

Forging an Artifact through Artifice

Manufacturing History in the Digital Age

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Since the “digital turn,” the realm of the digital has, perhaps ironically, foregrounded a desire for analog aesthetics by offering manifestations of precisely the elements that would seem to define analog aesthetics as flawed. Even while the advertisements for products such as the iPhone continuously promise ever more impressive contrast ratio and “studio-quality” camera capabilities, users are also offered either manipulated products or the ability to manipulate digital files to mimic analog media. For instance, within digital photography, an application such as Photoshop allows a given user to age a contemporary photograph with the click of a button. As Julian Kilker (2009, 60) explains, “Photoshop includes ‘dodge’ and ‘burn’ tools, as well as many digital ‘filters’ (algorithms) which modify the image data to suggest a variety of effects, including damage.” Similarly, the social media application Instagram provides that same user the ability to make their image appear as if taken by a Polaroid camera. Or, with contemporary digital music, producers are able to add record scratches or pops to a given track before releasing the mp3. On the one hand, there may be an inclination to reduce these possibilities to a nostalgic reaction to the loss of these older forms of media, but, on the other hand, they may provide even more clues to the nature of our increasingly digitized lives.

According to Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin (2000, 45), it is precisely these connections to previous media that define the digital. They use the term remediation, which refers to “the representation of one medium in another [and which]...is a defining characteristics of the new digital media.” This essay argues that the reproduction of the flaws and failures of residual media becomes a means of manufacturing a sense of physical presence and history in digital images that, as a form, they otherwise appear to lack. Using the first film (*Planet Terror*) from the Robert Rodriguez-Quentin Tarantino double feature *Grindhouse* (2007) as a case study, I claim that instances of digital mimicry allow media producers to engage in a process of history-making. As I will argue, this action articulates a frustration with not only digital aesthetics, but also with the sanitization of previously apparent markers of physical existence and material engagement. However, the irony at the heart of this film is precisely that which Bolter and Grusin explain with respect to the digital, as a whole. By using digital cinema as the means to consider celluloid, Rodriguez actually highlights the interconnection of the digital with the analog. Rather than merely enacting a sort of nostalgic rumination on the past or ambivalence with respect to technology, *Planet Terror’s* deployment of digital means of rendering celluloid decay as a historiography process becomes a means through which we can understand the particularity (and interconnectedness) of the analog and the digital. By first examining the scholarly discourse surrounding the pristine, ahistorical qualities of the digital contra the deterioration defining celluloid, I can highlight both the aesthetic qualities of *Planet Terror* that use the digital to mimic the analog and the thematic concerns that extend those aesthetics to a more nuanced understanding of both the digital and its predecessor.

Digital Cinema and the Erasure of Entropic Noise

Since the onset of the digital turn, scholars, filmmakers, and critics have focused on the specifics of the digital and the analog largely in terms of whether this shift represents a radical break for cinema as a medium. By first discussing the terms by which digital and celluloid cinema have been characterized, I hope to show how *Planet Terror* actually represents an exercise whereby the specifics of celluloid and its connection to materiality come to be understood, however ironically, through digitization itself.

The digital turn supposedly represents a break from the “residual” medium of cinema. As Bolter and Grusin (2000, 20-24) argue with respect to digital technology, writ large, transparency and immediacy may be an apparent goal of these innovations, at least initially. That is to say that digital might appear to erase the mediation of media itself. Though they go on to complicate this notion – citing the interdependence of transparency and hypermediacy, to which I will turn in later sections – it is noteworthy to highlight the ways in which similar sentiments have been echoed by scholars with respect to the digital. In particular, rather than deploying the language of “immediacy,” many assessments of the digital (particularly in attempts to juxtapose it against the analog) use language privileging the sanitized, pristine digital image that has removed the entropic, deteriorated qualities of its celluloid predecessor. For example, one of the most significant points of contention is digital cinema’s “feel” as compared to celluloid. As Bennet Miller explains, “Side by side, the film image hits you in the gut immediately. There’s a cleaner, drier feel to the digital image that doesn’t quite have the dimension and weight of photochemical” (Hart 2015). Miller’s assessment of the digital as “cleaner” not only implies a certain sanitization process in the movement from the photochemical to the digital, but also the former’s supposed “dirtiness” or grunginess. And, while Miller uses those terms as a way of privileging celluloid over digital, his observation suggests a characteristic often cited as inherent to the digital. In fact, the cleanliness of these images was an explicit goal of digital film, as a medium, and producers of the technology were frequently mired in language making this apparent. For instance, according to John Belton (2004, 906), Steven Morley (former Vice President of Technology at Qualcomm) writes the goal of digital cinema is “to provide the image quality of a first run motion picture on 35mm film stock projected on opening night at a premier theater.” For Morley, then, the quality was not necessarily designed to be radically distinct from celluloid, but rather to present the most *pristine*, clean version of that celluloid; a version before damage would have been introduced by projection itself.

Such marketing schemes seem to suggest that viewers desire such pristine images stripped of any visual or auditory disruption. For some scholars, this represents an inherent flaw in the logic of the digital. As Hugh Manon (2007, 20) explains with respect to CGI, for instance, it “aims not to produce a sense of the ‘really real,’ which would incorporate signs of failure at the level of form, but instead, like the elaborate layouts created by model train enthusiasts, seeks to include as much microscopic detail as possible in any given shot – as if the clearest, most unimpeded image is always the most interesting.” Of course, CGI and digital film are not synonymous terms, but the advent of the digital has made CGI possible and the logics Manon explains here seem equally applicable to digital filmmaking’s “pristine” prints. The assumption that the spectator always desires the clearest image, for Manon, is challenged through a careful reading of the value of lo-fi aesthetics. Following Slavoj Žižek and Sigmund Freud, Manon claims that the spectator desires to look beyond an image; they prefer the image to be dirty, imperfect, or flawed such that it limits the ability to see in entirety. They covet the *trompe-l’oeil*. For Manon, the Freudian doubly-deceptive *trompe-l’oeil* succeeds not in convincing us that there is actually a veil (rather than merely a painting of a veil), but rather succeeds when we see the veil as a representation *and yet* we ask what’s behind it. In much the same manner, these imperfect analog images succeed not by showing us everything in extreme detail, but by revealing just enough (and never presenting it as a perfect, unobscured version of the thing itself).

Beyond providing too much detail or an image that is too pristine, the removal of digital noise also disrupts an essential characteristic of celluloid as a form: deterioration. D.N. Rodowick paraphrases Paolo Cherchi Usai:

Cinema is inherently an autodestructive medium. Every art suffers the ravages of time, of course. But structural impermanence is the very condition of cinema's existence. Each passage of frames through a projector—the very machine that gives filmophanic/projected life to the moving image—advances a process of erosion that will eventually reduce the image to nothing... Digital media have their own forms of entropic decay and obsolescence, of course. Nonetheless, one may say that the material basis of film is a chemically encoded process of entropy. (Rodowick 2007, 19)

On the one hand, film decays naturally (given its chemical nature) and, on the other hand, the way in which we experience film as a projected medium means that our experience of it naturally contributes to this deterioration. While the digital can experience obsolescence and failure at the moment of a spectator's engagement with it, that failure is not a defining characteristic in quite the same fashion. Wheeler Winston Dixon (2016, 127) explains, "every time the [celluloid] is projected and moves through the gate, it risks damage or at the very least, some degree of wear." And it is precisely the wear and the damage that mark celluloid as a medium as well as particular prints. As Rodowick (2007, 20) explains, "No two prints of the same film will ever be identical—each will always bear its unique traces of destruction with a specific projection history; thus each print is in some respects unique." Unlike digital cinema, that, following Dixon, "tends to 'strip down' the image, and remove all the artifacts that are the hallmark of the film experience; grain, scratches..." (Dixon 2016, 123), celluloid bears visible traces of its own passage through the world and its engagement with different projectors. Or, following David Lerner (2010, 363), "While the negative of a film print is endlessly reproducible, the individual scratches on a particular film print maintain the auratic function." The experience of celluloid provides a sense of a given print's aura, its uniqueness as an art object.

As Morley's explanation regarding the image quality of digital furthers, digital cinema can be thought of as akin to the quality of a print on its premiere; in other words, before it was subjected to repeated viewings. However, the digital *will* never be subjected to these same kinds of damage. Its experience, especially in an age of streaming services and cloud storage, does not require the same kind of physical damage or risk of damage as that of celluloid. It is not defined by its deterioration and does not gain auratic function from that damage. Digitization, then, removes what Kilker (2009, 50) has called the function of damage as an establishment of the film as an "entropic artifact (one that reveals its interactions with time)." In other words, Kilker argues, "damage provides an important function for understanding the 'lives' of media artifacts" (51). By providing visible evidence of its passage in the world, damage allows an object's past to become legible. According to Kilker, for example, an image that has a great deal of damage may, ironically, demonstrate its importance (that which was used frequently) as opposed to the pristine object (that which was, perhaps, valued but was infrequently used). On the other hand, damage can betray a lack of expertise on the part of handler or else extremity of storage conditions. In either case, the damage visually renders a film's existence and circulation within and as a part of the material world. The scratches, dirt, and other destructive forces visited on a film provide important cues regarding its projection, storage, and other particulars of its lifespan. They give a visual record of each screening, accessible and legible in the image itself.

The digital realm removes not only the evidence of celluloid's status as entropic artifact, but also the manner by which damage becomes historical evidence. In other words, the historicity of digital images is not visually recognizable for human beings without the aid of software or hardware capable of explicating that information (Kilker 2009, 57-58). The digital image is not visibly marked by its storage, projection, etc. in a manner that human viewers can comprehend on their own. In digital media, "Damage due to 'handling' an image... is more subtle because the data are encoded and hidden to the naked eye" (59). That is not to say that a coherent sense of the celluloid's movements throughout different projectors would provide any definitive way to write the object's history. Instead, the visibility of the object as having *a* history is part and parcel with the print's auratic function. We could not write its particular history, but through our awareness of the damage done to the print, we know someone was watching it; we are aware it has had physical interactions with both viewers and projectors.

Even if the digital image highlights a distinction from celluloid with respect to its lack of entropic noise, that is not to say that its existence represents a complete breaking with earlier media. According to Bolter and Grusin:

like their precursors, digital media can never reach this state of transcendence, but will instead function in a constant dialectic with earlier media... Once again, what is new about digital media lies in their particular strategies for remediating television, film, photography, and painting. Repurposing as remediation is both what is 'unique to digital worlds' and what denies the possibility of that uniqueness. (2000, 50)

Digital images, then, exist in a tension with older media that become their content. Dependent upon remediation, the interconnectedness between transparency and hypermediacy (the highlighting or privileging such that we become aware of mediation) defines the digital. This is precisely the nature of a film like *Planet Terror* and, by extension, similar borrowing of analog aesthetics within other digital forms. The "dialectic with earlier media" highlights the specifics of the digital by framing it as, ironically, unable to break with the aesthetics of its precursors. *Planet Terror's* use of digital film as a means of appropriating celluloid (and, specifically, B-movie) aesthetics becomes an ironic gesture demonstrating the interdependence of analog and digital. This manufacturing of the auratic, historiographic elements of celluloid make apparent the interconnection between celluloid and digital, past and present.

Planet Terror, Visual Noise, and Fabricated History

In 2007, in the midst of Hollywood's transition to digital cinema, Quentin Tarantino and Robert Rodriguez – two filmmakers with an undisputed degree of Hollywood cache – released *Grindhouse*. The double feature was comprised of two films, one helmed by each director, as well as trailers between the two that advertised non-existent films. It served as a sort of "homage to 1970s urban exploitation theatres, or grindhouses" (Benson-Allott 2008, 20) and the B-film fare one would typically find on their marquees. Overall, the Weinstein Company release received respectable critical reviews, but had poor box office returns. Coming in fourth at the domestic box office on its opening weekend – behind such typical Hollywood offerings as the Will Ferrell-Jon Heder figure-skating comedy *Blades of Glory* (2007) and Ice Cube's *Are We Done Yet?* (2007) – the film was widely regarded as a commercial failure and became the least-attended film either director had released in their career to that point (Gray 2007). A range of theories circulated concerning the cause of such a disappointing showing, with the Weinstein Company apparently deciding the format was at least partly to blame and, as a result, releasing the two films as separate DVDs and hoping to capitalize on each director's independent following.

Though the double-bill encourages the viewer to consider the films as two sides of the same coin, the two filmmakers are actually invested in exploring different 1970s B-movie genre films: splatter films and car chase films. Even more to the point for this paper, the differences between *Planet Terror*, Rodriguez's film, and *Death Proof*, Tarantino's, with respect to digitization, could not be more evident. According to Benson-Allott:

whereas *Planet Terror* builds its elegiac celebration of 1970s splatter movies on digital enhancements of the form's prosthetic excess *Death Proof* marks the passing of the car-chase movie by refusing any digital assistance. Indeed, Tarantino insists in interviews about *Death Proof* that 'I hate that [CGI] stuff' and that the thrill of the car-chase movie comes from knowing that it cannot be faked. (2008, 23)

The two directors seem, then, to represent the two opposing attitudes towards digital cinema. Tarantino – who has been one of the most outspoken advocates for celluloid, commenting in another interview, "digital projections...that's just television in public. Apparently the whole world is okay with television in public, but what I knew as cinema is dead" (Tarantino 2014) – celebrates not only the authenticity apparently denied by CGI, but also a rapidly outmoded analog filmmaking practice. Rodriguez, on the other hand, uses digital tools to, as Benson-Allott's description highlights, create one of the most noteworthy images from the film. Heavily featured in marketing campaigns for both *Grindhouse's* theatrical run and *Planet Terror's* DVD release, the image of Cherry (Rose McGowan) with a prosthetic machine-gun leg is frequently cited as one of the many elaborate digital effects in the film. According to Benson-Allott,

Cherry's prosthesis highlighted what 1970s effects artists were incapable of doing. For Rodriguez, contrary to Tarantino, digital effects present the possibility of extending older special effects practices in a manner those artists could only dream of. Additionally, such an effect represents Bolter and Grusin's assertions regarding film's appropriation of digital effects. As they explain, "Like television, film is also trying to repurpose digital technology... And in most cases, the goal is to make these electronic interventions transparent. The stunt or special effect should look as 'natural' as possible, as if the camera were capturing what really happened in the light" (2000, 48). These deployments of the digital don't initially appear to further a logic of remediation. Instead, they seek to make innovative aspects of the digital completely transparent—which, of course, due to the fantastical nature of the composite (the machine-gun leg), they will never be.

On the other hand, the more pervasive deployment of digital effects throughout the film highlights the film's remediation. Rodriguez's use of digital effects throughout can be characterized as an imitation of analog aesthetics and the deterioration of celluloid. The bulk of the work of Rodriguez's CGI team, Troublemaker Digital, focused on making the film appear to have all the flaws and visual obstructions apparent in 1970s grindhouse prints. As Alex Toader explains, this choice was not ancillary, but was essential to how they conceived the look of the film from the outset. He identifies how the very first tests conducted by this effects team were tests on how to digitally manifest the aged look of the film. The film digitally composites celluloid discoloration, dust, and scratches. It even goes so far as to fabricate the image of (fictional) celluloid melting from the heat of a non-existent projector. The effects artists, from the inception of the project, experimented with a wide range of strategies for both digitizing the flaws and for understanding how all the visual noise occurs in actual celluloid. As Toader explains, the artists examined stock footage of damaged film that was digitally scanned as well as physical prints from the era in order to understand issues such as "how scratches can look different by the way they cut through emulsion or if they happened in the negative, for example." Beyond just subjecting existing films to this intense scrutiny, some of the digital artists actually went so far as to damage celluloid in order to bear witness to the way the damage occurs and is visually coded (Tarantino and Rodriguez 2007, 142). This attention to the particularities of damage further a reading of *Planet Terror* that demonstrates a desire to use the digital as a means of investigating celluloid's nature in terms of decay and damage.

Planet Terror's digital effects artists, as Toader explains, observed the qualities of celluloid and how the scratches and burns result from interactions with time and projectors. Because of this extensive research and experimentation, the digital effects they created take on a similarly auratic function as the celluloid damage they are meant to evoke. For the artists, such extended consideration of this damage tended to reveal certain patterns or traces of the celluloid's engagement with projectionists and the physical world. For instance, Rodney Brunet observed that the heads and tails of the reels they inspected tended to show more damage and wear because they are "most exposed to editing or the mechanics of the projector" (Tarantino and Rodriguez 2007, 142). Such observations, in turn, guided the particulars of the film's aesthetics and even some elements of the narrative. As David Lerner observes, in *Planet Terror*, there occurs an explicit love scene between Cherry and Wray, in which the soundtrack includes a crackling and the visual track shows the image of celluloid melting. Then:

Following a card that reads 'Missing Reel,' the action resumes with the audience having missed several critical plot points. Less an issue of style, this directorial intervention carries a different kind of overt intentionality, with Rodriguez historicizing the common theft of sex reels by grindhouse projectionists. (Lerner 2010, 369).

Such a moment highlights the way in which the style and narrative are designed to represent all manner of actual destruction visited upon the celluloid (including the melting and theft of a reel).

On the one hand, it would seem that this fabrication of celluloid damage would be an attempt to move away from the pristine, transparent nature of the digital. In fact, even in this digital era, there is still a market for residual media forms. As Manon asserts, writing in collaboration with Daniel Temkin (2011), "today, in the era of high resolution noiselessness, there exists a latent desire for the noise of old. Lo-fi music and photography are part of this perverse impulse to reintroduce noise..." Listening to records on vinyl, for example, might suit the desires that appear to resist any logic of the digital. However, Rodriguez

could have chosen to eschew the digital altogether and made a tribute to grindhouse films on celluloid before inflicting real damage upon the developed reels. Instead, the choice to digitally render these damages, reflecting the intense examination and experimentation observed on actual celluloid, highlights the double logic of remediation. The digital acquires a sense of visible history – a record of its fictional passage through space and its physical interactions – through its imitation of analog damage. On the other hand, the attention to the specific ways in which damage occurred on actual celluloid becomes central through its digital manifestations. *Planet Terror*, then, is conducting a sort of film history in the vein of Usai's writings. As Usai (2001, 89) explains, "The ultimate goal of film history is an account of its own disappearance, or its transformation into another entity." Digital allows for an understanding of celluloid's disappearance as a defining characteristic and for cinema's transformation into the new form of the digital (with the inherent tensions between transparency and hypermediacy).

Contingency Displaced

Like many critics and reviewers, Lerner describes the general attitude of *Planet Terror* in terms of nostalgia for the films of yesteryear – or a specific, forgotten sort of film from outside canonical film history. The bind in which Rodriguez seems to find himself positions him as both nostalgic and progressive; expressing his loss of the celluloid past, but only by translating it through the power permitted by the digital. As A. O. Scott (2007) puts it with respect to both Rodriguez and Tarantino, "The filmmakers are at once bad boys and grumpy old men, effortlessly adept at manipulating new-fangled gadgets even as they sigh over the way things were in the good old days." Lerner (2010, 371) echoes this sentiment, claiming, "the film's relationship with technology is ambivalent, expressing disdain for all things contemporary, but simultaneously utilizing all of the tools of contemporary digital filmmaking to express these concerns and appeal to contemporary audiences."

What I want to argue, however, is that the tension at the heart of *Planet Terror* is not indicative of the film's failure, but rather, of the interconnections central to the digital as well as the comprehension of the past evidenced by the film's ability to fabricate damage. In particular, in this section, I seek to expand upon how the deployment of the damage highlights particular themes that illuminate concerns about both digital and grindhouse film. In particular, the intentionality of the "damage" as well as themes of liminality and death inform a reading of this film's particularity with respect to the analog-digital divide.

Importantly, the digital effects artists also acknowledge the way in which these effects are purposefully deployed within the narrative. That is to say, when to use a specific composite effect (scratching versus discoloration versus dust) was dictated by what the particular scene seemed to call for. As Brunet explains, Rodriguez uses the effects as "almost a character in the story...Frame flutter, finger print blurs, scratches and flashes were all used sparingly until either Robert or the story dictated they be exaggerated" (Tarantino and Rodriguez 2007, 142). Rather than being implemented as a stylistic element divorced from the thematic concerns of the film, the damage was deployed purposefully to enhance the tone of individual narrative exchanges. Lerner, for instance, emphasizes another scene involving Cherry's sexuality. As he explains:

in a...sequence with a lascivious military prison guard...harassing [Cherry], the color switches to a red hue imitating an old reel's faded color balance. For Rodriguez this formal shift serves a double purpose: it both maintains the 'ride' aspect of the film's conceit, keeping viewers immersed in the 1970s experience, and serves to manifest the sexual energy of the scene and perhaps Cherry's rising ire. (Lerner 2010, 368-269).

The stylistic flourishes, like any other effect, are deployed for thematic or narrative ends. Rather than resulting from the contingent damage visited upon the celluloid by repeated viewings, the damages serve to reinforce the tone of given scenes Rodriguez constructed. The purposeful nature of these digital manipulations also expresses the substitution of intentionality for contingency with respect to this visual noise. In other words, aside from the theft of a reel, the damages inflicted on celluloid film that result in the visible damage are not typically delivered in an intentional manner. Instead, the celluloid in a 70s grindhouse film would almost certainly not respond to sexually explicit material with the kind of emotional volatility evidenced by Lerner's example. *Planet Terror* depends upon an "intentionality that is absent from the trash cinema [it] wish[es] to evoke" (Ler-

ner 2010, 359). This is one of the many elements Lerner ascribes to the film's failure. As he states, "The question remains though to what extent authenticity is possible when it is not threatened by obsolescence, and, perhaps more important, to what degree can authenticity be deliberately encoded in the text" (364). Or, as he argues, the film's flaws come from its failure to fail. However, what I want to suggest is that this is not necessarily an issue of authenticity, as such. These digital effects do not necessarily serve to trick the audience into believing that they are in fact "authentic" artifacts from within film history – since, as Lerner acknowledges, they are well aware of that fact that the damage is manipulated and constructed. Instead, the goal is to weave a metaphor for the contingency of celluloid and its historicity (and the way in which these elements impact the viewing of a film). Our awareness of the inauthentic, metaphorical nature of these effects serves as a reminder, as well, of the possibility of the false nostalgia that they are designed to evoke. In fact, as Benson-Allott points out, even as many of the critics reacted to the film by celebrating their own personal experiences with precisely the Grindhouse theaters whose content Rodriguez seems to be celebrating, both Rodriguez and Tarantino are, "themselves too young to have attended such a paradise." However, she goes on to claim, "that is irrelevant, because their movie celebrates film fantasy, not film history" (Benson-Allott 2013, 146). The end result is not to actually convince the viewer that they are witnessing either history or even an "accurate" representation of a particular collection of films, but rather to expose the fact of that history's fabrication, its nonexistence.

Like this sense that the damages provide a metaphor for contingency rather than being mistaken for contingent damage, the aesthetics defining the film in terms of both its native digital arena and its celluloid predecessors are echoed in some generic and thematic elements. When writing about the film, scholars have often cited the film's genre as evocative of given meaning. In particular, the indebtedness to the history of the zombie film has provided scholars with nuanced readings of how the film deploys the genre conventions as part of Rodriguez's style of the "grotesque" and a dependence on intertextuality (see Alma 2014; Aschenbrenner 2014). Other scholars have evaluated the zombie film and the zombie as an important for addressing ethnic and racial Otherness, a tradition that Rodriguez continues with respect to Latinx characters and the setting in a Texas border town (see Gonzalez 2015; Garcia 2015). While these are certainly salient observations for considering the specifics of the zombie genre *Planet Terror* deploys, I would like to suggest an alternate means for considering the zombie elements alongside my analysis of the film. The zombie is certainly "Othered" in the zombie film, but its specificity as "Other" lies in its liminality. As an entity, the zombie is a reanimated corpse. As such, it exists between the living and the dead. It has limited brain function – enough that its body is mobile, but not enough for complex problem solving of any kind. As such, it is neither fully alive, nor fully dead. Something similar could be said of *Planet Terror*. Though it's certainly a digital film, its production history and aesthetics demonstrate its status as evocative of a certain "past-ness." Like the zombie, it exists in the liminal space between the digital and celluloid.

It also strikes me that the liminality is not merely between digital and celluloid, but that the central defining characteristic of the zombie is its *undead* nature. In fact, death is commonly figured as central to discourses debating cinema's defining characteristic. According to Rodowick's (2007, 20) reading of Usai, for instance, "watching film is literally a spectatorship of death." Because celluloid is defined by its deterioration, the experience of viewing involves witnessing the death of the print to which your watching inherently contributes. By imitating these traces of celluloid death in the digital form, *Planet Terror* borrows the centrality of death at the level of the aesthetics. Similarly, the centrality in the narrative of decaying characters echoes the aesthetic decay. Scenes that Frederick Luis Alma highlights as evidence of Rodriguez's grotesque aesthetic also evidence the bodily destruction wreaked by the spread of the biological weapon throughout the world. Their decay and the imitative decay at the level of the film's form mirror one another.

Lastly, this decay is also invoked by the subject matter of the "grindhouse" film as not only an aesthetic, but also a particular topos and history. As Jay McRoy explains of Tarantino and Rodriguez:

their ambitious collaboration aims to replicate the historically, technologically, and geographically specific 'feel' of viewing exploitation films, often in the form of damaged or incomplete prints, within a spatially and temporally specific locale, namely the derelict, often financially imperiled, urban theaters that 'flourished' in the 1960s and 1970s before slowly vanishing from the North American landscape with the emergence and proliferation of video cassettes and cable television channels. (2010, 222).

The deterioration mimicked by the film's aesthetic and central to the narrative development is relevant for the history of both grindhouse cinema and urban spaces within American history, more broadly. The grindhouse theaters evoke a particular experience – with which the audience of *Planet Terror* may or may not be familiar – that places deterioration as central. Much like the irony of *Planet Terror*'s digital aesthetics, the particular nostalgia invited by the film for the decaying urban space is invoked for the spectator who, most likely, viewed the theatrical release in a large-scale Cineplex or in the comfort of a domestic space on DVD. The sense of comprehending both the aesthetics and the material reality of decay becomes more nuanced when juxtaposed with the present, digital, Cineplex reality.

Conclusion

Though, to be sure, *Planet Terror* represents but one potential example of a wide range of means through which digital effects are deployed in favour of introducing anachronistic aesthetics into the digital realm, examining the particulars of this case study provides a means to think through the implications of what might, initially, seem like a contradictory resistance to technology. Rather than viewing it as such, I argue that the digital becomes a means of comprehending the history of celluloid. Because Rodriguez's film includes such an apparent – or, following the observations of his effects artists, an obvious – deliberateness where the relationship between visual and narrative content and the manufactured flaws are concerned, the film is actually uniquely capable of introducing purposeful visual noise to drive home the interconnectedness between digital and analog media as well as the way in which the digital may be uniquely positioned to analyze the historical evidence in the analog.

Despite one critic's observation that *Grindhouse* has a "Russian-nesting-doll quality" because "Unpacking it steadily reveals more...in the substance beyond the scratchy surfaces," (Phipps 2016) what *Planet Terror* actually seems to highlight is the way in which the scratches are actually the substance. This is not due to the postmodern tendency to focus on the play of surfaces in order to empty texts of their meaning, but rather because there is nothing beyond the image without the fabricated historical evidence on the surface. One depends so heavily on the other in order to provide meaning and perhaps even a sense of loss that, nevertheless, feels cautiously optimistic.

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