

BEYOND THE DARKNESS

CULT, HORROR, AND EXTREME CINEMA



PHIL RUSSELL

PARENTAL
ADVISORY
EXPLICIT CONTENT

BEYOND THE DARKNESS

Cult, Horror, and Extreme Cinema

By Phil Russell

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This book is dedicated to the memory of Ken Russell

1927 - 2011

BEYOND THE DARKNESS

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By Phil Russell

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INTRODUCTION

Mainstream movies have always struck me as bland, boring, safe, predictable, and prudish. However, the mainstream is also necessary for cult movie fans as a point of distinction between 'us and them'. One of the great pleasures of being into this kind of stuff is to seek and ferret out new cinematic treasures, and for that reason I have resisted the urge to compile a comprehensive guide. Generally, this book concentrates on the darker side of film; the controversial, the shocking, and disturbing. It serves as a gateway into extreme cinema rather than a complete guide. The intention is to give readers an idea of what is out there, but by no means is the territory fully mapped-out in these pages. Rather than being content to seek out random, directionless entertainment, as mainstream film fans do, devotees of the darker side of cinema are more willing to discover these oddities for themselves. For example, it was only a few short years ago when the usually reliable IMDB listed just a handful of films by Japanese provocateur, Hisayasu Sato. But the last time I checked that number had grown to more than 50! Barely any of his films have had a DVD release in the West, but with the recent success of *Rampo Noir*, cult movie fans are quickly catching up with the filmic output of this extraordinary director. Some of his films are covered in this book, including one of the most fucked up movies you'll ever see, *Lolita Vibrator Torture*. As for the rest, you'll have to discover them for yourself.

There are a number of films covered here that have barely been written about before, not even online, such as *First Transmission*, *The Video Diary of Ricardo Lopez*, *Love To Kill*, and *Molester Train: Dirty Behaviour*. This is not an entry-level book. It is assumed that the reader will be somewhat familiar with the world of film and the horror genre in particular, and be open to alternatives. It's not a complete overview of extreme cinema (a complete A-Z guide would include almost 3000 titles!). But hopefully you'll be introduced to a few gems you have never even heard of before. And if I can convince just one person to the sleazy joys of a CAT III movie, I'll consider this book job done.

Everything from big-budget Hollywood flicks to micro-budget amateur crap is covered here, and everything in between. The style of the reviews are also varied; some are short and straight to the point, others are more in-depth attempts to engage with a film. Some are strictly objective in approach, whereas others offer a more personal, subjective point of view. Most were written in a sober frame of mind, but there were one or two written under the influence. I also attempt to explain my own interpretations of some of these films but many will probably be widely off the mark. But hey, don't mind me.

There are some people out there who prize certain films depending on the levels of gore, violence, sexual depravity on display that the more mainstream types of films don't deliver. If that's your main interest in film then perhaps you should join a relevant web forum and compare top ten lists of favourite decapitations with fellow geeks because this book will have little interest for you. Likewise, if you're just interested in the real stuff. Monday movies and shockumentaries are covered in these pages but the coverage isn't all that extensive. Although I have watched a fair few of these types of films over the years, I generally draw the line at the genuine stuff. If you've become so jaded that even the grisliest and goriest of special effects have no effect on you then by all means go check out the fully illustrated *Color Atlas of Forensic Pathology*, or the AP photos of the Liberian Civil War, or the police recovery footage of the corpse found under John Wayne Gacy's house, because let's face it, there's no hope for you in fiction. That stuff might just bring it on home to you the cost of human destruction.

Films like Pasolini's *Salo*, however disgusting it may be, had a point to make about the reduction of man to pieces of meat in the world of late capitalism, and John McNaughton's *Henry-Portrait of a Serial Killer* is a gruelling character study that effectively shows how vulnerable we could be to an unreasoning psychopath. But the celebration of these films should not be at the expense of the more gratuitous and exploitative side of shock cinema. Koji Shiraishi's *Grotesque* may not offer anything even resembling a social and/or political standpoint, but is a darn good piece of torture porn, nonetheless. William Lustig's *Maniac* may not offer the same psychological insight as the anti-hero in McNaughton's film, but it remains one of the most brutal and harrowing slash movies ever made. Sometimes the horror and the gruesomeness and the sleaze is reason enough to watch these films, and there is nothing wrong with that. It's perfectly natural to express an interest in the dark and the forbidden; we shouldn't need to justify our viewing pleasures by relying on some 'moral message' or serious subtext. If a filmmaker decides to use shocking and disturbing imagery in order to make a point about where we're heading as a society, then that's great. And if the same director decides to make a film that is gratuitous and for the sole purpose of shocking and amusing his audience, then that's also fine by me. After all, we're responsible adults and we should be free to decide for ourselves what we would like to watch. Cinema as pure spectacle is accepted in the form of the musical or the big-budget action film, but the censors always make a point of cutting and banning this kind of thing in the horror movie equivalent; the violent set-piece. A recent example is *The Human Centipede 2* which was briefly banned in the UK in 2011 for being utterly gratuitous.

The Devils, Peeping Tom, and Scum have never been easy viewing and had caused much controversy and scandal on their initial releases, but at the same time these are among the finest British films of the post-war years. Nagisa Oshima's Ai no corrida is considered a masterpiece but has been banned and censored across the world. Even the former head of British censorship, James Ferman, admired the film (and this is the same man who seemed to have a personal vendetta against The Exorcist and The Texas Chainsaw Massacre, both of which he happily banned in this country). But while many of the films covered here have their own artistic and social merits, an equal amount of coverage is given to films that possess no such thing. Such then is Beyond the Darkness, a book that juxtaposes the highs of the arthouse cinema with the lows of the scuzzy underground flicks, and much in between. You're just as likely to read about the work of despised filmmakers such as Fred Vogel, Andrey Iskanov, and Uwe Boll, as you are the films of such vital artists as Abel Ferrara, David Cronenberg, and Lars Von Trier.

My unshakeable enthusiasm for the most bizarre, deformed, and outrageous cine-life-forms has sometimes led me down some dubious paths - Hentai anime, Japanese AV crap, and even German amateur gorefests - There are so many genres and sub-genres to explore that it's easy to get lost and find yourself completely alienated from the reasons why you love movies in the first place. However, it's the willingness to explore the nether-regions of the world of extreme cinema and to dig through all the crap, that forms the ethos of this book. I don't expect to stop taking unwise detours in the film jungle any time soon. I remain utterly and foolishly in love with movies. And I hope you are too.
Enjoy!

Phil Russell, January 2012.

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ABNORMAL - THE SINEMA OF NICK ZEDD (1980-2001)

Dir: Nick Zedd /USA

This 2-disc set from the man who coined the term 'Cinema of transgression' includes a dozen short films mostly shot on 8mm that span twenty years of his career. They're presented chronologically but in reverse order for some reason, and are a hit and miss collection displaying the difficulties of being a super low-budget filmmaker whose main objective is to shock, provoke, and push the boundaries.

Tom Thumb In The Land of The Giants (1999) was shot in Copenhagen and is fashioned in a faux trailer style (a la Jim Van Bebber's *Chunk Blower* and Richard Gale's *The Horribly Slow Murder With The Extremely Inefficient Weapon*). A child is running through a graveyard and is followed by being in black. The voiceover is very tongue-in-cheek and sells the film well. The kid (played by Zedd's son) crawls into a huge vagina at the end. Running time: 3 minutes.

Ecstasy In Entropy (1999) 17 mins. This looks like a tribute to the old grindhouse movies of the 60s with its gritty style and constant barrage of tinny pop music. A bunch of strippers get into a fight and a man receives a blowjob before unloading half a bucket of (fake) spunk onto a woman's face. Then we switch to a colour scene where someone dressed in black and wearing a mask strips and attempts to rape a woman (Annie Sprinke), but she fights back and amusingly drops some huge tit-bombs on his head while she rides on his back.

Why Do You Exist (aka Screen Test) (1998) 16 mins. This starts out quite fun and entertaining but quickly outstays its welcome by a good ten minutes. It basically presents a group of people in front of the camera; a large woman puts squirty cream all over her tits along with cinnamon and cherries, and the camera licks it off (or as Zedd puts it, "consuming a picnic on her tits"). More people posing and smoking. A lot. The woman painted in blue and strumming an acoustic guitar (the 'Blue Lady' Kembra Pfahle) was another highlight but overall this isn't up to much. The film also features other underground personalities, including Brenda Bergman and Dr. Ducky DooLittle.

War Is Menstrual Envy (1992) Perhaps the highlight of the whole set. This excerpt from Zedd's feature film ranks among the finest work he has ever achieved. A woman painted almost entirely in blue (except for the pink nipples, reminiscent of Barbara Steele in *Curse of The Crimson Altar*) unwraps a mummified figure to reveal a man who has severe burns to his head, face, torso, and arms. It's quite clear that this guy is a real burns victim, and this makes the clip uneasy viewing. The sequence is played out to a light flute arrangement like from an old Disney movie, and this gives the proceedings a dark fairytale edge. Then we cut to the next scene in which the man is encountered by the infamous fetish porn actress, Annie Sprinke, and she dresses him in a gun holster, a headscarf, and a pair of shades, takes them off again, and then kisses and licks his melted flesh. The man then sucks her tits for a while and tries to caress them, but finds it difficult because all his fingers have been melted together, and he struggles to make that lustful contact he so desires. I'm not sure what the clip means but it's mesmerizing stuff. The end credits are displayed with graphic footage of real eyeball surgery.

~~Whoregasm! (1988) 12 mins. A short collage/experimental film which juxtaposes images of hardcore sex and war footage through a process of tricky and inventive editing and over-lapping techniques. Perhaps Zedd's most technically impressive film to date. Again, there's no narrative here to speak of but it's quite engaging and much more interesting than some of the crap that gets passed off as experimental. Includes graphic shots of fellatio, explosions, in-and-out penetration close-ups (some performed by Zedd himself), more explosions, and an image of a young boy whose hand is being held by a man who has an erection (whether this is a 'doctored' image or a real one I've no idea but it certainly adds to the transgressive nature of the film), a transvestite sucking a foot, a policeman screaming into the lens (that shot was taken from Zedd's previous short, Police State), and the transvestite receiving a blowjob from a woman.~~

Police State (1987) 18 mins. This micro-budget slice of punk nihilism could have been so much better but as it stands it's a scrappy and uneven piece that at least adds a few nuggets of interest on repeated viewings. Perhaps the most disappointing film of the set due to the potential at its disposal, Police State is about a young man (played by Zedd himself) who is cornered and harassed for a while by a cop before he is taken to the station, interrogated, beaten by more cops, and is eventually castrated. It shows an obvious disdain for the police and an Orwellian warning about where we're at as a society sleep-walking into totalitarianism, which is a valid point to be made, but the acting, camera work, and script could have been so much better. According to the interview on the second disc, Zedd and his cohorts were almost caught by the cops vandalising police cars with spray paint during the making of the film.

Kiss Me Goodbye (1986) Another disappointing short but at least this one only takes up three minutes of your time. A man (again played by Zedd) wanders into a room to find a woman reading a book. He kisses her and then strangles her. The end. Zedd appears as B.D. Shane, a 'dead star' and he apparently strangles one of his fans.

Go To Hell (1986) 11 mins. This one isn't much better. Zedd wanders around and sees a woman dressed in white and some junky shooting up into his arm. The junky follows the woman and beats her unconscious, and then Zedd shows up and kisses her as an atomic bomb blast goes off in the background. Music by The Swans who sound like an 80s version of The Doors.

Thrust In Me (1985) 8 mins. Things improve a lot with this one. This time Zedd plays two roles. Co-directed with Richard Kern (it's also included on Kern's Hard Core Collection). A tranny reads a book on suicide. Zedd walks the streets. Tranny gets into the bath and slashes her wrist. Zedd enters the apartment and takes a shit without noticing the bloody corpse in the tub. He takes a picture of Jesus off the wall and wipes his arse on it, and then notices the dead tranny. He then fucks the corpse in the mouth and squirts half a gallon of spunk on its head. He walks out onto the rooftop of the apartment and gazes at the New York skyline. Aww, who said romance is dead. It's a shame that Zedd and Kern ended their friendship over a "misunderstanding" as this film shows potential. Yes it's childish and you get the impression that they're trying really hard to offend you whilst at the same time pretending not to care what you think. But there is an undeniable power to this clip that probably stemmed from a competitive streak between the two. It would have been interesting to see more collaborations. A studio porn star was also used.

The Wild World of Lydia Lunch (1983) 20 mins. Someone once dubbed this 'The Incredibly Dumb World of Lydia Lunch', and to be honest I can't argue with that. Even many of Lunch's fans find this a crushing bore. It starts in a dark room where she reads a letter from someone complaining about being stranded in London with increasing money problems. Then it cuts to scenes of Lunch walking the streets of London (well, we see a red phone box so I assume it's somewhere in England), and her voiceover talks a lot of nonsense. She teases a cute dog, hangs out in the park, stands on street corner and stares a lot into the camera lens. It's as if she is trapped in some kind of post-punk-pre-goth limbo.

The Bogus Man (1980) 11 mins. A satirical pseudo-documentary with weird clips of rehearsed and repeated voiceovers. A man in a ski mask tells of his warped ideas about the American President being a clone. He explains his conspiracy theory and shows us some footage of a doctor under interrogation who shoots himself when asked why he has blood on his hands. We also see footage of the kidnapped President (actually, some dude in a Jimmy Carter mask). He is tied to a strange vaginal chair that has phallic prongs sticking out at either side, and someone cuts his finger off. We're told that the tissue from each finger will be used to generate more clones... The most disturbing scenes though are the ones featuring the woman (or is it a man?) in a full body suit dancing around in a room with an American flag displayed in the background. One of the freakiest things you'll ever see. This film is also notable as an early outing for special fx legend 'Screaming Mad George' of A Nightmare On Elm Street and Society fame.

1 of K9 (2001). This last clip is in black and white and lasts just a couple of minutes. There looks to be an orgy going on in the background and a woman takes hold of a dog's face and starts kissing it on the mouth with tongues and everything. The Doberman doesn't look to be too happy about being slobbered on (I suppose it makes a change, it's usually the dogs who slobber on us), and looks to be on the verge of chewing her face off at any moment. But then a man enters the frame, shoves the woman out the way, and then he starts to kiss and lick the dog's mouth; he almost has his tongue down its throat at one point. An amusing clip but I've no idea what it means.

So there you have it, 12 shorts that vary in terms of quality and re-watchability set over a twenty-or-so year period of filmmaking history. None of them can really live up to the scummy triumphs of Zedd's debut feature, *They Eat Scum* (1979), but there are a few clips here that are worth a re-visit from time to time. It's a good place to start if you want to know what all the fuss was about in the New York underground. I should also point out that the extras on the second disc includes a very strange interview with Zedd taken from some old cable TV show. See it to believe it.

Nick Zedd made his debut feature, *They Eat Scum*, in the late 70s. Starring Donna Death as Suzette Putrid, she leads her Death Rock band, *The Mental Deficients*, to world domination when she kills her family and causes a core meltdown at a nuclear power station. The film features murder, cannibalism, bestiality, and a girl being forced to eat a live rat. It was broadcast on cable TV in 1982 causing much controversy when the *Wall Street Journal* condemned the screening with a damning front page article. The following year Zedd returned with his second feature film, *Geek Maggot Bingo, Or, The Freaks From Suckweasel Mountain*. Coming on like a twisted take on the Universal monster cycle of the 1930s, *Geek Maggot Bingo* saw the return of Donna Death along with Brenda Bergman and Richard Hell, and depicts an evil doctor who uses a slave to procure victims for his fiendish experiments.

In 1985 Nick Zedd wrote *The Cinema of Transgression Manifesto* for his fanzine, *The Underground Film Bulletin*.

Written under the pseudonym Orion Jericho, Zedd calls for a rejection of traditional film theory and instead declares that he and his fellow underground filmmakers, including Richard Kern, intend on breaking every taboo they can in the name of freedom.

His next feature, *War Is Menstrual Envy*, appeared in 1992, and is the first of his full-length films to break away from traditional narrative storytelling.

THE CINEMA OF TRANSGRESSION MANIFESTO

(Reproduced here with the kind permission of Nick Zedd)

We who have violated the laws, commands and duties of the avant-garde; i.e. to bore, tranquilize and obfuscate through a fluke process dictated by practical convenience stand guilty as charged. We openly renounce and reject the entrenched academic snobbery which erected a monument to laziness known as structuralism and proceeded to lock out those filmmakers who possessed the vision to see through this charade.

We refuse to take their easy approach to cinematic creativity; an approach which ruined the underground of the sixties when the scourge of the film school took over. Legitimising every mindless manifestation of sloppy movie making undertaken by a generation of misled film students, the dream media arts centres and geriatric cinema critics have totally ignored the exhilarating accomplishments of those in our rank - such underground invisibles as Zedd, Kern, Turner, Klemann, DeLanda, Eros and Mare, and DirectArt Ltd, a new generation of filmmakers daring to rip out of the stifling strait jackets of film theory in a direct attack on every value system known to man.

We propose that all film schools be blown up and all boring films never be made again. We propose that a sense of humour is an essential element discarded by the doddering academics and further, that any film which doesn't shock isn't worth looking at. All values must be challenged. Nothing is sacred. Everything must be questioned and reassessed in order to free our minds from the faith of tradition. Intellectual growth demands that risks be taken and changes occur in political, sexual and aesthetic alignments no matter who disapproves. We propose to go beyond all limits set or prescribed by taste, morality or any other traditional value system shackling the minds of men. We pass beyond and go over boundaries of millimeters, screens and projectors to a state of expanded cinema.

We violate the command and law that we bore audiences to death in rituals of circumlocution and propose to break all the taboos of our age by sinning as much as possible. There will be blood, shame, pain and ecstasy, the likes of which no one has yet imagined. None shall emerge unscathed. Since there is no afterlife, the only hell is the hell of praying, obeying laws, and debasing yourself before authority figures, the only heaven is the heaven of sin, being rebellious, having fun, fucking, learning new things and breaking as many rules as you can. This act of courage is known as transgression. We propose transformation through transgression - to convert, transfigure and transmute into a higher plane of existence in order to approach freedom in a world full of unknowing slaves.

POSTSCRIPT: INTERVIEW WITH NICK ZEDD

Conducted via email on 1st February 2012

“I believe you must be obsessed to produce anything of lasting value in this world...My commitment was total

– Nick Zed

PR - Tell us about your childhood and where you grew up.

NZ - I grew up in Hyattsville, Maryland, watched a lot of TV as a kid, went to drive-in movies, had big imagination, played out having a television network in my head, produced, wrote, directed and starred in my own movies and television programs on a daily basis. I read a lot of comic books Famous Monsters of Filmland, Castle of Frankenstein. I produced and performed scenarios with puppets for my brother and myself as a kid. This was all a rehearsal for making real movies later in life.

Many filmmakers started out with Super-8 as youngsters, such as Jim Van Bebber and Sam Raimi. Did you get to play around with cameras as a kid?

Yeah, I made my first 8mm movie when I was 12, animating GI Joe dolls. I produced and directed a series of science fiction films and their sequels from the age of 14 to 16, using friends as actors.

I've always been fond of They Eat Scum. How did that project come about? Must have been pretty daunting to set out making an apocalyptic punk movie on such a miniscule budget.

It started with a script I wrote while in film school after I moved to New York. I produced, wrote and directed it using people I knew, met or auditioned from the punk scene. It was made with almost no input from the film teachers or film students, like an outside project. I left school before it was finished. I financed it by sweeping floors in a wood shop part time. I used miniatures and stock footage shot off a TV screen for the more expensive effects or location shots.

It was just an extension of my directing style which I'd begun 9 years earlier in Maryland; do-it-yourself, don't get hung up on money or "professionalism," don't let anything stop you, just do it. Things come out better when you keep it personal, working with amateurs, with people who aren't motivated by money; inspired to be part of something new. My enthusiasm must have been infectious because I always could get people to work for free.

The year I premiered it, I was invited to show it in San Francisco and was flown there to screen it at some punk venues with good local publicity and big crowds. Some place in Berlin also showed a video of They Eat Scum in 1979 which amazed me. There was immediate interest as soon as it came out. A local NY paper gave it a great review.(Fortunately one of my film teachers wrote movie reviews.) The other local paper gave it a scathing review, dismissing it along with Gordon Stevenson's Ecstatic Stigmatic, another brilliant and legendary super-8 film made at the same time, so I was in good company.

Who was the burnt guy in War Is Menstrual Envy?

Ray, who was Annie Sprinkle's boyfriend at the time. He was a drummer who got burned in a campfire accident as a teenager.

Who was it who was dancing around in the body suit in The Bogus Man? I found those scenes be quite disturbing.

That was Grier Lankton, a friend of Donna Death who made costumes as sculpture and later had a sex change and became female.

Johannes Schonherr held screenings of your films in Nuremberg in 1990, and apparently feminists attacked the event and threw cat shit at the screen. And you were subjected to some front page tabloid infamy. In the UK (and America) it's usually the conservatives who picket and protest at cinemas, but in Germany, according to Schonherr, it's more often than not the leftists who are the most intolerant of daring and challenging films. Can you share some of the most memorable reactions to screenings of your work, both the good and bad?

When I showed War Is Menstrual Envy at Anthology Film Archives in 1993, a guy fainted and had to be carried out of the theatre during the scene with Ray the burn victim and Annie.

In San Francisco in 1979 when I showed They Eat Scum, enraged punks were heckling and screaming at me so I shot them with a water pistol.

On Nuremberg in 1990 the Rote Zora feminazis threw garbage and cat shit over the audience and threw acid on the movie screen, blew whistles and threw tracts in the air, protesting the "provocation" of the program notes describing the movies, which I hadn't read. I locked myself in the projection booth when I heard a stampede of feet from the theatre and people pounding on the door, but Johannes opened the door anyway and fortunately the feminists had left.

In Gothenberg, Sweden in 1993 I was arrested upon arrival at the airport, then the police spent 3 hours examining my movies and held me in a cell, threatening to put me in prison. Afterwards they let me go, but warned me to never show them because they were "sick" and "immoral." A week later, police raided the apt I was staying in, arrested me and took me to the station where I spent another 2 hours in a cell while they looked at all my movies. The chief of police told me the government instructed him to let me go, but warned me to never show the movies in Sweden.

In Canada, my films were confiscated in 1988 and later returned 4 months later by mail to NYC. In 2007, I was removed from a train entering Canada by the police, who escorted me over the border after looking at my films which they declared "borderline criminal material" and told me I was banned from the country for ten years.

Best recent reaction was last year in Mexico City when I showed Geek Maggot Bingo at the Cineteca, and a big audience loved it and asked for autographs and lined up to have pictures taken with me. This movie was not popular when I originally showed it in 1983.

This morning I saw a news report claiming that scientists have learned how to read minds by monitoring brainwaves as a way of decoding inner voices. It brings to mind Orwell's *Thought Police* and also your film *Police State*. Do you feel that society is heading toward totalitarianism?

Of course. Surveillance is everywhere. Now that people spend most of their time on computers they can be monitored and tracked thru social networking sites. The populace has been made docile with superficial distractions like text messaging, virtual reality sites and video games. A massive dumbing down is taking place all over the world. But totalitarian control is being short-circuited by Occupy movements using technology against the global elites, organizing online and with cell phones, taking to the streets and rendering bogus electoral systems irrelevant. Parliamentary cretinism has been revealed as a false construct by mass passive resistance and organized protest world-wide. Corporations, media and their puppet masters are dumbfounded at this turn of events which is a good sign that things are changing. People are fed up all over the world and want their freedom back.

It seems you take inspiration from all kinds of areas, not just filmmakers. Who do you consider to be the biggest influence on your work?

Whoever I'm in contact with at the moment. That changes from week to week. The more isolated I become the more I influence myself. I'm not really that inspired by anyone at the moment.

What do you make of John Waters' early films?

They're fabulous.

How was it working with Richard Kern? *Thrust In Me* seemed to bring out the best in you both. Would you agree that there was a competitive streak between you and Kern?

Sure. We were all competing with each other as filmmakers in the early days. Later, I was competing with my main collaborator Rev Jen, from 2001 to 2009. Creative competition is a great catalyst. It is unfortunate that inflated egos and insecurities can turn creative collaborator/competitors into mortal enemies. I always thought that producing end results far outweighed holding grudges and being on pointless ego trips but you'd be astounded at the level of assholeism in most artists. They're some of the worst people in the world to deal with; vicious, petty, mean-spirited hateful creatures...It's unfortunate when they also have some talent waiting to be exploited, but I've become an expert in utilizing that talent until it dissipates into self-destructive narcissism. Then it's time to move onto the next "stage" and break new ground. So much can be accomplished when people put their egos aside and can see the bigger picture. It's that narcissistic egotism that kills so much creative potential, destroys creative alliances that could produce historic art. I've seen it happen again and again.

What's the New York underground scene like nowadays? Is there anything interesting going on?

No, it's dead.

Tell us about *Electra Elf*.

That was a superhero comedy series I produced, directed and co-wrote with Rev Jen from 2003-2009, shown on NYC public access and syndicated to some cities in other states, ultimately released by MVD as a boxed set of twenty episodes. It was really sugar-coated subversion designed to activate certain sexual fetishes while attacking the status quo through political and social satire. Some episodes completely deconstructed conventional narrative in order to jolt the viewer awake with xenomorphic shock therapy disguised as family friendly entertainment. It was an exercise in anti-Simulation free thought. I loved making that series as much as a cultist might love a new religion... it was my reason for living for six years...I believe you must be obsessed to produce anything of lasting value in this world...My commitment was total.

What's the most shocking or disturbing film you've ever seen? And what was it about the film that disturbed you?

The 9/11 inside job, perpetrated by traitors in the US shadow government and facilitated by brainwashed imbeciles in corporate media who collaborated in promoting the greatest hoax in human history (aside from the Christ and Mohammad myths.) This Big Lie enabled the illegitimate Bush crime family to jump-start two disastrous wars of aggression that bankrupted our economy and extended the profit margins for war profiteers and fossil fuel conglomerates while expanding the global control grid of an elitist blood-line (the Rockefellers and the Rothschilds) whose tactical agenda is world genocide. The current administration is a continuation of the same illegitimate neo-con lunacy. The false-flag 9/11 event and its promotion by corporate media to millions of conspiracy dupes disturbs me as much as the Kennedy assassinations, which similarly were covered up and mythologized by corrupt fascists peddling disinformation to the masses. The decline of everything positive in our lives can be traced back to these pivotal events, orchestrated by the most evil men in history.

What's your favourite book, and why?

Totem of the Depraved, because I wrote it, and it's a great series of true stories. I'm the world's best living writer. No lie, just fact.

Finally, what's next for Nick Zedd? Do you have any future projects lined up?

That would be telling... It's better to surprise the world...

THE ADDICTION (1995)

Dir: Abel Ferrara /USA

In Abel Ferrara's earlier film, *Bad Lieutenant*, Zoe Lund suggests that drug addicts are like vampires and that "vampires are lucky, they can feed on others. We have to feed on ourselves". It was only natural that Ferrara would eventually tackle the opposite: Vampires in the clutch of addiction. He teamed up once again with his long-time writing partner, Nicholas St. John, and together they came up with a vampiric tale that contemplates the nature of eternal guilt.

The plot concerns Kathleen (Lili Taylor), a postgraduate philosophy student who is pulled into a dark alley and bitten by a glamorous vampire, Casanova (Annabella Sciorra).

After having her wounds checked out at the local hospital, Kathleen comes to realise that she is now addicted to human blood. This affliction brings on a new outlook on life and has a tremendous effect on her thesis. And when she thirsts for the red stuff, she uses an oddly ethical approach to her victims, giving them the opportunity to overpower her ("Tell me to go away like you mean it"). But strangely, none of her victims can sum up the willpower to avoid their fates (much like drug addicts in real life) who seem to inadvertently will their own corruption and downfall by not being steadfast enough to confront the situation before it takes hold - Avoiding the confrontation, hence Sartre's 'Bad Faith').

Kathleen digs deeper into her studies and wallows in the graphic footage of atrocities at My Lai, Auschwitz-Birkenau, and Srebrenica as a way of coming to terms with her own eternal damnation. Her biggest life-lesson though comes in the form of Peina (Christopher Walken), a wise old vampire who discusses Nietzsche and Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* before biting into her jugular, and informing her that "Demons suffer in hell".

One of the most serious-minded horror movies of all time, *The Addiction* is nonetheless disliked by many who are turned off by its harsh philosophical probing and abrasive visual style. The film's central motif is moral responsibility; when Kathleen is first approached by the vampiric Casanova she is given the opportunity to deal with the situation head-on ("Tell me to go away"), but Kathleen can only manage a pathetic "please" in response. In the world of Ferrara and Nicky St. John, this kind of feeble stance amounts to consent. Accordingly, by refusing to face up to evil and deal with it openly, Kathleen and other victims just like her, deserve all they get.

Kathleen later succeeds in luring a young student to her place. And after feeding on her blood, she blames the terrified girl, insisting that "It was your decision". The victim pleads "Don't you care what you did to me! Doesn't it affect you?" She replies, "Why didn't you tell me to leave, to get lost like you really meant it? My indifference is not the concern here; it's your astonishment that needs studying." In another scene Kathleen looks in the mirror and muses "Is it wrong for me to draw blood? No. It's the violence of my will against theirs." A comment that also relates to Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*. Free will is of vital importance to Ferrara and St. John in their idea of evil: If you don't put up a fight then the vampire, the evildoer, takes that as a form of social consent. In this case, in the supernatural world of the vampire film. In addition, this concept of evil also relates to the real life evil in the form of murder, genocide, and drug addiction. The theme of refusing to confront evil recurs throughout the film in its many and varied ways, and also examines attitudes of moral ambivalence and apathy towards evil that exists in modern society.

It's possible that Kathleen's blood addiction isn't real. Maybe her obsessive studying has caused her illness through mental exhaustion. Perhaps she is a plain old drug addict, and she fantasizes of vampirism as a way of making light of her condition (and this could also relate the film to George Romero's *Martin* in that it is never confirmed or denied whether Martin is in fact a real vamp. *Martin* has flashbacks to times set in old Europe where he drank blood from victims, but those episodes could be plain old fantasy).

Lili Taylor is superb as Kathleen, even surpassing her performance in Mary Harron's *I Shot Andy Warhol*. Christopher Walken and Paul Calderon (both of whom appeared in Ferrara's *King of New York*) add some solid support. Still one of the most irredeemable American filmmakers working today, Abel Ferrara has managed to combine exploitation with a high-minded sensibility for more than three decades. From *The Driller Killer* in the 70s, *Ms.45* in the 80s, *Dangerous Game* in the 90s, and *RXmas* in the 00s, this native New Yorker has never once compromised on his dark vision, even when working within the studio system (*Body Snatchers*). *The Addiction* remains one of his darkest efforts, a black and white gem which asks some important questions and never flinches in its search for answers. Essential viewing.

AFTERMATH (1994)

Dir: Nacho Cerda /Spain

Rarely does a short film attract such global recognition when it is limited to playing only a few film festivals, but Nacho Cerda's *Aftermath* has become something of a cult classic and has divided its audience down the middle between those declaring it a masterpiece of horror and others a crude and overblown piece of nonsense. But make no mistake, once seen this film is not so easily forgotten.

Aftermath presents a day in the life of a necrophiliac pathologist whose job in the local morgue puts him into close contact with the recently deceased. No sooner have his colleagues left the building when the nameless pervert (played by Pep Tosar) indulges in a bit of 'how's your father' with a female corpse. The film is about as explicit as a non-pornographic movie can be, with the infamous scenes of Tosar defiling the corpse with a knife and plunging the blade in between the legs whilst jerking off and then climbing on top for a bit of gross penetration. The film is beautiful to look at considering the subject matter, with some impressive photography, an insane performance by Tosar, giving it a sheen of glossiness.

Whereas previous necro-shockers like Lucker's *The Necrophagous* had a cheap and nasty aura about it, *Aftermath* offers the production values of a Hollywood film (albeit on only a fraction of the budget), at complete odds with the rank and disgusting imagery on screen. Indeed, horror fans didn't get to witness such nasty and perverted scenes in such glossy looking productions until the equally troubling likes of *Grotesque* and *A Serbian Film* came along more than a decade and a half later.

The film basically puts us in the company of a sicko for half an hour, during which time the hopelessly defenseless cadavers are opened up and sexually violated with nary a word of dialogue for the whole film. The camera prowls along investigating the lifeless slabs of meat whilst Verdi's *Requiem* plays out on the soundtrack. It's a film that is tailor-made to kill your spirit; one day it will be your corpse laid out on a slab similar to the ones in *Aftermath*, and it's that helpless identification with the subject matter that affects viewers the most: It's personal, it makes you feel vulnerable, it presents to you your own mortality that is both natural and open to abuse. And of course, most people don't want to be reminded of such things.

Emerging as part of Cerda's 'Death Trilogy', sandwiched between his black and white student film *The Awakening*, and his beautiful shot in scope *Genesis*, *Aftermath* premiered at the Sitges Film Festival in October 1994 after seven months of intense work from pre-production to its first screening. It was met with staunchly polarized opinions from both those who were impressed and those who were appalled, and it became one of the most talked about films of the year, leaving similarly themed, big budget dreck like *Curdled for Dust*.

This word-of-mouth buzz and excitement followed the film across the Atlantic to its North American premiere at the 1997 FantAsia Film Festival in Canada where almost a thousand avid horror fans reacted in wild delight as Cerda's shockfest unspooled before their eyes (the 2003 documentary *In The Belly of The Beast*, includes some invaluable footage of this event and also the fascinating reactions of people like Mitch Davis and Jim Van Bebber defending the film as a masterwork, and Chas Balun dismissing it as an over-hyped, pretentious student film).

Aftermath picked up the Public's Prize at FantAsia and Cerda became a cult celebrity in Montreal. The film became a mainstay on the bootleg video circuit (along with *Genesis*) until it was released on DVD by Unearthed Films. Later, German company Dragon released the *Death Trilogy* in a metal box set with a shed load of extras including an anatomical figurine!

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