste is, putting it extremely lightly, a complex issue. It relates almost exclusively to the analysis of reception – that is, how audiences perceive, consume and interact with different texts and how their cultural capital influences their reactions. Seldom do they concern the formalities of paracinematic craftmanship, in any manner that isn't referential i.e. referring to a particular Badfilm and expressing "*this* is bad, because we all know it's bad" or recognizing "that *thing*, frequently happens in Badfilms" without ever expressing what "*this*" or "that *thing*" actually is. These breadcrumbs of "bad" or "cult" are only for the already initiated to perceive. According to Mathijs (2011) "These are salient moments or small cues within a film that are picked up by savvy viewers who relish their expertise in recognizing these 'cues'". This is the usual way of defining paracinema, different films are listed according to whether or not they express these cues, often relying on a gut feeling instead of providing concrete verification. A form of esoteric intertextuality – all, more or less, dependent on already established taste, or in this case established counter taste, which is ultimately hard to define even if it might be easy to recognize (Jancovich, 2002).

To better illustrate the text part of the text/subject entity that is a Badfilm we need a different approach. By identifying some common technical denominators within the canonical Badfilms we can establish what a Badfilm looks and sounds like, letting us rely less on establishment, esoteric "cues" and more on our own eyes and ears. A formalist

generalization helps avoiding excessive listing of examples of paracinema, instead supplying a definition that can be applied to a text (Bartlett, 2015).

4.1 The Hollywood exploitation film

" An exploitation film is a motion picture in which the elements of plot and acting become subordinate to elements that can be promoted"

Herschell Gordon Lewis (Curry & Curry, 1999)

Going forward, some thought should be given to the relationship between the practicalities of mode of production and the actual artistic content of films. Because of the machinelike, industrial nature of Hollywood, where the pragmatism of maximizing profits are at the center of almost all (including artistic) decision making, it is necessary to consider what effect this mentality has had their products. Even if having a large budget, in no way, guarantees that a movie will be received well, it can at least provide some basic competency which inevitably impacts the craftmanship that goes into cinematography, editing, sound mixing etc. making budget an integral part of not only mainstream films, but paracinema as well. As stated, this is by no means a reliable predictor of success - *up to a point* – but recording a feature length film without having allocated any resources for the proper equipment will almost guarantee that any intentions of the filmmakers will be hard to achieve. Between the years 1940-1970 the production of cheap, excessive and sensational movies ran rampant, giving birth to a category of films called the *exploitation film.* It is no wonder that so many canonical Badfilms stem from this era and follow some of the patterns generated through the pure pragmatism of profit margins.

Even though the term *exploitation film* has long been used to describe a film genre, it's frequently used interchangeably and alongside terms like *trash*, *cult, schlock* or *sleaze,* the actual term stems from the mode of production rather than any genre imposed thematical similarities. The term denotes films that have been churned out by an industry to sell as many movie tickets for the lowest production cost possible – put simply, an exploitative mode of production. Ironically, even though the term does not refer to genre, this method of producing films has inadvertently caused there to be many aesthetic and

thematic similarities (Roche, 2015). Many times, exploitation films featured some form of sensationalist gimmick: sex, drugs, violence, monsters, gore, zombies, nazis etc. to lure in viewers by offering them cheap (un)reliable thrills. These films were, of course, targeted at the most exploitable demographics such as "ethnic minorities, teen-agers, sub-literates and 42nd Street derelicts" (Hoberman, 1980), to siphon their loose change and exploit their social exclusion. As a result of a measly budget another practicality of filmmaking that was impacted was, of course, schedule. Many of the Hollywood exploitation films were made in only a few days, which is not a sensible timeframe even for a short film, drastically impacting the craftmanship of the content – again, solidifying the relationship between budgetary and productional restrictions and the artistical content, of any film, but perhaps, especially the Badfilm. The same goes for another very prominent part of poor craftmanship in Badfilms, namely set design and costumes. This should be kept in mind throughout the rest of this chapter.

There are some notable exceptions in the relationship between size of budget and grade of paracinematic qualities, which calls into question not only how size of budget impacts a production, but also the impact of how the budget is allocated. As a frame of reference, the 1971 Badfilm *Zaat* had a budget of 75 000 dollars, whereas the arguably most famous Badfilm of all time, Tommy Wiseaus 2003 film *The Room*, was made on an unbelievable budget of 6 million dollars. Both films are technically and artistically incompetent, but in wholly different ways. *Zaat* follows the traits of a classical exploitation film quite closely, being a cheaply made monster film, with both bad acting, poor editing and excessive use of stock footage (traits that will be covered a bit more closely still in the next subchapters). *The Room,* however, suffers to a higher degree from the problems that follow of the incompetent *auteur*, and a failure of intent, where Wiseau largely funded the film himself and thus had almost complete creative control, leading to some of cinemas most bizarre acts of direction and production – but almost all of it is telling of some sort of creative passion. The film was however, mostly competently shot, lit and recorded, which is telling for a film with a bigger budget. Comparatively, the obvious competence in craftmanship shown in parts of *the Room* might be what makes the lack of competence in other areas so highlighted. Whereas in *Zaat*, unmistakably an exploitation film, the lack of almost any effort (except, perhaps, from the actors) is not

only expected by the audience, but not in any way hidden away, but shown front and center, also making the experience rather bizarre.

4.2 Poor acting, bad dialogue

A film with a competent script can, to a certain degree, overcome almost any technical limitations. Especially in an age, where almost everyone carries with them a high definition camera on them at all times, the technical barriers of filmmaking are quickly disappearing – making the barriers of competent storytelling even more prominent. A "good" actor can elevate a poor script, but only so much. A "poor" actor reading a well written script can be jarring, uncomfortable or worse, boring but still serviceable. There is, however, something uniquely fascinating in seeing a bad actor executing a bad script. Most importantly, an actor does not have to be good to be memorable or even iconic. Quite the opposite. So, what exactly is "good" acting and what is "bad" acting and what kind of acting goes into a Badfilm?

According to Bartlett (2015) a good actor "should aim to create a fully rounded and coherent character, one with as much depth and complexity as any 'real' personality", where the actor attempts to "become" the character without the audience noticing this construct. A good performance therefore is described as "believable", "truthful" and "realistic". She goes on by describing bad acting as "wooden", "stilted", "unbelievable" – in other words, the actor has failed to convince the audience that they are not acting. But there is more to acting than just performance. The technical prowess of the filmmakers, camera angles, mise en scène, lighting etc. and most of all editing, all play a part in highlighting an actor's work. Under the right circumstances, and through a participatory mode of viewing (more on the subject later), the elements associated with traditionally bad acting can be elevated into cult status. Many times, good-bad acting encompasses some form of excess that propels an actor's performance into cult fame. The excess of overdramatizing radiates a sense that the actor is "giving their all", despite "their all" being contextually over the top, providing the audience with a sense of charisma and presence in an otherwise, perhaps incompetent film. Excessiveness in the way an actor doesn't even try, or perhaps is unable, to portray a character, creating a bizarre uncanny experience completely breaking the illusion of cinema. Excess in an actor *failing* to

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overdramatize, meaning overdramatizing but not understanding but not according to the context of the scene, thus creating a humorous and humane instance of trying hard but in "the wrong way", generating a rift between intention and execution.

Although bad acting is a staple of paracinema, the quality of an actor's performance is inevitably linked the quality of the screenwriting, of which the most tangible, relevant to paracinema and likely the most memorable (especially if it is "bad") aspect is the dialogue. Many, perhaps all, Badfilms feature some form of uncanny, bizarre and idiosyncratic dialogue – which could be called objectively bad. But there is a rather big caveat which relates to what the purpose of dialogue is. Just as with acting, much weight is put on dialogue being "natural", "believable" and "realistic", and just as with acting, it is somewhat hard to pinpoint what exactly makes dialogue realistic. Or even if "realistic" is what is called for in all cases. Many times, subtlety is praised. Characters should not express what they are feeling overtly, or what they "really" intend to do. This applies to plot as well; overly expositional dialogue is recognized as being written more for the audience to clarify what is happening in the story (instead of relying on visual cues), more than as a part of the diegesis of the film.

This is however also the most abstract of the technical distinctions since it pertains specifically to things of a more subjective nature, such as "natural dialogue", plot, themes, characters and their development – factors that could easily fall under the rubric of taste and intentionality. There can be some generalizations made, since even a story that is unappealing on a personal level, can be competently unappealing.

4.3 Post-production sound design

Sound design is very often neglected, both in analysis and criticism, as well as in cheaper, or more rushed productions. This can be a result of the peculiar nature of cinematic sound being so intertwined with the images we see in a film that it can seem almost unnoticeable – usually when done well, or at least adequately. For the average viewer, it is usually only remarked upon in case it is unusually good, or unusually bad. Of course, when it comes to paracinema sound is often utilized not as a part of a narrative device but as a tool to be used to cover up mistakes, to fill in for what missing content has left out.

One way of doing so is through the use of *voice over*. A common practice in any area of filmmaking, where speech is added in post-production as an overlay to the edited images. Frequently used in low-budget Hollywood films of the 50s and 60s. Primarily used as literal narration; a voice without a body, or at least, without a body shown on screen, giving the audience direct information that is, more or less, relevant to what is happening – if not narrating the pictures exactly. This form of narration is more common to the literary world as the voice of the "all-knowing narrator", to supply a framework of storytelling. Badfilms utilize this tool in an attempt to diegetically convey information that has been left out, for one reason, or another of the "actual" film – going so far as to lie about what is happening on screen, or tell it's audience to believe something that is never shown. A way of explaining the otherwise nonsensical images that have been cut together.

This disparity between sound and image usually result in the same kind of shock, as when an audience witnesses a terrible performance or the delivery of poorly written dialogue. It shatters the illusion of diegesis and draws one out of the cinematic experience. The same applies to issues with post-productional syncing of sound, also a common feature in many Badfilms. Syncing errors occur, put simply, when mouth movement and sound is not synchronized properly, either so that the mouths of the actors move when there is no sound, or sound appearing seemingly from nowhere. This is often encountered when films are dubbed to another language than originally recorded, and as such the mistake can be easily forgiven, and the diegesis is preserved through some relatively easy mental acrobatics and suspension of disbelief - since the audio and the actors mouths are not "supposed" to be completely in sync. But this problem can also be encountered in situations where dialogue has recorded in a studio, either by the same actor or another. In this case the audio is of course recorded to fit as closely as possible to the actions on screen, and when it does not, it has an uncanny effect. Errors in syncing can end up exposing the audience to the "sausage factory" of film production – where, the illusion of a constructed reality is shattered, revealing the hideous truth that the story of the film is fictional and any means it has provided for us to make sense of our existence is a fabrication. Thus, expelling us from the experience, the same way a visible microphone,

the camera reflecting in a mirror, or an actor accidentally breaking the fourth wall by looking directly into the lens can do (Bartlett, 2015).

4.4 Editing

Editing and sound design have plenty in common. The same way that traditionally good sound design tends to remain so intertwined with the images of any film, that it can seem almost unnoticeable, so too does traditional editing strive to reduce the metaphorical distance between audience and film, by being unnoticeable or invisible. Of course, editing is and can be used to create certain jarring effects or convey a subversive message, but generally speaking good editing conveys a continuity that is effortless to follow and keeps a pace that supports what is happening in the images. Unsurprisingly, paracinematic editing "remains entirely inappropriately visible through the frequent inability to provide a coherent narrative and logical representation of diegetic space and time." (Bartlett, 2015)

Most audiences have already, through consumption, garnered a fairly good eye for editing. This means that most people are more desensitized to the new editing techniques such as "jump-cuts", "cross fades", "the one-take", and different montage techniques then ever before, rendering them unnoticeable, through repetition. Even if these editing techniques are noticed most likely, the editor has allowed them to be noticed. This can even lead to an audience feeling clever for noticing and appreciating the significance of the edit – sometimes to the extent that filmmakers and editors are using some of the more recognizable techniques of shooting and editing for audience recognition alone, no matter how it fits contextually (the "one-take" shot is particularly guilty of being used to this effect). However, no editing technique seems as noticeable as the bad edit. The simplest of which is the continuity error, where a "mismatching between day and night, inconsistencies in costume or appearance, or the failed integration of footage from multiple sources" break the diegesis of the film (Bartlett, 2015). As with erroneous audio dubbing, the closer the mistake is, to the correct way of editing, the more disorienting the flaw becomes – as when an edit is otherwise, traditionally correct, but the characters clothing has mistakenly been changed from one shot to another, diegetically meant to be subsequent. Not "erroneous" enough to be labeled as a technical mistake or

an attempt at artistic editing, but not invisible enough to go unnoticed. It is seen as one of sheer negligence and incompetence.

5   AUTHOR INTENT AND AUDIENCE EXPECTATION – *A FAILURE OF INTENT*

So far, I have only discussed the technical elements that make up a Badfilm, trying to avoid involving the matter of taste. In this chapter I will begin to analyze the paradoxical nature of enjoying something objectively bad.

To begin with, let me reiterate: Badfilms are enjoyed, not *in spite* of their flaws, but *because of them* – even going so far as to say that it is the actual flaws that are being enjoyed, demonstrated by the various "failure" compilations on platforms such as YouTube, where all the biggest failures of, in this case, *The Room* (2003) are edited together and enjoyed. Evidently this enjoyment is, for the most part, humorous in nature. It is funny to watch; it makes the audience laugh (Hye-Knudsen & Clasen, 2019). Not only because it's funny, but because it is sincere, and pathetic. It's endearing and frustrating, charming and embarrassing, good and bad. Of course, not everybody will find a Badfilm entertaining. In the same way some people dislike horror films because they are too frightening, some people cannot enjoy a Badfilm because of the sheer magnitude of the artistical failure (Dyck & Johnson, 2016). Sometimes a Badfilm can be outright boring, yet in the right context that boredom can become hilarious – it is the absolute opposite of what any movie should be, which makes it, somehow, entertaining. It invokes a physical reaction. But what exactly makes it this way? What is the precise nature of this feeling, what is it that we feel when we see one of these paradoxes on display in a Badfilm?

Let's ask ourselves the following question: What do we, as members of the audience, expect when we are watching a monster movie? We expect that it to be scary, thrilling and violent. Not only because it is promoting itself as such, through marketing: trailers, movie poster or through the name of the film. But also discloses its intent through the content of the movie itself. As soon as we start watching, we might recognize some recycled horror tropes, horror music, recycled ideas from previous, perhaps better, horror

films – it looks, and sounds like a horror film, so it must be one. We can predict the sensations it will try to evoke. The feelings it will want us to feel; fear, intensity, uncertainty, anxiety, maybe we are supposed to feel the sensation of an adrenaline rush, and finally perhaps some form of catharsis when the monster is slayed – a sigh of relief and a return to status quo.

These expectations, that have arisen from years of media consumption and through the recycling of ideas, are quite deeply rooted within many of us. They factor in whenever we watch something, that isn't completely new to us. Even if we don't want them to. If we go see a horror film, we expect these tropes, to be followed – *even* if our expectations are subverted in the movie, they need at least to be acknowledged, otherwise we only feel cheated – this is generally how horror comedies work, they make fun of tropes, while still being bound to using them. What is then, the reaction, when a film, not only does not deliver on our ingrained expectations, but *unintentionally* (due to a *lack of skill*) makes us feel the opposite of what we expect? The monster looks nothing like what was on the poster, instead it looks like a green rubber duck, as it utterly non-threateningly stumbles around on a set lit like a soap opera, although it is supposed to be a swamp. At night. You become acutely aware that it is not, in fact, a monster, but an overweight man in an ill-fitting costume, most likely unable to see anything, as he is sweating into his eyes because of the heat radiating from the lights. The film cuts to the heroine, giving the most unconvincing scream you have ever heard, as a boom microphone dips into frame. Then the scene ends. In the right circumstances, this extreme juxtaposition of highly specific intent and failed execution can become *bizarrely humorous*, which in turn can make us curious, verging on awe-inspired in the face of this absolute disaster. We might ask ourselves impossible questions such as: "What were they thinking?", "What possessed the *Authors* to go through with this?", "Is this intentionally this bad?". These questions brings us to can either set us down a path of further paracinematic readings, or d (Dyck & Johnson, 2016; Hye-Knudsen & Clasen, 2019).

There is no doubt that enjoyment of Badfilms relies heavily on previously accumulated experiences with cinema. The humor that can be found in watching the most basic rules of cinema being neglected in a Badfilm, builds itself on a vast amount of intertextuality and recognition of film language. If you do not know what conventions are

being broken in a Badfilm, then how can possibly be entertained by the acknowledgment of it happening? This makes paracinema difficult for "newcomers" to accept – as any form of Cult Cinema can be. It is largely a cumulative form of media consumption, where cultural capital has to be gathered through obsessive consumption of obscure film, to possess the right intertextual knowledge and the right references (Eco, 1985). An uninitiated viewer might be able to discern that "something is not right" with a particular Badfilm, but naturally conclude that the film is bad and discard it as trash, as many Badfilms have been, throughout the years.

6 HOW TO ENJOY A BADFILM – *A PARTICIPATORY MODE OF VIEWERSHIP*

"To understand bad taste, one must have very good taste. Good bad taste can be creatively nauseating but must, at the same time, appeal to the especially twisted sense of humor, which is anything but universal."

- John Waters (1981)

The last of the three-step unity, lies appropriately in the place where a film, metaphorically, ends up. With the viewer. Even if author intent already makes some demands on the viewer, Reception study is an integral part of paracinema, there are numerous incompetently made films, where the intent of the author is not matched by the execution to a *bizarre* degree. As previously stated, it is easy for the uninitiated to discard any Badfilm as, just being utterly, irredeemably bad – since it demands a lot of accumulated knowledge of cinema intertextuality to find enjoyment in a Badfilm. This, one could argue is the position of the average viewer. To just "turn it off" – this is only natural. We are taught to watch "good" things. This goes for the seasoned cinephile as well. Just because you are familiar with a broad range of cinema and you possess ample knowledge on the language of cinema, doesn't mean that you automatically will enjoy paracinema. Paracinema demands a conscious effort, an act of active *cinemasochism*, that transforms you from a passive observer into an active component, constantly questioning what you are seeing and referring to your previous experiences to try and explain what is happening on screen (MacDowell & Zborowski, 2014).

6.1 Four modes of viewing

A mode of viewing is essentially an active acknowledgement of metatextual information, an acknowledgement that any text does not exist in a vacuum but is a part of something bigger. That the content of a film is affected by outside forces and that your reception of it also depends on outside forces. Put simply a mode of viewing can be a critical approach to any media text that does not let the content of the text dominate, but makes the viewer actively repurpose the text for their own wants or needs. In this subchapter I shall explore some of the active viewing modes commonly adapted to enjoy *paracinema*.

1. The first mode of viewing is active in the way that it does *not* take a critical approach, and *not* think about all the assumptions that a film makes. A viewing mode that does *not* seek to challenge any notions of cultural hegemony and sticks to the symbolic boundaries that condemn low brow artforms as being in "bad taste". This what McCoy and Scarborough (2014) call *A Traditional Viewing Style*. Through a traditional viewing mode Badfilms are taken at *face value*, they are artistical failures that deserve no praise and should be disregarded.

2. The second mode, and one that is very common, especially amongst consumers of both cult cinema and paracinema, is an *Ironic Viewing Mode*. This mode of viewing texts finds enjoyment int things that are labeled "trash", through ironic distance and derisive mockery. This distance allows an ironic consumer to both condemn and consume a text, at the same time – laughing at the participants and the *Authors* instilling a feeling of both moral and cultural superiority. A staple of this viewing mode is ironic commenting. A form of performance that enhances the enjoyment through communal joking and riffing on the films expense. This can also demand a lot of prior metatextual knowledge, easily alienating newcomers who lack the cultural capital (McCoy & Scarborough, 2014; McCulloch, 2011). A Badfilm viewed through this mode would be a source of comedy through ironic mockery, derisive commentary and a performance together with others.

3. The third mode entails an adoption of *Camp Sensibilities*, whereupon the content is enjoyed ironically, perhaps, but nonetheless sincerely and without derision, almost, if not completely, approaching admiration. This mode is, in a way, the inverse of *the Traditional Viewing Mode* in as much as it takes the text at face value, but instead of discarding it, a *Camp* viewer adopts a framework of evaluation that is appreciative or even celebratory of the ways most Badfilms are seen as failures: the over the top performances and dialogue, the perhaps misguided sense of cinematic language, and the melodrama – seen through Camp esthetics, not as failures but as, perhaps, passionate and truthful versions of cinema. More so, than any film that tries to satisfy what the market demands of a film to make it into a profitable commodity (Sontag, 1964; McCoy & Scarborough, 2014).

4. *Guilty Pleasure*. Not everybody seeks to gain cultural capital when consuming media, some people seek to hide their consumption from the public gaze. An anti-performance. It stands to reason that most of us at some point consume media we want to hide, there is a whole industry built on such media. However, neglecting pornographic and snuff content, this mode of viewing is often times compared to the proverb of "not being able to look away from a train wreck", where the viewer feels both guilt and shame in consumption of a text, but enough enjoyment out of the viewing to be compelled to watch - the shame and guilt arising from the incongruence of both acknowledging the text as being "trash" and still finding it enjoyable, thus condemning one's own sensibilities leading to inevitable repression (McCoy & Scarborough, 2014).

As an appendix to the, not-as-self-explicatory, mode of *Camp Sensibilities*, a short definition is in order. In her influential 1964 article *Notes on Camp*, author Susan Sontag describes *Camp* as being "not a natural mode of sensibility, if there be any such. Indeed the essence of Camp is its love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration. And Camp is esoteric — something of a private code, a badge of identity even, among small urban cliques". Adopting camp sensibilities might require conscious effort, but however you apply it, it signifies an appreciation of the exaggerated, and of style over substance. Comparatively, whereas an ironic sensibility strives to "laughs at" something, camp seeks

to "laugh with". Sontag goes on by adding "Camp is a certain mode of aestheticism. It is one way of seeing the world as an aesthetic phenomenon. That way, the way of Camp, is not in terms of beauty, but in terms of the degree of artifice, of stylization" even going as far as to point out the influence of "bad films" by further adding that "movie criticism (like lists of "The 10 Best Bad Movies I Have Seen") is probably the greatest popularizer of Camp taste today, because most people still go to the movies in a high-spirited and unpretentious way."

6.2 The Fifth mode: critical subjectivity – *how to watch a movie you actually dislike*

No film and no viewing mode described so far can be neither completely oppositional nor subversive since all of them take part in the consumption of products of a late stage capitalist industry, that is more interested in profit than artistic merit. True, they may contain instances of "bad taste" that offend the sensibilities of the average viewer, which might give them subversive qualities, but they are nonetheless produced solely as a mean of increasing profit margins.

Inevitably any ironic viewing protocol will be repurposed by the culture industry as a novel way of marketing intentionally "bad" films – as already seen with films like *Sharknado* (2013) and *Snakes on a Plane* (2006), evidence of this already occurring. More insipid, perhaps, is the adoption of Cult sensibilities into the mainstream as means of marketing, where films are described as "The next big cult movie" even before they are released. Adopting only the aesthetics, and thus recyclable part, of Cult or Trash cinema. At least with *Sharknado* its cynical an exploitational qualities are quite obvious. But how can we reconcile the fact that true subversion of power might not be possible as long as we are participating in the culture industry? How do we stop participating?

We can adopt a purist viewing mode that replaces the subjugation of the subjective, by established rules based on cultural capital, dictated to us by the culture industry, with an acceptance of the subjective – moving from metaphysical discussions to emotional and rational reception study.

At the center of this *Critical Subjective* viewing mode is the questioning of governing powers of the culture industry and the understanding of how they work, through critique of the ulster it produces – movies, tv, YouTube etc. This mode of consuming doesn't concern itself with any form of academic hegemonies or theoretical snobbishness, but wholly embraces a primal subjectivity, and the power to resist the culture industry by acknowledging this subjectivity, and the self, considering all of its aspects. This mode of viewing seeks to replace the idea of media consumption with that of media critique, requiring the subject to ruminate instead on "why do *I* dislike this movie" rather than "why is this movie disliked" and especially on what implications come with that answer (Stocchetti, 2013).

Of course, this *does* require one to watch a film one dislikes, which is not a pleasant experience, whereas the paracinematic viewing mode, as we have seen, is all about seeking out novel pleasurable experiences – with perhaps a short-term gratification in mind. This means, that it is better to "know thy enemy", to reflect on the products of the industry rather than to shut it down or escape it. We are a part of the culture industry and understanding its effects on our society is key to perhaps moving forward into a world where the constant influence of class disparity can be resisted.

7 RESULTS – *A THREE-STEP APPROACH*

Throughout this essay, I have reviewed the different elements of what makes a Badfilm using established scholarly writings on the subject. When condensed into a synthesis where all parts are combined, a Badfilm can be said to consist of an interplay between three factors, that together form a text/subject entity. The first factor concerns the content of text itself, the second the intent of the text and the final the audience reaction to and interaction with text, and with each other:

1. *A lack of skill.* The text is a result of a combination of specific, unfavorable productional and skill-based traits. Such as, but not limited to: clichéd screenwriting, bad acting, bizarre direction, error-prone or generally incomprehensible editing, poor audio postproduction, excessive us of stock footage etc. (Bartlett, 2015)

2. *A failure of intent and a lack of self-awareness*. The intent of the text is more or less obvious, but the faltering execution prevents that intent from being realized. This is often combined with theory of *auteurism*, where the intent of the text is substituted with the intent of the author – in film, usually the director (Dyck & Johnson, 2016; MacDowell & Zborowski, 2014)

3. *A participatory mode of viewership,* where the audience acknowledges the failures of the creator(s) and, rather than discard the text, choses to celebrate and consume it in different ways, many times through a cultish following and a performative enjoyment – thus elevating both the text, and their own taste (McCulloch, 2011; Sconce, 1995; Mathijs & Sexton, 2011)

Thus, a Badfilm can be said to be an amalgamation of different kinds of failures and of an audience willing to accept and enjoy these failures through an ironic or camp reading mode. These three factors provide a road map of dissecting, not only, *what* a Badfilm is, but *why* and *how* Badfilms are enjoyed. This model could be applied to any piece of media, any text can be a Badfilm (be it a music video, educational film, documentary etc.) as long as it adheres to the criteria stipulated: *technical incompetency, failure of intent and a participatory viewership*.

8 DISCUSSION

In this essay I have mapped out the phenomena of repurposing discredited movies, *Badfilms*, using a variety of *paracinematic* viewing modes, thus elevating them as works of art. A Badfilm is a text produced with a lack of proper skills. It is technically flawed, not in a sense that is either romantic or daring, but objectively bad. It does not meet the standards of the medium it is presented in – not as an act of rebellion or subversion but because it has failed to do so. The intent if the author(s) is not only poorly implemented, but effectively fails to such a degree, that the execution has the opposite effect. These films require the active participation of the audience to be enjoyed. The films present no clear answers or visions and need to be read using certain frameworks, that usually require at least some cultural capital.

However illuminating this essay *might* be, it is inevitably rather shallow. This subject is broad and contains a variety of interpretations and dissenting opinions, making it difficult to form a coherent narrative at times. I have chosen to focus mainly on the ulster of a single country, where the machinations of the "culture industry" is incredibly omnipresent and films are often treated as commodities. This also brings about a certain cinematic language, upon which, the notions of good and bad cinema then are formed – meaning, what is considered "bad" or "good" cinema might be partly decided by only a few Hollywood producers. Of course, the films of Hollywood are consumed all over the world, here in Finland as well, which is why it is still relevant to consider their effect, however shallow it may seem. One way of expanding this research, would naturally be to focus on a different part of the world, with a different cinematic language perhaps – to see how the notion of "bad" applies.

Another way of continuing the research started here, would be to through direct interactions with audiences, leaving out, the already established opinions of the "cultists", the cinephiles and the scholars, instead asking an audience directly whether or not they could find a Badfilm entertaining, let's say, before they are provided with the aforementioned reading mode, and after. Since knowledge of what the re-appropriation of a Badfilm is, changes the viewing experience – I would think.

Let's consider the following: If one was to watch a Badfilm, expecting a "normal" film experience, one would most likely be baffled and perhaps irritated over the issues of quality, condemning the film as garbage. If, however, somebody was to explain, and deconstruct the idea of the Badfilm – thus filling the gap in cultural capital - one could perhaps watch the film with a new outlook and maybe even come to enjoy it.

There are numerous things we take for granted when watching high budget Hollywood films, concerning sound, picture, acting etc. These elements, I think, alienate us from the content: since the purpose of a mainstream film, many times, is to try to convince the audience that it is not "a film" they are watching, but a version of real life caught on tape – through natural acting, appropriate lightning, sound- and film editing etc. It demands nothing from the audience. No suspension of disbelief and no critical thinking. The language of film is so ingrained, both with many mainstream filmmakers,

as well as with most audiences that the barrier of reality sometimes seems to disappear. Even if the subject matter might be over the top superheroes – made to sell commercial products. What paracinema can be, is a reminder that film is a *craft*, and that it is us humans that are the wielders of this *craft* – not a corporate machine. Nothing makes that clearer than a complete failure.

Another area of problematization is the on related to the "othering" of what is different. Cinephiles might consider paracinema, trash, b-movies etc. as oppositional, since they are always compared to a hypothetical "mainstream". But where are the lines drawn, between mainstream and "the other"? A monetary value could be applied, where films with a certain amount of budget would be considered mainstream and the rest "not mainstream", but that is wholly arbitrary - what is the difference then, between the most expensive film considered "not mainstream" and cheapest film considered "mainstream". A thousand dollars? That signifies absolutely nothing. There are even examples of films produced on a very low budget that have made an incredible profit. How well can we apply a binary system to something that is more or less a "gut feeling" and "sliding scale"? It is more than anything else, a narrative device to help us make sense of things – not perhaps as they are, but rather, as we think of them - and would benefit greatly from further research and definition. Even if it is not necessarily a monetary issue that divides the issue, there might be an establishment, that does - even in opposition. Not all films are accepted as Badfilms, even if they would fill the criteria stipulated in this essay, since it demands that a fickle audience decides whether it is, or it isn't paracinema. Maybe there could be a way to define a Badfilm without the audience participation clause presented here?

Continuing from this discussion, what happens to films that are rejected by *both* the mainstream *and* paracinematic audiences? Films of too great a "quality" to be of any interest to paracinematic audiences, but of too poor "quality" to appeal to mainstream audiences. Where do they belong? Could they be "the real bad cinema" – films that nobody can enjoy?

For a long time, before the internet, watching obscure Cult films was a matter of some hardship. Nowadays, no matter how obscure the media, it is possible to find and

take part – opening up a whole new world, that doesn't revolve around a specific geographic place. This is how I learned of, and started to participate in *paracinema*, through curiosity and (almost) instant availability. *Paracinema*, although not a genre, offers something that even the most cynical cinephile longs for. Something new, surprising, unpredictable and perhaps more than anything, in some ways naïve. The sensation that not everything can be taken for granted, such as our shared cinematic language, or our notions of quality and meaning. This will, of course, not last. It is not the media that needs to change or be different. It cannot. It is us that need to change – if we want. Paracinema taught me to be critical and to take into consideration more than just the text presented before me. I think this is the ultimate merit for a repurposed trash film – it taught me the joy of critical thinking and critical viewing. Instead of dismissing, take part, ponder and critique!

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