

Mark of the Auteur: *Mark of the Devil's* Blu-Ray Release and the Cult of

Authorship

Michael Fuchs

Abstract

The disputes between writer/director Michael Armstrong and producer/original scriptwriter/director Adrian Hoven play a key role in *Mark of the Devil's* (1970) production history. This article explores how the bonus features included on the movie's Blu-ray/DVD combo release tell the story of *Mark of the Devil's* production, in general, and Armstrong and Hoven's roles, in particular. In the process, this article demonstrates that the ancillary materials do not merely relay the events that transpired behind the scenes, but, in fact, further deepen the drama surrounding these events in order to nurture interest in the myths associated with *Mark of the Devil* and thereby prolong its cultural presence.

Keywords: *Mark of the Devil*, authorship, paratexts, bonus features, cult cinema.

Introduction

In their introduction to cult cinema, Ernest Mathijs and Jamie Sexton suggest that the “auteur figure is [...] important to cult cinema”, as “the need to locate creative human beings” is instrumental in a cult community’s attempts to differentiate a movie from the dreaded homogeneous mass of the mainstream.¹ Indeed, as Matt Hills has noted, cult author figures “are promoted [...] as the source of cult texts’ distinctiveness”.² The cross-medial promotion to which Hills refers usually employs channels such as magazines, interviews, websites and social media, which are referred to as “paratexts” in narratology. These ancillary texts “negotiat[e] or determin[e] interactions” between “the triumvirate of Text, Audience, and Industry”.³ Thus, paratexts suggest “ways of looking at [a] film” and provide “frames for understanding or engaging with it”.⁴

While in the past, particularly in niche genres, fans had to actively seek out paratextual information in industry publications or fanzines and at conventions, nowadays, many of these

additional materials are assembled on DVDs and Blu-rays in the form of bonus features such as commentary tracks, making-ofs and featurettes.

In their seminal study of DVD textuality, Robert Brookey and Robert Westerfelhaus thus stress:

Primary and secondary texts are usually physically distinct from one another and are often read at different times, creating an intertextual relationship that is marked by both temporal and spatial distance. However, by including such distinct but interrelated texts in a self-contained package, the DVD turns this intertextual relationship into an intratextual relationship.⁵

Although Brookey and Westerfelhaus were somewhat overzealous in celebrating the merging of the movie itself and secondary texts in a single package as representing the dismantling of the primary text-vs.-secondary texts hierarchy, the degree to which DVDs and Blu-rays have both highlighted the significance of ancillary materials and increasingly tapped into their potentials cannot be overestimated. Indeed, Barbara Klinger has concisely summed up the situation by noting that the “DVD acts literally as an ambassador of context, entering the home complete with its armada of discourses

meant to influence reception, including behind-the-scenes industry information and commentary tracks”.⁶

Paratexts and the Cult of Authorship

Since one of the commentary tracks featured on DVD and Blu-ray releases is usually voiced by the movie’s director, while other bonus features tend to emphasise the director’s crucial role in the filmmaking process, Catherine Grant has suggested that DVDs should be understood as ‘auteur machines’ which encourage “a comprehensive attentiveness or responsiveness to the film’s authorial context”.⁷ In light of Grant’s argument, it seems hardly surprising that one topic comes up time and again in the bonus features included in *Mark of the Devil’s* (*Hexen bis aufs Blut gequält*, Michael Armstrong, 1970) Blu-ray/DVD combo release – namely that, in the words of Michael Armstrong, “more blood was spilled off-screen than on-screen” due to various problems between Armstrong and Adrian Hoven.⁸ In fact, the tension between Armstrong and Hoven has been a consistent

topic in nearly all discussions of the film for many years.

Indeed, when perusing reviews of *Mark of the Devil’s* recent Blu-ray release, one barely finds a writer who does not address the well-known conflict between writer/director Michael Armstrong and producer/original scriptwriter/director Adrian Hoven. Paul Metcalf, for example, notes, “there was a lot of controversy behind the scenes, especially the tension between Michael Armstrong[,] the director/co-writer[,] and Adrian Hoven[,] producer/co-writer and director of some of the movie”.⁹ Similarly, *DVD Drive-In’s* review states, “The director seems to have not seen eye to eye with Hoven”,¹⁰ and *DVD Sentries’* Luigi Bastardo quips, “Armstrong and Hoven quarreled over every little thing”.¹¹

Admittedly, it is entirely within the realm of possibility that the behind-the-scenes drama’s ubiquity in these recent reviews results from the important role the film’s production (hi)story assumes in the bonus features included on the

discs. However, Clemens Ottawa's 2011 book *Die großen Skandalfilme der Kinogeschichte* (*The Most Scandalous Movies in Film History*) tellingly stresses that "the eccentric Brit was more likely to be seen at parties of the Austrian in-crowd and consuming drugs than appearing on the set, which is why Adrian Hoven started directing".¹² The book thus testifies to the apparent interest in the myths surrounding the movie's production (and the struggles between Armstrong and Hoven, in particular) even before the Blu-ray was released. Considering this continuing curiosity about the movie's authorship, it is hardly surprising that Armstrong is asked about the movie's genesis only seconds into the Blu-ray commentary. Beginning to tell the (hi)story of *Mark of the Devil's* production, Armstrong relates:

I was originally approached to direct a film which was entitled *The Witch-Hunter Dr Dracula*. The less said about it, the better [...]. It was awful. It was as if they'd on Monday seen *Witchfinder General* and on Tuesday seen a *Dracula* film, trying to spice it all together [...]. There wasn't really a plot as such. [...] [T]here were lots of witches who flew around, and lots of caves, and loads of torture, with girls with big breasts being tortured the whole time [...]. I think Adrian Hoven had written *Witch-Hunter Dr Dracula*, and I wrote the script of *Mark of*

the Devil, which is the film that we're watching now [and] which is where the conflicts arose during the [shooting of the] movie.

The above quotations from reviews, Ottawa's explicit inclusion of 'making-of' information in his description of *Mark of the Devil*, and Armstrong's emphasis on the conflicts that arose behind the scenes testify to the dominant role Hoven and Armstrong's disputes assume in the legends surrounding *Mark of the Devil's* production.

If you are reading this article, chances are you know the story (or a version thereof – what 'really' happened is, of course, subject to personal interpretation): *Witchfinder General* (1968), directed by Michael Reeves and starring Vincent Price, was a smash hit – particularly for a low-budget movie. Adrian Hoven and *Mark of the Devil's* eventual producer Dieter Menz planned to exploit the movie's success and wanted Reeves to direct *Brenn, Hexe, Brenn* (*Burn, Witch, Burn; or The Witch-Hunter Dr Dracula*, according to Armstrong's version of the tale), but Reeves surprisingly died at the age

of twenty-five before the film's production even started.¹³ Michael Armstrong was approached instead and took over the director's chair. Producer and scriptwriter Adrian Hoven, who had purportedly wanted to direct the movie himself, was not satisfied with Armstrong's interpretation of what Hoven considered *his* movie. As a result, Hoven began staging and directing scenes himself with an unplanned second unit. Since Armstrong had "had enough", as he puts it in the commentary track, once shooting was over, Hoven exerted his influence in post-production and made sure that some of his scenes were included in the final movie. Even though Hoven apparently altered the film, Armstrong claims in the commentary track that *Mark of the Devil* is "more or less" the movie he had always meant to release to the public.¹⁴

From this confusing situation emerges a question that looms large over *Mark of the Devil*: who is the movie's 'author'? Director Michael Armstrong or producer and "artistic supervisor" ("künstlerische Gesamtleitung", as the German credits have it) Adrian Hoven? The

paratexts included on the discs repeatedly raise this question, but never explicitly answer it. This non-committal stance on the question of *Mark of the Devil*'s authorship echoes Mark Bernard's argument that bonus materials construct "multiple and divergent narratives" surrounding a movie.¹⁵ However, my contention is that – consciously or not – in their totality, the bonus features included in the Austrian Blu-ray/DVD combo release of *Mark of the Devil* do, in fact, provide a relatively clear (albeit somewhat unsatisfying) answer to the question of the movie's authorship.

Cult Auteurs?

Of course, trying to assign the authorship of a movie to a single individual sounds counter-intuitive, as it belies the reality of film production. After all, filmmaking is a collaborative process involving numerous figures who have – more or less – valid claims to authorship. Indeed, as James Naremore has explained, in the history of cinema, a number of different parties have been considered authors, including photographers, composers and even

stars.¹⁶ In fact, the ‘author’-tag has even been applied to “the old-style corporate executives [...], who functioned as impresarios and who wanted to keep their names before the public”.¹⁷

However, the person most often credited as a movie’s ‘author’ is the director. This conception may be traced to Andrew Sarris’s ‘*auteur* theory’, which he distilled from François Truffaut’s 1954 essay “Une certaine tendance du cinéma français” and discussions sparked by Truffaut’s essay in the iconic French journal *Cahiers du Cinéma*. Sarris misunderstood Truffaut’s polemic and transformed it into a theory which suggests that the director is – to use a sports term – a triple threat, since he functions as “a technician, a stylist, and an *auteur*”.¹⁸ In his reflections on Truffaut’s original article, Sarris clarifies that the French filmmaker’s “greatest heresy was [...] in his ascribing authorship to Hollywood directors hitherto tagged with the deadly epithets of commercialism”.¹⁹ By featuring directors such as Douglas Sirk and Edgar G. Ulmer (then considered mere hired hands in the B-movie

business) next to the likes of Orson Welles and D. W. Griffith in his pantheon of directors,²⁰ Sarris, likewise, granted artistic legitimacy to the commercial studio system. However, critics of Sarris’s inclusive gesture argued that he embraced drivel and encouraged the concomitant downfall of good taste: “*auteur* critics seem [...] deeply involved, even dedicated, in becoming connoisseurs of trash”, complained Pauline Kael in an early response to Sarris.²¹

Sarris defended his approach by explaining that *auteur* critics are “obsessed with the wholeness of the art and the artist”.²² While for Truffaut, this wholeness was most evidently realised by what he termed “*homme[s] de cinéma*” (filmmakers who directed movies based on their own scripts),²³ Sarris privileged mere directors, arguing that a movie’s parts, “however entertaining, individually, must cohere meaningfully. This meaningful coherence is more likely when the director dominates the proceedings with skill and purpose”.²⁴ This emphasis on coherence and purpose leads to

what Sarris referred to as “the first premise of the *auteur* theory”, namely “the technical competence of the director as a criterion of value. A badly directed or an undirected film has no importance in a critical scale of value”.²⁵

Michael Armstrong: The Romantic Genius

After writing and directing the critically acclaimed short *The Image* (1967), Michael Armstrong “was regarded by some as another young auteur in the Reeves/Polanski mould”, as Ian Cooper has remarked.²⁶ Despite being only twenty-five when *Mark of the Devil* went into production, the British filmmaker endowed the film with a certain degree of gravitas (with the assistance of actor Herbert Lom and director of photography Ernst Kalinke). In his commentary track, Armstrong does not fail to highlight his special status in the film’s production and his early aspirations towards greatness, noting that a running joke in late-1960s’ England suggested that any filmmaker named Mike would be proclaimed a genius at age twenty-five.

Although Armstrong presents this anecdote half-jokingly, it still lends an air of credibility to his

assertion that he is the movie’s sole creator.

Indeed, the commentary track allows Armstrong to fashion an image of himself as the central creative force in the movie’s production. For example, around the eight-minute mark, Armstrong further elaborates on his struggles with Hoven:

I read this original script, which, I thought, was just appalling, refused to have anything to do with. I was told to have a free hand to re-write it, so I sat down, completely wrote a new script. Hoven hated the new script and wanted to get back to the original, but couldn’t because the money guys were more prone towards wanting to make my picture than his.

In these few sentences, Armstrong emphasises the differences between his script and Hoven’s, thereby staking his claim to the scriptwriting credits, which, officially, went to Sergio Casstner and Percy Parker. Interestingly, while the *Internet Movie Database* suggests that “Sergio Casstner” and “Percy Parker” are the pen names of Armstrong and Hoven, respectively, Dieter Menz (who claims in his self-introduction that he and Hoven developed the idea of the movie together) maintains that both names are, in fact, Hoven’s *noms de plume*



Mark of the Devil's opening credits suggest that the script was co-authored by Sergio Casstner and Percy Parker, while Michael Armstrong directed the movie and Adrian Hoven – at least according to the German credits – was the film's producer and "artistic supervisor".

(note, however, that about five and a half minutes into the commentary track, Menz suggests that they hired Armstrong because he directed *Witchfinder General*, to point out just one of the factual errors in Menz's recollections).²⁷ While Armstrong grudgingly acknowledges Hoven as the original script's author as the opening credits roll, he downplays Hoven's actual involvement by hemming and hawing about the legal requirements of German film production. It seems as if the mere sight of Hoven's name inscribed upon what Armstrong considers "his" movie catches him totally off guard. However, his calm and assertive demeanour throughout the rest of the commentary track not only makes the viewer quickly forget this moment, but also helps reinforce Armstrong's claim to both scripting and directing credits, thereby

transforming him into an *auteur* in Truffaut's sense.

In addition, Armstrong's statement quoted in the previous paragraph emphasises how his script developed independently. This rhetorical gesture marks only the first step in constructing the British filmmaker as an author figure in the Romantic tradition. While in the English-speaking world, this notion of authorship is nearly inseparable from William Wordsworth's elaborations on authorship in his introduction to the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), Thomas Carlyle probably best summed up the concept when he combined English, German and French aesthetic theory in his 1840 lecture "The Hero as Man of Letters", suggesting that the author is an autonomous individual inspired by originality and genius.²⁸ Various cast members, as well as

Armstrong himself, repeatedly highlight these two traits. For example, at one point during his ruminations on *Mark of the Devil*'s production, Armstrong notes: "I was asked [...] in an interview before whether I was influenced by *Witchfinder General* – not at all, really". A little later, he hammers home the message by stressing: "The script and the whole thing is me". In an interview included among the bonus features, Herbert Fux supports Armstrong's self-construction, for he acknowledges that "Armstrong was the creative genius" behind *Mark of the Devil* and backs up this statement by referring to the sequel's failures, saying: "The second movie [...] was not good – Armstrong was not involved".

Even though Armstrong apparently assumed an important role in the movie's production and maintains that – as mentioned above – "the whole thing is [him]", he concedes that there were "one or two little alterations" to his movie. These changes involve the score (which is at times hopelessly inappropriate and diagnosed as "dull" by Armstrong), the editing (some of the

cuts seem to drive Armstrong nearly insane), the special effect used when the advocate loses his eye (the only alteration that garners praise from Armstrong in the commentary track), the scenes featuring Hoven and his son Percy, and the ending. The latter receives Armstrong's harshest criticism, for he believes that the original ending, in which the witch hunters' innocent victims rose from the dead and claimed Christian's body, "would have put the film into that other dimension". The ending included in the film, with Vanessa running through the woods, has too much of "a fairy tale-like feel" and thus somehow misses the mark, suggests Armstrong (interestingly, Menz deems the original ending too "kitschy"). Armstrong speculates that the editor did not understand the ending and "couldn't quite make out how it would fit in" and thus removed it. This emphasis on the lack of understanding of the original ending constructs Armstrong as the visionary artist in the Romantic tradition – a misunderstood, alienated and unconventional individual.

Although a number of the interviews included on the discs and various remarks on the commentary tracks testify to Armstrong's 'creative vision', the actors and actresses in particular repeatedly stress how his artistic aspirations, in fact, overburdened the production. Udo Kier, for example, states that Armstrong "had too many creative ideas". In the same vein, Michael Maien notes that Armstrong "wanted to make [...] a highly artistic movie", which, apparently, was not what the producers and distributors had in mind. Kier tellingly adds, "Armstrong was that kind of director who would've filmed at least for four more weeks", which the budgetary constraints did not allow. Thus, even though Armstrong admits that his involvement in *Mark of the Devil* started out with him being hired to make the movie, he rapidly asserted his artistic authority over it, as both Armstrong himself and other members of the production team testify. However, his artistic aspirations for the film appear to have been entirely incompatible with the commercial motivations guiding its production.

Adrian Hoven: The Goal-Oriented Manager

Herbert Lom makes Armstrong's shortcomings most explicit when he explains that Hoven "took over the direction of the film when [Armstrong] turned out to be not quite up to it". Whereas Armstrong is represented as the creative genius in the bonus features, Hoven assumes the role of the actor-turned-producer-creator who understands the film business and simply gets the job done. As certain interviews and commentaries clarify, this business orientation had already surfaced before Hoven took over the director's chair. Dieter Menz, for example, relates that Atlas International held the rights to distribute *Witchfinder General* in the German-speaking world. When exposed to the movie, "Adrian Hoven came up with the idea of shooting a similar one". Evidently, Hoven recognised the commercial potentials of replicating *Witchfinder General*; artistic aspirations were of little – if any – relevance to his decision to produce a rip-off. Whereas Armstrong assumes the role of the solitary genius inspired by a heavenly muse, Hoven

emerges as a creator who is primarily driven by business interests.

In addition to these influences from within the entertainment industry (i.e. earlier cinematic products, such as *Witchfinder General*, and the commercial interests driving such endeavours), the movie was (purportedly) also inspired by historical reality.²⁹ In particular, Menz and Fux underline how legal documents of witch trials served as the historical foundation for Hoven's script and influenced his eventual stylistic decisions. As Menz stresses, this research into the past of the region in which the film is set helped Hoven to replicate authentically what happened during the witch hunts. In other words, in contrast to Armstrong, who performs the role of (and is performatively constructed as) the solitary artist who draws on his own creative energies, Hoven emerges as a type of creator who refutes the traditional notion of the author as the lone, visionary creator. By highlighting Hoven's embeddedness in various discursive fields, the interviews suggest that *Mark of the Devil* is not the creation of a single artist, but

rather is "woven entirely with citations, references, echoes, cultural languages [...], antecedent or contemporary, which cut across it through and through in a vast stereophony".³⁰

This stereophony also becomes evident in what might be termed one of Hoven's trademarks – cameos. Indeed, Hoven appeared in the first five movies he directed, including *Mark of the Devil*, but he obviously 'borrowed' this device from earlier innovators in the film industry. Ernest Mathijs has tellingly observed that cameos are "signpost[s] for cult cinema", since "these moments" may generate the "obsessive mining for details and endless kinds of talk" typical of cult texts.³¹ However, Hoven's occupation of diegetic space and time, in addition, provides a trace, a "sign [...] left in the text by the author",³² which functions as an unmistakable claim to authorship. Accordingly, this self-figuration (as animation scholar Donald Crafton has referred to the animator's self-reflexive self-representation³³) serves as a visible assertion of Hoven's presence (which continues to haunt the

movie after his death in the real world) and his role in the movie's production.

In the bonus features, Dieter Menz emerges as the individual who most vehemently supports this claim. For example, in the commentary track to which Menz contributed, the German opening credits trigger his assertion that naming Hoven as the movie's "producer and artistic supervisor" was the right move because Hoven "made the movie", as he emphasises at another point. And even though, for example, Herbert Fux explains that Armstrong's direction gave the movie a distinct style that Hoven merely copied, Hoven introduced what came to be known as *Mark of the Devil's* trademark – its visceral torture scenes. Actor Michael Maien relates:

The distributors and producers [...] wanted to more clearly transport a feeling for the time of the events by depicting its harshness and cruelty. [Armstrong], however, was too sensitive. He didn't want to show too much blood. [...] In fact, he even shied away from shooting certain scenes.

Hoven, on the other hand, "was not the most sensitive person. [...] He always wanted more",

as Maien puts it. Whereas Armstrong's artistic aspirations may have suited the tastes of mainstream audiences, Hoven's excessive display of bodies in pain apparently addressed a different audience. As Jeffrey Sconce stressed as early as 1995, marginal cinematic traditions "celebrat[e] the cultural objects deemed most noxious (low-brow) by their taste culture as a whole".³⁴ He supported this argument by observing:

Paracinematic films [...] rarely exhibit such pronounced stylistic virtuosity as the result of a 'conscious' artistic agenda. [...] [R]ather than explore the systematic application of style as the elite techniques of a cinematic artist, paracinematic culture celebrates the systematic 'failure' or 'distortion' of conventional cinematic style.³⁵

This is why, as Ernest Mathijs and Xavier Mendik have remarked: "'yukkie stuff' is a sure way to grant films a cult status".³⁶ Hoven's stylistic decisions (i.e. primarily the inclusion of gory scenes of torture, mutilation and death, along with the campy score) seem tailor-made for a (sub-)culture in search of alternative cinematic pleasures. Accordingly, *Mark of the Devil's* style lends credence to the view that



Gaby Fuchs, Percy Hoven, Udo Kier, Dieter Menz, Wigbert Wicker and Uwe Huber (from left to right) gathered to voice the German commentary track for *Mark of the Devil's* Austrian Blu-ray released by Turbine Media in 2012.

Hoven was the movie's creator, as his contributions are precisely the aspects of the film that fans have latched on to. However, Hoven is at a distinct disadvantage vis-à-vis Armstrong, as the latter's commentary allows him personally to reflect on *Mark of the Devil's* production and to provide his own particular perspective on how the events unfolded. At first glance, the German commentary track provided by Udo Kier, Dieter Menz, Percy Hoven, Gaby Fuchs, Wigbert Wicker and Uwe Huber suggests a more objective view on account of its combination of a number of different voices. However, Menz's tales are filled with contradictions and Gaby Fuchs repeatedly underlines that, forty years later, she can no longer remember much about what happened during the film's production

(including who directed scenes she starred in), which not only casts a shadow of doubt on the collected (and collective) stories told by the group, but, in fact, also grants precedence to Armstrong's solo-track, in which no one disagrees with what he says and which lacks any traces of uncertainty as to what happened in 1969. Armstrong, accordingly, seems to take "ownership over the debates" surrounding the movie.³⁷ At the same time, however, the heterogeneous, contradictory and polyvalent voices featured in the other bonus features make such a project impossible.

The Cult of *Mark of the Devil*

These contradictions and the multiple voices assembled in *Mark of the Devil's* bonus features return us to the question of whether *Mark of the*

Devil can be conceived of as the brainchild of a single individual. In a relatively recent article on cinematic authorship, Peter Sellors has rightfully stressed that “authorship is not an instance of solitary genius but, like most other human activities, a social practice”.³⁸ Indeed, in the commentary tracks, several members of cast and crew are highlighted as leaving their marks on the movie, chief among them cinematographer Ernst Kalinke and actor Herbert Lom. Ultimately, since the paratexts included in the Blu-ray edition never explicitly take a stand concerning *Mark of the Devil*’s author, they suggest that singling out one individual would belie the reality of the film’s production: like any other movie, *Mark of the Devil* was a collaborative endeavour.

Yet beyond capitulating to the reality of film production, not granting primacy to one potential ‘author’ over another creates an added – and most likely not unwanted – effect.

Catherine Grant has suggested that in DVD culture, “‘understanding the film’ is not reducible simply to understanding the story *told*

by the film, but instead to understanding the *story of the film*”.³⁹ This argument also holds true for cult communities, which embrace the “complex, confused, controversial or bumpy origins” of their celebrated objects.⁴⁰ The Blu-ray’s ambiguous stance on the question of authorship simultaneously mystifies *Mark of the Devil*’s creation and fuels speculation, thereby fostering commitment from the fan community. However, the Blu-ray’s engagement with the authorship debate is only one ingredient of the disc set’s self-reflexive discursive emphasis on the film’s cult appeal.

For example, in a pre-title menu sequence, Udo Kier briefly introduces the movie and stresses the promotional efforts made to market the movie during its original theatrical run. While doing so, he not only mentions the promotional gimmick of the infamous vomit bag, which was given to cinema patrons in the United States, but also stresses that Germans were cautioned not to watch the movie if they suffered from heart problems. In this way, the bonus features stress that, as in the case of so many other cult movies,



The boxset's cover taps into cult discourses. Cover of the Austrian Blu-ray released by Turbine Media in 2012.

Mark of the Devil's promotional campaigns tried to present the film as a cult object even before it reached an audience – “packaging it as cult to fit into a niche market segment”.⁴¹ This niche marketing is further emphasised by the Blu-ray/DVD box's reminder that this release is a limited edition, with purportedly individual numbers printed on each case (1676/5000 on my copy). Although this may appear to contradict the usual reason for releasing movies on home media (i.e. to reach the largest possible

audience), such limited releases of course specifically target collectors and thus consciously exploit the ‘rarity’ value of cult classics.

A similar paradox emerges on another level from the combo disc set's packaging, since the graphic layout obviously taps into B-movie and grindhouse traditions of the 1960s and 1970s.

While this retro-style may be linked to the recent grindhouse nostalgia David Church has



The boxset's inlay likewise draws on cult discourses. Scan of the Austrian Blu-ray released by Turbine Medien in 2012.

discussed,⁴² *Mark of the Devil* is, of course, a movie made and screened during those very days, and the cover design therefore suggests a nostalgic trip down memory lane in order to re-experience the film in ways very similar to the original theatrical experience. In contrast, the back cover stresses that “this shocking cult classic is presented in never-before-seen video and audio quality”. Thus, the box both elicits nostalgia for the (memory of the) original cinematic experience and simultaneously promises a viewing experience that will improve upon the original. Although Mathijs and Mendik have listed textual openness as one of the characteristics of cult films,⁴³ their remarks on textual openness focus on the ‘anatomy’ of the

film. However, in the case of the *Mark of the Devil* Blu-ray release, this openness also extends to the movie’s reception: watching the movie on Blu-ray may serve as a nostalgia-filled trip into the past, but it may also inspire an appreciation of the technology employed during the film’s restoration and used to enable audiences to watch the movie at home – or it may perform both of these functions.

All of these paradoxes and contradictions contribute to the network of polyvalent discourses surrounding *Mark of the Devil*. As Mark Bernard has observed, bonus features tend to “create a larger, multivalent narrative that fictionalises the making [and, in the case of cult

movies, distribution, M. F.] of the film and mythologises those involved in the making”.⁴⁴ This is certainly true of the *Mark of the Devil* Blu-ray. In this production mythology, Michael Armstrong and Adrian Hoven assume special positions, and the stories about the disagreements and conflicts between these two individuals are an important part of the “murky

and bizarre legends” that have assured *Mark of the Devil*’s continued cultural presence.⁴⁵ By refusing to clearly endorse either of the would-be authors, the Blu-ray set guarantees that generations of viewers and fans will continue to discuss the question of who *Mark of the Devil*’s ‘true’ creator may, in fact, be.

¹ Mathijs, E. and Sexton, J. (2011) *Cult Cinema: An Introduction*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 75.

² Hills, M. (2004) “Defining Cult TV: Texts, Inter-Texts and Fan Audiences”, In: Allen, R. C. and Hill, A. (eds) *The Television Studies Reader*. London: Routledge, 509–523: 522.

³ Gray, J. (2010) *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts*. New York: New York University Press, 23.

⁴ Gray, J. (2010) *Show Sold Separately*, 10–11.

⁵ Brookey, R. A. and Westerfelhaus, R. (2002) “Hiding Homoeroticism in Plain View: The *Fight Club* DVD as Digital Closet”, *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 19 (1), 21–43: 23.

⁶ Klinger, B. (2008) “The DVD Cinephile: Viewing Heritages and Home Film Cultures”, In: Bennett, J. and Brown, T. (eds) *Film and Television After DVD*. Abingdon: Routledge, 19–44: 21.

⁷ Grant, C. (2008) “Auteur Machines? Auteurism and the DVD”, In: Bennett, J. and Brown, T. (eds) *Film and Television After DVD*. Abingdon: Routledge, 101–115: 111.

⁸ All quotations by cast and crew members are taken from the Austrian Blu-Ray/DVD combo release of *Hexen bis aufs Blut gequält* published by Turbine Medien in spring 2012. I translated all of the German quotations (Kier, Maien, Menz and Fux). It may be emphasised that the UK and US releases by Arrow include different bonus materials, such as a 48-minute documentary on *Mark of the Devil*’s impact, and the Arrow Blu-ray features a restored 1.0 audio track for the purists, which is missing from the Austrian disc.

⁹ Metcalf, P. (2014) “*Mark of the Devil* Blu-ray (Arrow Video) Review”, *Pissed Off Geek: Reviews*

with an Edge, 23 September, <http://www.pissedoffgeek.com/2014/09/23/mark-of-the-devil-arrow-video-review/>

¹⁰ Anon. (2014) “*Mark of the Devil* (1970) Blu-Ray/DVD Combo”, *DVD Drive-In*, <http://www.dvddrive-in.com/reviews/i-m/markofthedevil70.htm>

¹¹ Bastardo, L. (2015) “*Mark of the Devil* Blu-ray Review: Say Hello to Arrow Video USA, Kids!”, *DVD Sentries*, 7 March, <http://cinemasentries.com/review/mark-of-the-devil-blu-ray-review-say-hello-to-arrow-video-usa-kids/>

¹² Ottawa, C. (2011) *Die großen Skandalfilme der Kinogeschichte: 55 Filmporträts – große Aufreger – von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*. Halle: Cornelius, 40; my translation.

¹³ Halligan, B. (2003) *Michael Reeves*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 219–222.

¹⁴ On *Mark of the Devil*’s production history, see also Andreas Ehrenreich’s contribution to this issue of *Cine-Excess*.

¹⁵ Bernard, M. (2014) *Selling the Splat Pack: The DVD Revolution and the American Horror Film*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 113.

¹⁶ Naremore, J. (1999) “Authorship”, In: Miller, T. and Stam, R. (eds) *A Companion to Film Theory*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 9–24: 9.

¹⁷ Naremore, J. (1999) “Authorship”, 9.

¹⁸ Sarris, A. (1970) “Notes on the *Auteur* Theory in 1962”, In: Sitney, P. A. (ed.) *Film Culture Reader*. New York: Praeger: 121–135: 133.

¹⁹ Sarris, A. ([1968] 1996) *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions, 1929–1968, with a New Afterword by the Author*. New York: Da Capo, 28.

-
- ²⁰ Sarris, A. (1963) “The American Cinema”, *Film Culture*, 28, 1–51.
- ²¹ Kael, P. (1963) “Squares and Circles”, *Film Quarterly*, 16 (3), 12–26: 17.
- ²² Sarris, A. ([1968] 1996) *The American Cinema*, 30.
- ²³ Truffaut, F. (1954) “Une certaine tendance du cinéma français”, *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 31, 15–29: 20.
- ²⁴ Sarris, A. ([1968] 1996) *The American Cinema*, 30.
- ²⁵ Sarris, A. (1970) “Notes on the *Auteur* Theory in 1962”, 133.
- ²⁶ Cooper, I. (2011) *Witchfinder General*. Leighton: Auteur, 91.
- ²⁷ On the lack of clarity concerning the scriptwriting credits, see also Ehrenreich’s contribution to this issue.
- ²⁸ Carlyle, T. ([1840] 2013) “The Hero as Man of Letters”, In: Sorensen, D. R. and Kinser, B. E. (eds) *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 132–161.
- ²⁹ As Ehrenreich points out in his contribution to this issue, the “Deutsches Filminstitut Frankfurt mentions a book entitled *Geschichte der Hexenprozesse* (*History of the Witch Trials*) by Soldan Heppe as the screenplay’s literary source”.
- ³⁰ Barthes, R. (1978) “From Work to Text”, In: Heath, S. (ed.) *Image – Music – Text*. New York: Hill & Wang, 155–164: 160.
- ³¹ Mathijs, E. (2013) “Cronenberg Connected: Cameo Acting, Cult Stardom and Supertexts”, In: Egan, K. and Thomas, S. (eds) *Cult Film Stardom: Offbeat Attractions and Processes of Cultification*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 144–162: 147.

- ³² Gaines, J. M. (2002) “Of Cabbages and Authors”, In: Bean, J. M. and Negra, D. (eds) *Feminist Reader in Early Cinema*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 88–118: 94.
- ³³ Crafton, D. (1993) *Before Mickey: The Animated Film, 1898–1928*. 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 11.
- ³⁴ Sconce, J. (1995) “‘Trashing’ the Academy: Taste, Excess, and an Emerging Politics of Cinematic Style”, *Screen*, 36 (4), 371–393: 376.
- ³⁵ Sconce, J. (1995) “‘Trashing’ the Academy”, 385.
- ³⁶ Mathijs, E. and Mendik, X. (2008) “Editorial Introduction: What Is Cult Film?”, In: Mathijs, E. and Mendik, X. (eds) *The Cult Film Reader*. London: Open University Press, 1–11: 3.
- ³⁷ Mathijs, E. (2008) *David Cronenberg: From Baron of Blood to Cultural Hero*. London: Wallflower, 5.
- ³⁸ Sellors, P. (2007) “Collective Authorship in Film”, *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 65 (3), 263–271: 263.
- ³⁹ Grant, C. (2008) “Auteur Machines”, 107; italics in original.
- ⁴⁰ Mathijs, E. and Mendik, X. (2008) “What Is Cult Film?”, 7.
- ⁴¹ Mathijs, E. and Mendik, X. (2008) “What Is Cult Film?”, 7.
- ⁴² Church, D. (2015) *Grindhouse Nostalgia: Memory, Home Video and Exploitation Film Fandom*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- ⁴³ Mathijs, E. and Mendik, X. (2008) “What Is Cult Film?”, 3, 9.
- ⁴⁴ Bernard, M. (2014) *Selling the Splat Pack*, 113.
- ⁴⁵ Mathijs, E. and Mendik, X. (2008) “What Is Cult Film?”, 7.