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Let's Get Physical: Film Curation, Restoration and the Shelf Life of Cinema

Rich Johnson

Even since the 'father of film', Thomas Edison, and Pathé started selling film projectors for home use in 1912, the true 'ownership' of film (and its respected shelf life) was still 70 years away when video distributors realised the potential in film fanatics building their *own* libraries. The nostalgia of this period is *unrivalled*. Via the golden age of the home video market – during the DVD boom of the noughties – a niche market would survive and focus on the restoration of film, lost in the hinterlands and limbo of film rights and distribution. This one-off course explores the history of home cinema and the all-important boutique labels that have helped keep physical media alive.

Books

Criterion Designs (2014) by Eric Skillman

DVD-Art: Innovation in DVD Packaging Design (2006) by Charlotte Rivers

The Medium is The Massage (1964) by Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore ([Read via archive.org](#))

Journals / Magazines (Out of print):

Video Watchdog (1990-2017)

DVD Monthly (1999-2009)

DVD Review (1997-2011)

The Physical Media Advocate

Podcasts / YouTube

[Disc-Connected](#)

[Chasing Labels](#)

[Just the Discs](#)

[Boutique Blu-rays with Elliot Coen](#)

Exclusive Interview:

[Chris Holden from SECOND SIGHT FILMS](#)



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INTRODUCTION: THE HISTORY OF HOME CINEMA

The “media wizard” Marshall McLuhan is a good place to begin. We are often reminded of the revolutionary 1964 book *The Medium is the Massage* in which he created a philosophy and even predictions) of what digital technology and the media was becoming in the modern age. There are many relevant quotes, one of which states:

“All media are extensions of some human faculty — psychic [/mental] or physical.” — Marshall McLuhan

The term “physical media” has become more common since the advance of streaming. As a “product” this may be in reference to books, tapes, CDs, DVDs, Blu-ray and records. Any media recorded onto a physical device before distribution.

Important memories we literally hold on to.

The League of Gentlemen (1999). Who remembers Henry and Ally at the video store?

Video store memories are a film education. Pure nostalgia.

“Physical media is almost a Fahrenheit 451 (where people memorized entire books and thus became the book they loved) level of responsibility... If you own a great 4K HD, Blu-ray, DVD etc. of a film or films you love... you are the custodian of those films for generations to come.” — Guillermo del Toro

What are we left with: Jumble sales, charity shops... and graveyards of plastic... at its worst. Recently, Seattle video store Scarecrow – one of the largest video stores in the world – and is currently clinging on for dear life.

Of course, there are not many video stores left at all. Gone are the days; most confined to major cities and existing on a non-profit basis, but they continue to serve a vital purpose to movie lovers around the world who wish to be provided with an education of cinema and its history. With this in mind they are becoming more and more like museums.

References: “Scarecrow Video says it needs to raise \$1.8M or face possible closure”
<https://www.seattletimes.com/entertainment/movies/scarecrow-video-says-it-needs-to-raise-1-8m-or-face-possible-closure>

“Seattle’s iconic Scarecrow Video turns 30 and uses vast catalogue to stay in the fight against streaming” <https://www.geekwire.com/2018/seattles-iconic-scarecrow-video-turns-30-uses-vast-catalog-stay-fight-streaming>



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VHS, in particular forges a strong sense of nostalgia... a potent memory. It's truly monolithic.

Memories of the VCR (Video Cassette Recorder) are potent. Not just for the rental and purchase of films but, obviously, its major function in rerecording... and not fading away.

Alas, it did fade away. But certain filmmakers (which we will get to) have kept it alive.

Reference: "He was always voraciously watching": Scorsese's secret life as an obsessive VHS archivist" <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2024/mar/25/martin-scorsese-vhs-video-collection-archive>

But the origins of what has now become known as "physical media" (in the digital age) can be traced back much further through early traces of "home cinema". It *always* begins with Thomas Edison is at the forefront of invention... and the earliest of film technology. Based on his ingenuity and resources beat everyone else to the punch perfecting the light bulb. Which leads to the invention of the camera and the first film studio called The Black Maria built in 1892. The reason Edison was so successful and at the forefront of early film technology was because he could afford to patent everything. This included the sprocket system that led to more film being held in the cameras, hence longer (less jittery) filmmaking.

Early portable devices include the Kinora viewer from 1907 with a "Kinora reel" and a Kinematograph with a "magic lantern projection" device from 1919 that also used slides.

According to the USC School of Cinematic Arts' HMF* Foundation Moving Image Archive, in 1912 – over 60 years before the VCR, and way before streaming from the Cloud - Thomas Edison introduced the 22mm Home Kinetoscope. Home theater devices were attempted as early as cinema was invented, but the Home Kinetoscope was one of the first successful home projection systems. *Hugh M. Hefner. Yes... that's right, the 'playboy'.

Reference: "Edison's 22mm Home Kinetoscope"
<https://www.uschefnerarchive.com/project/edisons-home-kinetoscope/>

While the film itself is 22mm, the actual images contained therein are more like 6mm essentially making the Home Kinetoscope the smallest format that ever released commercial product. The benefit was that a small 100 foot roll could contain almost as much content as a 1000 foot 35mm roll. Considering that in 1912 many releases still lasted only 1 reel, this meant that users could get the same films they enjoyed in the theatre on a single reel and without edits.

Mechanically speaking the Home Kinetoscope remains one of the most unusual projectors due to the efficient design of the film. To use the machine, the strip of film would first be cranked clockwise, then when the images stopped the user would then turn a knob to adjust the positioning of the gate and then crank the film counterclockwise.

Finally, the user would adjust the position of the gate again and turn clockwise for the last length of the strip.



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Instead of the sprockets being on the outside as we see in more common projectors, the two rows of sprockets are in the center section requiring two claws for movement. The use of this side-by-side claw system proved to be both a blessing and curse in that a broken sprocket on one side would not stop the projection. However, a bad splice across the film or a momentary jam could not only cause the claw to tear a gouge through four sprockets on both sides, but the stationary pause would, of course, create a burnt frame of film. Since the film passes through the gate three times per showing, an already damaged film strip would only cause more destruction. For example, if you tore the sprockets on the first pass you would get two more passes to most assuredly cause more damage before finishing the reel. In today's fast-paced, YouTube-centric world, it's especially fun to remember how home entertainment all started.

The Pathé KOK Home Cinematograph followed, first released in 1912

Then there was the hand-cranked Pathé Baby 9.5mm film projector from France in 1922.

Reference: "1924's Cinema Projector 'Pathé Baby' – Restoration"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eWe-uwWi4rU>

Various 9.5mm film reels and cassettes produced by Pathé for their home cinema system were released along with Various handbooks, manuals and film libraries for the Pathé Baby system.

Reference: "Life in motion: Home cinema" <https://www.europeana.eu/en/exhibitions/life-in-motion/home-cinema>

In 1924, Kodak invented 16 mm film, which became popular for home use and then later developed 8 mm film. After that point, the public could purchase a film projector for one of those film formats and rent or buy home-use prints of some cartoons, short comedies, and brief "highlights" reels edited from feature films.

A number of other home projectors were created over the years including: the DeJur 8mm Model 1000, first manufactured in 1947. YouTube Short from Erik Clapp at Cinema Force.

The Super 8 film format, introduced in 1965 was marketed for making home movies, but it also boosted the popularity of show-at-home films. Super 8 projectors are divided into two main categories, silent and sound. The first Super 8 projectors that appeared in the latter half of the 1960's were silent (they could not reproduce sound), but were mostly dual gauge. This meant they had the ability to run both Super 8 and the old Standard (Regular) 8 mm films. This was very handy as almost everyone that bought a Super 8 projector at this time had Standard 8 films they still wanted to view. In fact even today you would be surprised how much Standard (regular) 8 film there is around.

In the early 1970's sound projectors appeared. They generally cost more to buy, but in addition to having a magnetic sound head, they offered more features. Most however could only run Super 8 films.



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By the end of the decade, anamorphic lenses were available for CinemaScope presentations of commercial releases, while two-channel stereo and Dolby Stereo exploited both magnetic sound stripes (the second designed originally for ballast as the film ran through the PJ). Package deals of “The thrill of Super 8” was the wide selection of films available to collectors. Prior to the onset of commercial VHS tapes. There were literally thousands of film titles ready for purchase by mail order, or at retail stores peppered across the UK.

The most popular package movies were the 17-minute highlight reels (mounted on 400ft spools) of major titles, which the Hollywood studios released directly. A highlight reel would include a usually skillful edit of an entire feature film with beginning, middle and end intact, and usually cost £30 for a recent release. In 2016, it's a hard concept to get your head around, but consumers lapped them up. Want to relive the best bits from Steven Spielberg's *Jaws* or Ridley Scott's *Alien* whenever you desired? Now you could.

Reference: “Super 8: When Home Cinema was super...”

<https://www.homecinemachoice.com/content/super-8-when-home-cinema-was-super>

“Home movie” catalogues were produced.

Then we start to see early forms of ‘recording’. A British company, Nottingham Electric Valve, produced the first crude version of domestic video recorder – the Telcan (“television in a can”) – in 1963.

Video players are one of those inventions that are older than you think: the first was demonstrated in Berlin, in 1961 (for more inventions that are older than you think, see this list). Sony followed suit, and produced its first model in the US, in 1965.

Sony also pioneered the use of video cassettes, which they unveiled in 1972. These were easier to use and more durable, and provided an expanded run time of 2 hours. This meant they could be used not just for recording, but to present feature length films. Until this point, to see a movie you had to go to the cinema, or hope it popped up on TV; now they would be available anytime, at home.

American company Avco was the first to try retailing films in the new format. In 1972 they launched ‘Cartrivision’, a colour TV set with a connected video player, compatible with the company’s own square shaped cassette tapes.

U-Matic was an analogue recording videocassette first shown by Sony in prototype in October 1969. It was introduced to the market in September 1971 and was among the first video formats to contain the videotape inside a cassette, as opposed to the various reel-to-reel or open-reel formats of the time. It was mainly used for storage as the quality of sound and image was poor and therefore mainly used by television companies to archive.

In the mid-1970s, videotape became the first truly practical home-video format with the development of videocassettes, which were far easier to use than tape reels. The Betamax and VHS home videocassette formats were introduced, respectively, in 1975 and 1976, but several more



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years and significant reductions in the prices of both equipment and videocassettes were needed before both formats started to become widespread in households. While Betamax offered superior picture quality, VHS offered longer recording times and was cheaper to produce. And in the consumer market, sometimes accessibility and economy are what wins the day.

Betamax was widely perceived at the time as the better format, as the cassette was smaller in size, and Betamax offered slightly better video quality than VHS – it had lower video noise, less luma-chroma crosstalk, and was marketed as providing pictures superior to those of VHS. However, the sticking point for both consumers and potential licensing partners of Betamax was the total recording time.

South Korean film *The Young Teacher* (1972) was the first film to be released on VHS in 1976. Alas, the final VHS release was David Cronenberg's thriller *A History of Violence* (2005).

It was the future. VHS *explodes*... due to one woman...

The “workout video pioneered by Jane Fonda began in 1982.

Blockbuster Video is born, founded by David Cook in 1985 as a single home video rental shop, lots of independent video rental stores open and provided us with reliable and friendly shepherds. It was “familiar”... and a family experience. Part of the important time spent... and movie memories shared. The “physicality of choice”.

However, things turn “nasty”.

During the early to mid-'80s in Thatcher Britain horror titles were banned, spearheaded by Mary Whitehouse. Of course, the titles were extreme but led to an *extreme* retaliation by the government including the banning of the films and severe prosecutions if caught with the titles. To assist local authorities in identifying obscene films, the Director of Public Prosecutions released a list of 72 films the office believed to violate the Obscene Publications Act 1959. This list included films that had either been previously acquitted of obscenity or already obtained BBFC certification.

In addition, a second list was released that contained an additional 82 titles which were not believed to lead to obscenity convictions but could nonetheless be confiscated under the Act's forfeiture laws. The resultant confusion regarding the definition of obscene material led to Parliament passing the Video Recordings Act 1984, which required certification of video releases by the BBFC. Severin Films founder, David Gregory (from Nottingham) developed his film label around such titles and found restrictions in the UK so frustrating when he set up In 2006 he took the company to L.A. It is now one of the most successful boutique labels.

Reference: “Video Nasties: The Expert Poll” <https://severinfilms.com/en-gb/blogs/news/video-nasties-the-expert-poll>

The format wasn't perfect, by any means. It was time to improve.



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Eventually we could start buying VHS at a reasonable price in the early '90s, previously the rentals costing up to £100. Realising there was now a market in people wanting to own the films and rewatch them, VHS tapes were mass produced, mostly spurred by kid's movies such as Disney animation.

The format wasn't perfect, by any means. It was time to improve.

The next leap from VHS was the LaserDisc, first available on the market in Atlanta, Georgia, on December 11, 1978. However, as with a lot of technology, there was some gestation period with the "optical video recording technology" using a transparent disc – first invented by David Paul Gregg and James Russell in 1963. The Gregg patents were purchased by MCA in 1968 and by 1969, Philips had developed a videodisc in reflective mode, which has advantages over the transparent mode. MCA and Philips then decided to combine their efforts and first publicly demonstrated the videodisc in 1972.

The format boasted improved quality and was the first commercial optical disc storage medium. They were the size of a record. The format was short-lived and failed due to the high cost of the players and discs (which were far more expensive than VHS players and tapes), and due to marketplace confusion with the technologically inferior CED, which also went by the name Videodisc.

The VCD format was overlooked due to it never cornering a market. This was due to how films could so easily be duplicated. Western sources have cited unauthorized content as a principal incentive for VCD player ownership. Quality was no better than VHS.

The format was popular in Asian countries for a number of reasons: 1) Most households still not owning VCRs. 2) The low price of the players and their tolerance of high humidity (a notable problem for VCRs) 3) Easy storage and maintenance, and the lower-cost media.

Who remembers Doovdé?

Ahhh... the glory of DVD (Digital Versatile Disc). November 1, 1996 - Toshiba and Panasonic release the first DVD players for the home audience in Japan. Toshiba SD-3000 and Panasonic A-100. It was initially used to store and view music videos.

A month later, four movies were released on 20 December: *The Assassin* (1993), *Blade Runner* (1982), *Eraser* (1996) and *The Fugitive* (1993).

When the viewing format was released in the US three months later, 32 titles were available on launch day:

Batman

The Birdcage

Blade Runner: The Director's Cut

The Bodyguard

The Bridges of Madison County

Bonnie and Clyde

Casablanca



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The Color Purple
Doctor Zhivago
Eraser
The Exorcist
The Fugitive
The Glimmer Man
Gone with the Wind
GoodFellas
Interview with the Vampire
JFK: Special Edition Director's Cut
Lethal Weapon
The Mask
Midnight Cowboy
Mortal Kombat
The Road Warrior
Rocky
Seven
Singin' in the Rain
Space Jam
Species
A Streetcar Named Desire: The Director's Cut
A Time to Kill
Twister
Unforgiven
Woodstock: The Director's Cut

HD DVD was then released April 18th 2006... with Blu-ray following June 20th 2006. This led to a format war with Blu-ray succeeding. This was down to two factors: shifting business alliances, including decisions by major film studios and retail distributors and Sony's decision to include a Blu-ray player in the PlayStation 3 video game console. Blu-ray corners the market and is still sold to day with 4K having a much smaller, niche market as screen resolution increases and leads to the constant upgrading amongst collectors and cinephiles.

PART I: THE GOLDEN AGE

"Physical media exists outside the whims of streaming's powers-that-be." — Rafi Schwartz, *The Week*

Reference: "Why Physical Media is Having a Moment" <https://theweek.com/culture-life/media/why-physical-media-is-having-a-moment>

Extra Features

Focussing on what is often referred to now as the "Golden Age" of physical media, led by the explosion of the DVD format... most notably the extra features that not only became a major part of selling the films, but educated an entire generation of geeks and cinephiles.



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This includes the film commentary which began with Criterion on their LaserDisc releases.

"Eight whole months? Like that's not enough time to learn to drill a hole? But in a week, we're gonna learn how to be astronauts..." — Ben Affleck

One of the funniest and most entertaining is Ben Affleck's for Michal Bay's *Armageddon* (1998) in which he pulls the film apart.

DVD menus were also a major part of the format's design that always reflected the storytelling.

Reference: "The Lost Art of the DVD Menu Screen" <https://medium.com/stop-drop-scroll/the-lost-art-of-dvd-menu-design-c44ab446df07>

Menu screens have become more and more sophisticated and modernistic, especially with the boutique labels – Criterion often leading the way as the benchmark in physical media production.

Case in point is looking at their release of *The Kid Brother* (1927) intricately designed by graphic designer F Ron Miller.

Reference: [F Ron Miller's official site](#).

Booklets have become more and more niche now as part of the boutique labels who claw onto keeping physical media alive. They are basically monographs. **Side note:** speaking of monographs, worth hunting down Creative Review's own series they did in the late noughties that cover a myriad of different subjects and obscurities.

Inside the booklets are mainly essays contextualising the films and sometimes archival material and interviews can be found.

How to package a film

During the Golden Age packaging was a huge part of selling standard releases but have become more and more "vanilla" over the years stripping back design and content due to cost and no longer holding onto the market. The upcoming release of *Challengers* (2024) is a prime example of a disc release with nothing on it other than the film. But, sometimes, this can be a sign that a label may have their eye on it or milk a release with another edition.

Reference: "The Lost Art of the DVD Extra" <https://slate.com/business/2024/06/dvd-special-features-bloopers-physical-media-collectors-fandom.html>

During the Golden Age packaging was a *huge* part of selling standard releases. Again, Criterion have often produced (and still produce) some of the best designed releases. Good luck finding Eric Skillman's *Criterion Designs* book from 2014 for a decent price. It can often sell for over £300.

It shows off their incredible commissioned artwork and designs.



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Often there are multiple versions of a film based on licensing in different countries/regions.

There are many examples of designs out there from the Hitchcock and Tarkovsky sets to the *Alien* Quadrilogy DVD set from 2004.

Personal favourites include the region 1 DVD set of Christopher Nolan's *Memento* (2000) – which reflects the entire mystery at the centre of the film – and *The Lord of the Rings* Extended Editions that were released as collector's sets from 2002 to 2004.

If interested in product and graphic design the book *DVD-Art: Innovation in DVD Packaging Design* (2005) by Charlotte Rivers is worth hunting down.

Top to bottom left: Keong Saik's Snacks Packaging via Somewhere Else. Bottom right: Dust: Whores, Heartbreak & Horse Thieves via Amelia Stier

There are also other examples that are even more bespoke including a *Hannibal* DVD package via Boyko Taskov

and *The Back To The Future* DVD set which is a one-off special edition package design. There are some incredible concept designs out there...

References: "Creative CD & DVD Packaging Designs" <https://www.vdcgroup.com/blog/creative-cd-dvd-packaging-designs/>

"21 Conceptual DVD Packaging Designs That are Hard to Ignore" <https://www.unifiedmanufacturing.com/blog/21-dvd-packaging-designs-inspiration/>

The Boutiques

Tartan Films are a good starting point. Established in 1984 as a UK-based film distributor, it was founded by Hamish McAlpine who is credited with creating the term "Asia Extreme". The term "J-horror" was also born out of the company's labels. They owned US-based Tartan USA and Tartan Video. And went on to distribute East Asian films under the brand "Tartan Asia Extreme". They were responsible for shining light on films such as *Battle Royale*, the *Whispering Corridors* series, *A Tale of Two Sisters* and *Oldboy*. Many people who now run and work for other labels started at Tartan.

What stands out about a label is how they look on a shelf and trigger any collector to "organise" by brand. There is a colour... and a curation. Tartan, in hindsight, have dated in terms of their transfers, many films having gone on to be remastered by other labels.

Main labels today include:

UK

Second Sight Films



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Arrow Films
101 Films
Eureka Entertainment
Radiance Films
Powerhouse Films (Indicator)
Shameless
BFI

There is also Network on Air which, unfortunately folded a few years ago. Mostly know for cult television there are some excellent movies with supreme transfers.

I highly recommend 1972's *Death Line*.

US

Shout Factory / Scream Factory
Criterion
Kino Lorber
Olive Signature
Vinegar Syndrome
Severin Films

Australia

Umbrella Entertainment
Imprint Films

There are many more if you dig, both home and away. Discs purchased abroad will require a multi-region player as Blu-rays and DVDs are often locked to their region.

Most labels market limited edition box sets that are filled with an exhausting amount of extra features and written material. Powerhouse Films' Indicator label is a top tie UK label that has a healthy mix of cult cinema and classic vintage films, including film noir and releases from the Hammer library.

Films are about 80% older films and 20% looking out for the odd new release that fits with their brand. They release a lot of horror, but there are thrillers too, including world cinema from France and South Korea.

Arrow Films have also been leaders in their field. Recently they have had to focus on 4K rereleases and cut back on their slate due to mistakes in their transfers. They are also owned by Zavvi which has altered some of their distribution. This said, they are still much loved and release so incredible films.

One of their best is *Oldboy*. A number of versions have been released by the limited edition set, that includes the rest of Park Chan-wook's Vengeance Trilogy, is the best showing off a nifty



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package design based on the opening of an elevator that reflects the famous hallway fight sequence and the film's green-tinged cinematography.

Enter The Video Store: Empire Of Screams is Arrow Films' tribute to those days in the video store tapping back into that nostalgic experience directly from the rereleases of Charles Band's Empire International Pictures. Films in the set include: *The Dungeonmaster*, *Dolls*, *Cellar Dweller*, *Arena* and *Robot Jox* – films that epitomise what Arrow Films released at their height, often proving that you can polish turds. Arrow explained to *Bloody Disgusting* on its release last year: "In 1983, entrepreneurial producer and director Charles Band founded Empire International Pictures, which would go on to make some of the most memorable and beloved genre movies of the 1980s. Empire became a mainstay of video stores across the world with their catchy titles, outlandish art and Band's wholehearted belief in giving audiences a good time."

Eureka Entertainment have some wonderful releases and range from Hong Kong classics to silent cinema such as Carl Theodor Dreyer's *Vampyr* (1932).

101 Films are also building into a respectable label with their Black Label series releasing limited editions including *Alligator* (1980) and *Memento* (2000) recent examples.

Where do you begin with Criterion? Well, certainly two recent releases over in the UK with the stunning set of Tod Browning's *Sideshow Shockers* – that includes: *The Mystic* (1925), *The Unknown* (1927) and *Freaks* (1932) – and Guillermo del Toro's *Pinocchio* (2022).

Then there is the *Lone Wolf and Cub* set, which houses a pleasant surprise in its spine: a fanned, fold out diagram of the baby cart.

Film Restoration

When it comes to the restoration of film, there are many 'physical' challenges based on the condition of the original negatives. They can show severe deterioration from scratches to water damage. All of which has to be removed digitally from high resolution scans. It can take *years*.

Reference: "Restoration as Reimagining History" <https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/7132-restoration-as-reimagining-history>

When it comes to the restoration of film, there are many 'physical' challenges based on the condition of the original negatives. They can show severe deterioration from scratches to water damage. All of which has to be removed digitally from high resolution scans. It can take *years*.

Images courtesy of: <https://www.deutsche-kinemathek.de/en/visit/exhibitions/frame-by-frame-restoring-films>

Just imagine if the film is torn... the level of inspection and challenges in restoring. Let's take a look at the restoration of *Jaws* from Universal, which still boasts one of the best restorations to date.



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Of course there is the restoration of Bruce the shark by special effects artist Greg Nicotero for the Academy Museum in 2021... but the restoration of the film itself is *remarkable*. The team at Universal scanned these from their archive, performed colour correction and digitally fixed dirt and scratches frame by frame.

Second Sight Films are one of the major boutique labels who invest in restoration and is a major part of bring a film back that may have been buried for years and in need of a 'clean'. The *Dawn of the Dead* 4K was a major project along with the recently announced *The Hitcher*, which, so far, has taken over four years. An interview on the process compiled especially for this course with Second Sight Films' Founder Chris Holden can be found [here](#).

PAUSE.

PART II: RESURGANCE

The older the film, the bigger the challenge, as Criterion illustrates:

Reference: "Restoring the Gold Rush" <https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/2348-restoring-the-gold-rush>

Reporter and editor Ian Jack went on to highlight in 2018: "The video, at least in our house, was obviously a great enabler of nostalgia." Nostalgia being a major fuel in keeping physical media alive – that there is a 'real' place to select your films... so you remember them all the more and never take (the final resting place of) cinema for granted.

Reference: "A video with a takeaway curry – lost pleasures of 1980s life" <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/nov/24/video-curry-takeaway-1980-vhs>

Curation vs. Saturation

It would be worth reminding ourselves of magazines. Another physical format that was hugely impacted by the internet and online forums. Specific magazines aimed at video collectors include *Video Today* and *Video Watchdog* that ran from 1990 to 2017

In the UK *DVD Monthly* and *DVD Review* were the main magazines.

Browsing piles of magazines was replaced with browsing the web and streaming menus, screens shrinking – home cinema become "mobile cinema" on the smallest of screens.

The advantages of this? There are many. Mostly declutter in the modern home and also ecological reasons with people rejecting plastic more than ever. Let's take a look at some reactions via a recent Guardian article.



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“The film fans who refuse to surrender to streaming: ‘One day you’ll barter bread for our DVDs””
<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2024/mar/27/the-film-fans-who-refuse-to-surrender-to-streaming-one-day-youll-barter-bread-for-our-dvds>

“‘This current phase sucks’: readers on fight to preserve DVDs and Blu-rays”
<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2024/mar/28/dvds-blu-rays-physical-media-reader-responses>

“A reluctant necessity for space reasons.”

“Ultimately wind up as future landfill.”

“Household budgets are stretched.”

A statement that really stands out from those holding onto physical media reads: “The biggest loss of films since the old studio vault fires.” A bold statement that absolutely rings true.

Podcaster Craig McNeil alludes to this:

“I can’t imagine not having my extensive library of Blu-ray, DVDs, VHS and my old LaserDiscs. A film you like? Buy it now — it may well disappear someday.”

It is all a direct contrast to what has become personal libraries separated out via label and genre. and genre... a space to retreat to and choose. A Bat Cave or Fortress of Solitude for some.

Back in March of this year, actor Carrie Coon commented on *The Tonight Show* that her husband Tracy Letts owns 10,000 DVDs and Blu-rays. “He’s a *very* sick man.”

Criterion have really owned this idea and invite many actors and filmmakers into their library with *Criterion Closet Picks*. There is a huge array of guests

Arrow Films have used streaming more as a curation of their existing catalogue, similarly inviting guests to choose through their “Selects” section.

Via Arrow’s curation, we arrive at Gala Avary. A perfect Segway into the championing of cinema.

I had the pleasure to interview Gala via *Fangoria* and for my Companion Pieces series, in which she shared her memories of anime; specifically her dad, Roger Avary (*Pulp Fiction*, *Killing Zoe*, *Rules of Attraction*) bringing back the DVDs from Japan when she was a child.

Exclusively for this course, Gala shares:

“When I was younger you were told not to believe everything that’s on the internet. Now, you’re told not to believe something unless it’s there. But what happens when they remove information that’s been available or redact imagery from art and interviews because it no longer fits their



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narrative? Who gets to decide what is the truth and what isn't? When you own physical media, you are a bastion of the truth. You see the movies, the interviews, the articles, the books, the art in its true permanent form, exactly the way the artist originally intended it.” — Gala Avary

Which brings us to...

Embracing the Archives

As most of you will know, Quentin Tarantino worked in a video store. He was originally taken on as an employee by the owner of Video Archives Lance Lawson and Roger Avary who was already working there.

When the store closed in 1995 Tarantino bought the entire store's contents and shelving, setting it up in his home. In 2022 both Tarantino and Roger Avary launched their own podcast The Video Archives, produced by Gala Avary, in which they choose three films from the archive, watch them on the original VHS tapes and do a deep dive.

Tarantino's mantra "If you haven't seen it, then it's new to you." Rings true.

Back to the archival... we have another top tier filmmaker who is also an incredible cinephile, Martin Scorsese, who, recently donated over 50 storage boxes of tapes, highlighting all the more his devoted interest in cinema. The tapes include films and shows from the '80s to the 2000s.

References: "“He was always voraciously watching’: Scorsese’s secret life as an obsessive VHS archivist” <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2024/mar/25/martin-scorsese-vhs-video-collection-archive>

“Martin Scorsese calls for money for Scotland's film archive” <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-edinburgh-east-fife-35460096>

Shelf Life

There are many collectors out there. Another well-known filmmaker, Edgar Wright has an exhaustive collection and will often provide definitive lists online.

Matt Landsman (Left) and Matt Renoir (Right) run *Be Kind Video* over in Burbank, L.A. where they rent videos and provide screenings and talks from local Hollywood filmmakers. As leading programmer Matt L. also programmes and screens all kinds of formats at Quentin Tarantino's newly opened Vista Theatre for *The Video Archives Cinema Club*. This includes anything from 16mm to VHS. If you are ever in L.A., definitely pay a visit as he is very accommodating often having famous guest speakers such as Joe Dante and Brian Yuzna.

Follow: @matts_mortuary @bekindvideo @videoarchivesclub

References:

<https://bekindvideo.com>



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<https://www.vistatheaterhollywood.com/cinema-club>

Snips Movies in Bebington, Liverpool, has been serving *customers* since 1995, offering families a mind-blowing selection of films. DVDs line every wall... and the ceiling! The store was started up by current owner, David Wain's dad. Speaking to the Liverpool Echo, Dave said: "Ever the entrepreneur, my dad decided to buy the neighbour's stock of a few hundred tapes and change the business completely by downsizing to one shop and having a go at movie rental. At the time, it was more of a needs must scenario than any lifelong dream to become the next Quentin Tarantino."

Reference:

"Merseyside's 'irreplaceable' movie rental store on being 'one of the last' and competing with Netflix" <https://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/news/nostalgia/merseysides-irreplaceable-movie-rental-store-25489863>

Another Liverpool local Andy Johnson has *Video Odyssey*. As a former journalist in 2018 he decided to create a haven of '80s and '90s nostalgia:

"As an homage to his favourite director, Quentin Tarantino, Andy has set the shop with the clear intent of saving old films and fight back against the digital tidal wave, which made a rarity for new films to exist in actual film. Believing that fans also crave a curated experience that does not involve scrolling through endless lists of online films and that it is possible to buck the trend of online streaming services by giving customers an immersive film experience in a brick and mortar video shop. Based at the old studios of Liverpool iconic Toxteth TV, on Windsor Street, VideOdyssey offers vintage VHS players for rental alongside videotapes as well as private VHS screening rooms with regular curated cinema screenings, Q&A with directors and many other events! Millions of hours of film are currently at threat of being lost forever due to video tape mould. Or simply being junked, with hundreds of thousands of tapes being thrown on the scrap heap, as they are unable to be recycled."

Reference:

<https://www.videodyssey.com>

Check out the more local Alfreton's Straight to Video 80s Video Shop.

<http://www.80svideoshop.co.uk>

Scarecrow Video claims to be one of the largest video stores in the US. Currently under threat of closure it is attempting to raise... wait for it... 1.8 million dollars. It questions a) Why is that much needed? And b) How truly devoted and loyal is the consumer *and* collector?

Now... some good news and an encouraging sign that physical media could be starting to make a come back as it piggy rides the popularity of vinyl, is the recent reopening of Fopp in Nottingham.



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Reference:

“Fopp is returning to Nottingham with a new shop opening soon”

<https://www.nottinghampost.com/whats-on/fopp-returning-nottingham-new-shop-9313496>

Go and check out those glorious shelves.

Theo Kalomirakis is the recognized pioneer in the design and development of opulent home theaters even larger! Now when I say “opulent”... they are *opulent*... having built home theatres for Hollywood elite.

Reference: “Theo Kalomirakis: A Personal History of Home Theater”

<https://www.cineluxe.com/theo-kalomirakis-a-personal-history-of-home-theater/>

But, the most impressive thing is his film collection, claiming to have one of the largest film collections in the world, Martin Scorsese’s collection the only one that surpasses it.

Reference:

“The \$300,000 Movie Collection” <https://www.forbes.com/video/4421781008001/the-300000-movie-collection/>

Ultimately, the history of cinema is found through a more archeological approach, more and more in the digital age that helps us to appreciate how it becomes a physical ‘artifact’ we can all cherish.

Podcasts and YouTube channels worth checking out include:

Disc-Connected

Chasing Labels

Just the Discs

Disc-Connected’s The Physical Media Advocate is a completely home grown and independent publication you can order via Amazon as print on demand. A little rough around the edges but the sheer passion and commitment more than shines through with Ryan Verrill even championing the labels through his yearly “Shelf Shock Rewind” Awards.

Erik Clapp of EC Films and Cinema Force provides these words exclusively:

“Physical media collections are not just fanboy fervor spilling over into mountains of media. They are living breathing time machines that chronicle the journey of the human race just like cave drawings did of early man. My own collection started back before I was born with my father’s 8mm collection of Universal horrors and the silent comedies of Harold Lloyd. And unbeknownst to me, those shared flickering images shaped who I was to become. A physical library and or archive might seem an antiquated concept in today’s times but in reality it is a tool that will live beyond the digital age and will inform future generations of what cinema reflected back to us about ourselves.”



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Additional links

How a 100 Year Old Animated Film is restored

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=4&v=rIOgaMnwRrQ&embeds_referring_euri=https%3A%2F%2Fhackaday.com%2F&source_ve_path=Mjg2NjY&feature=emb_logo

Oh for the Days of the Making-Of Featurette — Seriously

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/06/movies/dvd-extras.html>

VHS tape fanatic with gigantic collection creates Blockbuster video store in his home

<https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/vhs-tape-fanatic-gigantic-collection-21883121>

DVD Special Features Are a Lost Art, Thanks to Streaming

<https://www.thedailybeast.com/obsessed/dvd-special-features-are-a-lost-art-thanks-to-streaming>

A video with a takeaway curry – lost pleasures of 1980s life\

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/nov/24/video-curry-takeaway-1980-vhs>

Why 2024 is the year to start a physical media collection, from DVDs to vinyl

<https://www.thenationalnews.com/arts-culture/2024/01/09/physical-media-resurgence/>

STOP.

EJECT.