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"We're never going to do a second take unless the camera falls over"
Roger Corman (Empire, February 1994, p 42).

The National College of Art & Design.

Visual Communications

Roger Corman: the man that launched a 1000 B-movies.

A study into the political, moral and social significance of the
films of Roger Corman during the period 1955-1971.

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Introduction

“Corman’s most characteristic achievement was to flourish with the B-movie. Corman seized what was a dying form, re-established its worth and managed to introduce its crazy disciplines to the indulgent perceptions of underground cinema”(Thomson, 1975, p116)

Roger Corman, through his single minded drive, creativeness, business savvy, ingenuity and remarkable resourcefulness, has been given such titles as “grand master and patron saint of American exploitation film”, “the Orson Wells of Z-pictures” and “the King of Schlock”. His willingness to work with untried talent to open his door, when the rest were closed, to people such as Francis Ford Coppola , Joe Dante and Monte Hellman has earned him a lasting respect from those who graduated from the “Roger Corman Academy”. His eagerness to work with women, to treat the as equals and to listen to them in the film industry when no one else would, has earned him the reputation that “he is and always has been, without question, a great champion of women in film” (Hiller, 1992, p129). His inventive use of camera shots, his vivid use of colour, his bizarre scripts and his own unique actors led him to be the creator of more cult films than anyone else. Yet to many critics, mostly American, his achievements are overlooked to a great extent. He is viewed as a “gadfly, more inventive than creative”(Thomson, 1975, p116). Others are less sympathetic to him, concluding that “where innovative film makers go Roger Corman is sure to follow”(Brosnan, 1991, p239). Even the more liberal critics conclude that “in the long term Corman's creativity may be seen chiefly in terms of the opportunities he has given to young people”(Thomson, 1975, p117). The latter is a point virtually all critics can agree on and it is indeed no small achievement, and at its time was of vital importance to the film industry. My argument is that his unique creativity, individuality and ability do not end there. Those critics who claim it does are blinding themselves as to what came after Corman and do not see what came during. Indeed I have to question if they even gave him a full examination at all. John Brosnan, author of The Primal Screen, claims that in The Day The World Ended(1956) five people survived a nuclear war (in fact seven survive survived), he also cannot understand what the creature in the film evolved from (it is explained that it mutated from a human). The New Hollywood claims that his films were rented for “for a flat fee and a percentage of the box office” (Hiller, 1992, p14) while Hollywood and the Box Office claims that the exact opposite was the case. Few critics have taken the time necessary to fully examine the period in great detail. Fewer still have looked at Corman's films in their social context and asked if they have any relevance.

Initially I had intended to examine Corman through his students, but I soon realised that I would not be examining his work. If one is to forget that any of his students became famous, Corman becomes quite an anomaly. Indeed it becomes rather difficult to categorise him at all. If you take away what is widely regarded as his foremost contribution to cinema what remains of Corman's work? This however is how I have chosen to examine his films. I believe that by viewing his films like this a fuller appreciation will be gained. Important contemporary film-makers to Corman, such as Jack Arnold or Don Siegel, are also referred to in order to get a fuller examination of Corman's work. This is a study into Corman's films in their time as much as it is a study of the films themselves.

The thesis is divided into three chapters. Each chapter represents a five-year cycle of Corman's work. These are 1955-59, 1960-64 and 1966-71. At the end of each chapter there was a major departure by Corman from his previous work. A brief description of each film covered in each chapter is included at the start of each chapter.

Corman in his own time. An uncharted voyage.

Introduction 1955-1959

Corman's career began in 1954 with Five Guns West. His first period as a film-maker was also his most prolific. He directed over 25 films and produced a further 20. By comparison mainstream Hollywood was in a crisis. Between 1948 and 1954 over 3000 cinemas closed. Box office take was down 48 per cent. Television ownership had jumped from 6000 in 1946 to 3,000,000 in 1949 (Davis & Neve, 1981, p 120). The average American in the fifties was spending more money on gardening than on than going to the cinema (Davis & Neve, 1981, p 120). Hollywood lost much of its audience to television. However the influence of television had been seen in the films of this era. In particular television's episodic format is clearly evident in films such as Twelve Angry Men (1957) or The Cain Mutiny (1954).

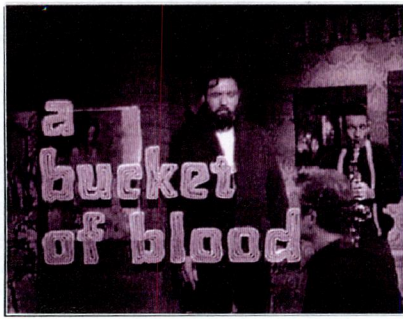
Corman's market was the drive-in, which was in its golden era due to the boom in car ownership. Drive-ins numbers had increased from 100 in 1945 to 3000 in 1955. The majors all but ignored this area. Drive-ins had their own individual tastes and culture. Corman suited their fetishes and whims, stooping eagerly to fill the vacuum. Often his films were based on a new dance or craze, as in the case of Rock All Night (1957) or Carnival Rock (1957). Corman believed that this audience might like the "sensational, the gruesome and the suggestive" (Pyle & Myles, 1979, p35). This was a shrewd decision because at the time 75% of the cinema going public were under twenty-nine. It is to Corman's credit that every film he made at this time showed a profit.

America at that time was in a troubled, paranoid era. Joseph McCarthy had organised a series of witch hunts in Hollywood in the early fifties. These not only robbed the majors of much new talent but also sent shock waves through the rest of the decade. Eisenhower was president from 1952 until 1960. Despite his conservative government and his refusal to get involved in an arms race with the Soviets an overwhelming air of despair, fatalism and depression hung over the decade. Eisenhower was also something of a paradox. He was against McCarthy. When McCarthy accused the U.S. Information Agency of having communist books Eisenhower urged people not to "join the book burners. Don't be afraid to go in your library and read every book" (Nevins, 1989, p109). However at the same time Eisenhower passed the death penalty for spying and insisted that the Rosenbergs¹ be executed (he twice rejected clemency pleas for the Rosenbergs). Eisenhower also sent troops to Little Rock in Arkansas so

¹Julius and Ethel Rosenbergs were the first ever American citizens to be put to death for wartime spying. Ethel's brother David Greenglass claimed that they recruited him to spy for them. The U.S. government claimed that the information that they gave to the U.S.S.R. were used to build the first soviet

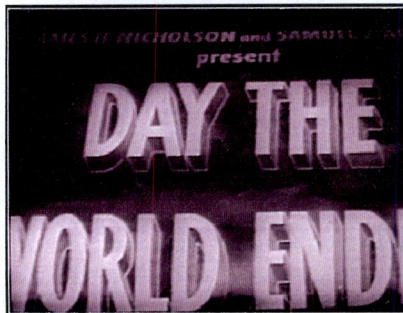
atomic bomb. The Rosenbergs pleaded innocent to these charges. They were subsequently found guilty and sentenced to death in the electric chair. Albert Einstein and Pope Pius XII appealed for clemency. The Rosenbergs were executed in 1953 at Sing Sing prison in Ossining, N.Y..

that black children could go to an all white school. He also desperately tried to have peaceful relations with the U.S.S.R.. Eisenhower, though immensely popular with the public, always claimed to be a soldier and a scholar. Previously he had wished to retire in order to teach in universities (Nevins, 1989, p107). In the White House he set up a chain of command like that of the army. He was a man of principles and always followed them through. One of the few issues that he was defeated on was his plan for compulsory national military training for all citizens. The irony was that despite always searching for peace he ran the U.S. nation like he ran the U.S. army.



A Bucket of Blood Roger Corman 1959.

Dick Miller (in arguably his finest hour) plays Walter Paisley, a busboy in a beatnik cafe. Unknown and unnoticed he more or less accidentally murders people before covering them in clay and displaying them as amazingly lifelike "sculptures". This hugely impresses his idol, Maximillion Baroque, who is the main poet in the cafe. A satire of beatnik pretensions and a neat twist on the old body in the wax museum genre.



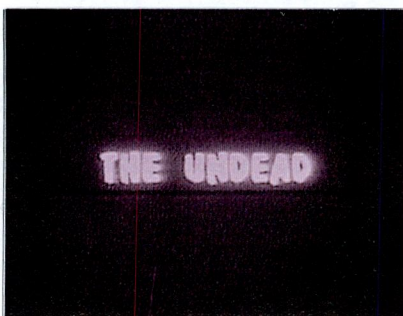
The Day The World Ended Roger Corman 1956

Seven people survive a nuclear blast. They take shelter in Captain Jim's house in a valley. Interplay of human nature that causes friction in the group. Gangster La Mot loves Jim's daughter Louise who is betrothed to Rick. Biblical references abound, Captain Jim reads chapters from the bible, and they are saved from the radiation monster by God. Or at least Jim thinks so. Jim even arranges Louise's marriage to Rick. Initially Jim tried to warn society of the dangers of the bomb. If only they listened.



It Conquered the World Roger Corman 1957

A carrot shaped creature comes from Venus, on an earth satellite that plays cabbie, with the express intention of taking over the world. Tom Anderson helps it, but his wife is less than pleased. Paul Nelson, Tom's close friend, works for the military and helped the satellite. It tries to take over people and their wives in this small American town. It tries to take over Paul but fails. After It kills Tom's wife he has a change of heart and kills It himself.



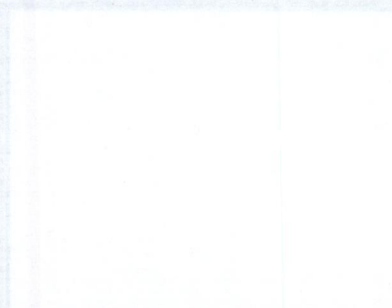
The Undead Roger Corman 1955

Quincy, a hypnotist, delves deep into the mind of a call girl. He discovers that she has had several previous lives. She *awakens* in a New England town in the sixteenthundreds. However her actions in that era alter the flow of time. Quincy follows her back through time in order to put things right. He meets up with Lydia, who is a witch and she follows him. After several close encounters with the devil and medieval knights everything is put right. Unfortunately this means that the call girl gets executed as a witch.



X-The Man With X-Ray Eyes Roger Corman 1962

Ray Milland plays Dr.Xavier- who has discovered a serum which gives him the ability to see beyond the normal range of human vision. Despite concern about its social responsibility Xavier becomes greedy and abuses his invention. Due to the theme of this film, namely social concern with scientific responsibility, it belongs to this period of Corman's work-rather than the Poe era.



BROOK

Religion, Magic and Science

“Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic”

Arthur C. Clarke's third law (Sobchack, 1980, p56)

The two main fears that faced society in the fifties (the Cold War and the atomic bomb) led to the horror genre being supplanted by the sci-fi genre for the first two-thirds of that decade. Some believed that the vampires, wolf-men and golems had evolved into moon-men, Venusians and androids. Others held that rather than evolve from horror, sci-fi had replaced it ; “the magic circle, the tetragrammaton and the full moon are replaced by test tubes, complicated electrical apparatus and Bunsen burners” (Sobchack, 1980, p55). Neither of these are entirely accurate. Sci-fi was about science. Horror was about magic and religion. The sci-fi genre initially tried to absorb the horror genre. Sci-fi offered such films as The Amazing Colossal Man which was sci-fi/horror. This film and its ilk failed because science was not scary to the fifties, merely daunting and amazing. Terror was replaced by wonder. The reason why science was not scary was because sci-fi films have always tried to rationalise and explain themselves, which renders science impersonal and dull. However by the mid-fifties a battle ensued between magic, science and religion for supremacy and survival. The Undead plots that battle.

Why did magic yield such a strong influence over society in such massive technological advances? Stanley Kubrick believed that it was a natural, social urge brought on by the impersonal nature of science:

“People in the twentieth century are increasingly occupied with magic, mystical experience, transcendental urges, hallucinogenic drugs, the belief in the extraterrestrial intelligence, et cetera, so that in this sense, fantasy, the supernatural, the magical documentary, call it what you will, is closer to the sense of the times than naturalism.”(Sobchack, 1980, p57)

Science is counter magic. Science gains its strength from the belief that “the superstition of yesterday becomes the scientific reality of today” (Van Helsing, Dracula, 1931). Science is also counter religion. In its icons it offers an alternative to religion ; “the space ship displaces the church as a vessel of salvation, the pilot leads his community of saint like a saviour - faith is placed in technical efficiency” (Sobchack, 1980, p56). Man was baptised into space which meant a “climatic initiation into the heavenly mysteries”(Sobchack, 1980, p56). The problem with the sci-fi film was that rather than debate magic and religion it discarded them. Ultimately science proved to be an exploration into emptiness. It was a



The Undead (1-6) The Devils Dancers of the undead offered as entertainment for those who are about to sell their souls. The film invokes a feeling that the sexual desires of the next world far outweigh those of this one.

dispelling of wonder. Rather than provide answers it showed how much man did not know about his existence. Science was only accepted in society when it was confused for either magic or religion. In The Undead after Quincy teleports into the past (in a sequence which which bears an uncanny resemblance to a similar one in The Terminator [1984]) Lydia sees his watch. She believes him to be a powerful magician. Quincy is a magician to Lydia not because he can tell the time but because she does not understand how. As a result she admires him. Magic is viewed as an unique, individual power. With science anyone can accomplish the same act.

Could religion be viewed as counter science? Apparently not, because scientific reality, however unpleasant, was already etched into the minds of American society. Instead religion claimed to supersede science as an ethos. Religion's real strength came from its promise of eternal life, which was greater than what magic or science could offer. Magic responded with the vampire, science with Dr. Frankenstein. Both of these are counter religion and as a result the vampire and Frankenstein are usually destroyed by religious methods (vampire killed by a cross et cetera). Religion proved that a hold on the after life gave you control over this one. Religion was a salvation from magic and science; people hide in churchs from vampires and in The War of the Worlds (1953) people take refuge in a church as the aliens destroy the world.

Science tried but failed to replace religion and magic. Science detached itself from society and shunned magic and religion. This fall of the science was anticipated in The Undead which started as a sci-fi but ended as a magic/religion film. Shortly after this film the horror genre flourished. Sci-fi disappeared. When sci-fi did return it was wise enough to ally itself with either religion, as in 2001 (1968), or with horror, as in Alien (1979).

American Society and Art

"Cut the bullshit, we're in it for the money", Stoney (Jack Nicholson) in Psych-Out (1968) on asked about his artistic integrity.

The paranoia which surrounded the fifties was not restricted to political circles. Art and the American intellectual culture also became embroiled in this paranoia. Art, in the Corman film A Bucket of Blood, is in a self-inflicted solitary confinement. As a result it is believed that art is only understood, examined and created by those within its own circle. This artistic circle also demands that anyone trying to engage in art must first renounce society itself. As regards to American society itself Harold Taylor¹ believed that:

"American culture has become fascinated by its self-analysis. Its novels are introspective, almost totally concerned with personal questions, with relationships, with personal manners; its theatre and poetry have turned to the emotional content of human life and away from the bigger human issues; its social comment has to do with the nature of the American character. We have created a self-absorbed culture just now, concerned with psychological comfort, running for the doctor before we feel the chill" (Harold Taylor, 1960, p18).

The self absorption discussed by Taylor was largely due to the migration during the forties and fifties to the suburbs by some 40-50 million Americans. This mass exodus led the American intellectuals of the fifties to believe that "the age of ideology was over" (Quart & Auster, 1984, p40). Taylor criticises the intellectuals for merely criticising. Taylor believes that "our intellectuals are more interested in analysis than in construction, more in probing and reporting than acting" (Harold Taylor, 1960, p18). Art in society is represented in A Bucket of Blood by the beat² movement. The beat movement launched an attack on "the middle-class conformity and hypocrisy of the Eisenhower years and the elite literary culture of the universities" (Quart & Auster, 1984, p42). The beat movement, even though it emphasised "spontaneity, personal freedom and spiritual exploration" (Quart & Auster, 1984, p42), criticised American society and isolated themselves from it.

The beat movement is personified in A Bucket of Blood in the character of Maximillion

¹Harold Taylor was president at the Sarah Lawrence College from 1945-60. During this time he gained international prominence as a progressive writer, educator and lecturer. Art

and the Intellect was a lecture he gave at the 18th Annual Conference of the National Committee on Art Education in 1960.

²The beat movement was led by such poets as Gregory Corso and Alan Ginsberg and novelists like Jack Kerouac. It was a movement in the fifties that indicated resistance to the conservatism of the decade. However much as their energies were spent on criticising the greater American society. This

lead to them being ignored by the general public at large. They modelled their writing on poets like Walt Whitman and novelists like Henry Miller and on the improvisation of jazz musicians like Charlie Parker. (Quart & Auster, 1984, p42)

Baroque (Baroque is a caricature of Alan Ginsberg). Baroque's poetry¹, ethos and lifestyle are mocked. The weakness in A Bucket of Blood is that it agrees too easily with the greater societies' opinion. Beat philosophies are never fully examined. The beat movement, though often uncomprehensible to society, were a progressive movement;

"Though they were never an integral part of a political or social movement their writings rejected racism and the nuclear arms race and treated homosexuality without contempt or condescension" (Quart & Auster, 1984, p42).

However perhaps though the greatest failing of the beat movement could shown by the words of an anonymous college student of the fifties who stated that they "would rather defend someone's right to say something than to listen to what's being said"(Harold Taylor, 1960, p18).

The last point is also demonstrated in A Bucket of Blood. Baroque claims that he is glad that his poetry is only understood by those who are "aware". "Aware of what?" asks his colleague. "Nothing, just aware" replies Baroque. Those areas of society that question Art and its creation are ignored:

"If a plain citizen questions the principal that the impulse of the subconscious is the ultimate determination of true art, he is often quietly ignored in the way one has with the partially deranged"(Harold Wilson, 1960, p36)

Corman rejects the beat movement because, despite rejecting the concept of money, the beat poets are seduced by it. However this is not grounds to reject all beat philosophies. The real failure of American society of the fifties was the poor lower-class individual who dwelled in sprawling inner city slums. Such concerns are successfully expressed through the protagonist of the film Walter Paisley (Dick Miller). Walter is initially alienated and ignored by both the beat movement and the middle class. However on accepting beat philosophies he is idolised by Baroque. The reason for his acceptance is the sculptures that he creates by killing people and covering them in clay. As a result he must continue to kill in order to be accepted by the beat movement. Ultimately though the beat movement and society are united in their reason for rejecting Walter. He commits murder and breaks social and moral law. It is not merely art and society that were unreconcilable. Social classes were also unable also to mix.

¹Alan Ginsberg's poetry is satirised most effectively in Baroque's speech of praise for Walter:

"Walter the bird that flies now pays later through the nose of ambidexterious apharty. Necrophiles may dance upon the placemats in an orgy of togetherness. The highway of light cuts sharply through the shady ghettos and the ivy covered tombs. And laughter reigns through every time capsule in the star-spangled feremament. And in the deep freeze it is the children's hour. And no-one knows that Duncan is murdered. And no-one knows that Walter Paisley is born. Duncan knows,

Tuesday sunrise knows, ally-cats and garbage cans and steaming pavements and you and I and the nude descending the staircase and all such things we thought we know that Walter Paisley is born. Ring rubber bells, strike silken symbols, play lethten gongs, the cats and cans and you and I and all such things with souls we thought we shall say Walter Paisley is born and the soul becomes flesh, Walter Paisley is born!"

The Threat of Knowledge/Paranoid Fifties

"Don't you see the danger inherent here. Genetic power is the most awesome force the planet has ever seen. Yet you wield it like a kid that's found his dad's gun. I'll tell you what's wrong with the scientific power that your using here. It didn't require any discipline to attain it.....Your scientists were so occupied with whether or not they could they didn't stop to think if they should" Jeff Goldblum to Richard Attenborough on the moral (not the monetary) questions surrounding the creation of dinosaurs in Jurassic Park.

One of the most common themes to surface in the fifties sci-fi movie was the threat of knowledge. This was usually manifested through the exploration into space or, perhaps more vividly, through the threat of nuclear destruction. Faced with the possibility of total extinction the audiences often delighted in thinking about the unthinkable. While consciously they feared the possibility of the end of the world, subconsciously they took great delight in "the fantasy of living through one's own death and more the death of cities and the destruction of humanity itself"(Quart, 1984, p78). Often the fantasies that were associated with nuclear war and its social, sexual and political implications were so strong that they overwhelmed the desire for peace. Man was regressing to the pessimistic when he entered the cinema.

Initially these films can be seen in a religious angle. For instance man can never fully destroy the world only God can. Thus in the case of The Day the World Ended it opens with a message that "man has done his best to destroy himself.....But there is a force more powerful than man and in His wisdom He has spared a few". The bomb is given biblical significance. Its importance could be linked to the great flood, ridding the world of all its wrongs. Indeed in The Day the World Ended the people have their own Noah's Ark in a valley which saves them from the bomb. Despite these challenges man is expected to keep his morals, and he is tested. One common moral question raised was that, in the event of a nuclear war your contaminated brother/neighbour/friend sought refuge in your bomb shelter would you shoot him to save yourself? The Day the World Ended claims that you should save him, and thus your soul, and place your faith in God to deliver. Indeed the monster at the end of The Day the World Ended God is killed by rain, prompting Rick to say "Man created it but God destroyed it". This is echoed in The War of the Worlds (1953) when germs kill the aliens, the germs are "the littlest things God in His wisdom put on the earth". Divine power is still greater than nuclear power.

However the trauma often faced by people in the fifties was so great that the bomb was often displayed as mans' saviour. The utopia that was created in society by consumerism was becoming anti-utopia in sci-fi. American in the late fifties was one year behind the U.S.S.R in the area of space exploration¹. As a reaction to this the benefits to the bomb, and American supremacy, were displayed.

James B. Brown

Eisenhower, through his "Atoms for Peace"² programme, mimicked this move to demonstrate the advantages of the bomb.

The first advantage of the bomb was that it wiped communism off the face of the planet. Communists were viewed as godless people and God only spared the righteous. The bomb was an element of change. Rick (the main protagonist in The Day the World Ended) claims that, when radiation changes a man into a seven foot tall creature with three eyes, it is akin to "a million years of evolution with one bomb". As a result of the bomb there is a "new set of laws" and "the world we know no longer exists". This trait is reflected in other sci-fi films of the time. In The Amazing Colossal Man (1955) the bomb changes a normal person into a sixty foot giant. The 4D Man (1954) can now walk through walls. Through these films the sci-fi movie was trying to calm our fears and assure us that the government and the scientist were good people who could be trusted with this knowledge. If the normal person tried to obtain this knowledge then social chaos results. Those who did, such as The Most Dangerous Man Alive (1954), isolated themselves from society.

In the fifties sci-fi the Last Judgement and the threat of nuclear destruction are synonymous. The reason why nuclear war touched such a deep chord in the American psyche was because for the first time America faced destruction of home soil. Communism dictated the pace of American cultural and national development.

"We have become obsessed in this country with ideology and with fighting communism, and we organise our national and international policies around those of the Soviet Union" (Harold Taylor, 1960, p24).

The only previous time to this was when Japan almost got control of Hawaii in World War Two, which sent America into panic and doubled their war effort. There was also a general ignorance at this time surrounding science, and in this case ignorance breeds fear. It coalesced into an extremely paranoid society that found expression in the McCarthy witch hunts in the first half of the decade. Indeed the paranoid society that was created had an ethos of its own. America moved in step with the Soviet Union. America appeared to be incapable of independent decisions. American policy towards the Soviet Union was : "when they act, we react. We seem to have no plans or ideas of our own" (Harold Taylor, 1960, p18).

¹In 1957 the U.S.S.R launched Sputniks 1 and 2. America launched its first satellite, Explorer 1, in 1958.

²The "Atoms for Peace" programme was set up in 1953. Eisenhower proposed that nations pool their atomic information and materials for peaceful purposes. As an outgrowth of this proposal, The International Atomic Energy Agency was set up in 1957 when 62 countries had ratified its charter (Nevins, 1989, p109).

The Monster Movie

"Look I know you have a civil tongue in your head. I sewed it in their myself". Whit Bissel to his creation in I Was A Teenage Frankenstein (1958).

The monster movie is synonymous with the fifties. Monster movies are a lasting icon and representation of that period. There are two types; BEM's and Jekyll and Hydes. BEMs (an abbreviation of bug-eyed-monsters) are the aimless, destructive creatures who wander around our cities destroying them and eating their inhabitants. Jekyll and Hydes are invariably humans who, through interfering with that which they should not, mutate or change into a social threat. The main preoccupation with both these types of films is the alienation of the familiar-such as The Incredible Shrinking Man (1957) or Them! (1954) (a film about giant ants).

There is debate as to what social concern these films represent. Margaret Tarratt relates the creature to Freudian psychoanalytic theory; "the creature is a dramatisation of the individual's anxiety about his own repressed sexual desires, which are incompatible with the morals of civilised life" (Sobchack, 1980, p47). Another belief is that while they place "their primary emphasis on disaster and destruction they also display the fifties anxiety about nuclear destruction" (Sobchack, 1980, p45). Alternatively they could also represent the fear of communist infiltration or even the actual fear of the invader from Mars.

However no one argument can cover the entire genre. Certainly the above points manifest themselves in various films. One fact about the creature that is common to all arguments is that the creature was a threat to national normalcy. In Jack Arnold's The Invasion of the Body Snatchers (1955) the aliens, believing humans to be imperfect, try to perfect us by taking away our emotions. Arnold believed that the pods could represent what the average American was turning into i.e. lifeless, passionless beings. Taken-over people still inspire fear because outside they look the same but inside they are rotten and irrevocably changed. Interestingly enough despite losing their free will the taken-over person is held socially accountable for their actions and punished.

However one of the most interesting point that the creature films displayed was their questioning of whether or not the alien invader was a saviour or a destroyer. In Corman's It Conquered the World the alien claims to be mankind's salvation. The creature is claiming that it is saving mankind from itself. What is interesting is that man is usually portrayed as being behind the other planets in evolution. However it was America who was behind the U.S.S.R., in the race to space. It Conquered the

World claims that the other planets constantly watch us, ready to invade in order to pull up our moral socks. There are several applications of this theory of the alien invader.

One of the most popular is the communist infiltration argument. People who are taken over show no respect for any established American institution. Nothing is sacred to them, "not Mom, not Dad not the Police Chief not even one's true love" (Sobchack, 1980, p123). Newspapers are "nothing but a stack of ideas and notions, useless" (It Conquered the World). They, like the communist spy, are only interested in obeying orders- regardless of what they are. Thus they do not think for themselves and



without a leader they are destroyed.

In It Conquered the World Paul

Nelson remarks that "man is a feeling creature and because of it

the greatest in the universe". The

"ultimate horror in science fiction

It (2,3): The screaming mob, so often apparent in the fifties sci-fi, that spreads social chaos never triumphs. Only combined efforts between the scientist and the army can put the social order right.

is neither death nor destruction but dehumanisation" (Sobchack, 1980, p121). Those who are taken over must be destroyed by society, regardless of who they are. Thus Paul Nelson kills his wife in It Conquered the World because she is taken over.

Was American society unsure of itself? Was it unable to cope with new pressures? American society certainly was unsure of the great power it possessed (nuclear bombs). The Rosenberg case clearly showed how paranoid American society was. Also Eisenhower, despite calling for peace with the U.S.S.R., continued to extensively spy on them and also rallied the rest of the world against the U.S.S.R.. So where did the answers come from? America could not get the answers from within so looked for an external saviour to come down from the heavens who would make the



It (4): The scientist, who dwelt into areas that man should not, pays for his crimes.

decisions for them. The paradox was that the "saviour" was the government incognito as a flying saucer, which did little to ease the minds of the apprehensive fifties. The reason for this was that rather than deal with the issues the government preferred to lock away the questions, under the guise that it was for the social good. The excuse that the government used was that the answers were a threat to national security. The truth was that the answers were a threat to national normalcy.

Woman and the B-Movie

"The fifties not only saw fewer films about emancipated women than the thirties or forties but there were also fewer films about women."(Quart & Auster, 1984, p55)

Though primarily occupied itself with reaffirming family values the fifties B-movie also acted as an exhaust for male sexual fantasies. While some of these films depicted dominant males enacting their masculinity over subversive females (Reform School Girls [1953] or Female Jungle [1956]), others portrayed lesbian fantasies (Girls in Prison [1956]). Corman, however, concerned himself with enhancing family values and a belief in the institution of marriage. He aimed his films primarily at the white middle class suburbans. To them marriage was believed to be a saviour, for women anyway. Marriage delivered women from spinsterhood and prostitution, which Corman believed to be the only social accepted alternative to marriage. Children not only meant a continuation of the social cycle but also that husbands were less likely to roam.

As a result It Conquered the World is not so much a parable of Russians dressed up in latex suits but a reaffirming of the institution of marriage. Tom Anderson is not being satisfied sexually by his wife. He turns down an invitation to go to bed in order to stay up talking to an "alien". The alien intruder is a threat to institutionalised sexuality because he is keeping Tom from sex and thus children. The real inherent social fear is that Tom might be a homosexual. The alien has no mate on earth. Thus it has no method of reproduction. It threatens domestic harmony when it interferes with the family. Tom's wife would prefer if he would take a prostitute instead of engaging in a homosexual affair. She tells Tom that "for a few dollars you can hire a woman to fit all your needs and fetishes" (It Conquered the World). Corman believed that the career woman or the dominant woman was also a threat to domestic harmony. Tom blames his sexual confusion on his wife who has appointed herself as head of the household. Tom's wife is punished at the end of the film by the alien which she tried to destroy (after she challenges it to "try your intellect on me"). The only other career woman in It Conquered the World, Ellen (who is a scientist), is killed by her two male colleagues at the behest of the alien. However Ellen's duties in work strongly reflect those she would do at home. She makes coffee and does the cleaning. The suggestion is that women would be far happier at home and that a woman who has a career breaks the natural social cycle and must be punished.

The Day the World Ended preaches that religion and the home are synonymous. The initial

moral challenge it portrays is also a sexual fantasy. The seven people in the house have to choose between sex for survival (as a method of procreating) or sex as an institution of marriage. Captain Jim (a pillar of society) believes that God has saved them and that they must stick to his commandments. Gangster Tony le Mot believes that they must engage in compulsory sex so that mankind does not become extinct. Jim, however, believes in marriage and asks his daughter, Louise, to marry Rick. As there are no priests alive Jim assures them that sea captains can preform a marriage in an emergency. In the following months everyone is killed except Rick and Louise. They then leave the house and go off hand in hand, a la Adam and Eve, to populate the world.

The most important element of these films is that sex outside marriage was always viewed as prostitution, or homosexual. Women are rarely discussed without their sexual role being called into question. If they upheld social mores they were rewarded. They were only happy as housewives. Was this to a great extent mirrored in society? The suburbs and Southern American were not only the stronghold of the housewife but also of family values. Suburbans and Southern Americans were also the most frequent drive-in attenders. Corman's films may not have reflected the beliefs of the greater society but he certainly reflected the beliefs of the drive in attenders.

Social Scientific Responsibility

“What sin could a man commit in a single lifetime to bring this upon himself” *The Amazing Colossal Man* (1955).

In *The Man With X-ray Eyes* the question of social scientific responsibility is personified through Ray Milland. This is a Jekyll and Hyde as opposed to a BEM film. In the former the protagonist is held socially accountable for his actions. He is punished rather than purely destroyed. Milland is the classic Frankenstein scientist who delves into secrets which man should not know. His crime is that he tries to enhance his range of vision. Milland's colleague, Dr. Barnet, warns him that “only the Gods see everything”. Milland ignores his warning. Traditionally such hubris in sci-fi films is rewarded by death. Milland breaks both medical and social ethics. He not only ignores his superiors but also standard medical practices. Milland through his quest for knowledge isolates himself. He claims that the invention will only be put to use for the good of society, but Milland has his own personal agenda. He constantly claims that he wants to be the first to see everything. However Corman does evoke sympathy for him. Milland ruins his career when he save the life of a young girl who has been wrongly diagnosed. This forces him to work in a sideshow. The irony is that this invention which was intended to enable him too see more only makes him see less. He initially sees people naked, then he only sees their skeletons. Eventually he sees a "city unborn, a city of the dead".

Milland invention is socially unacceptable because it robs people of their privacy. He also directly confronts society with its ills. This causes a violent reaction. Milland reads a private letter from one of the audience in the sideshow. He then tells everyone else that this person has got a girl pregnant and left her. The man reacts angrily and leaves. Confronted by this Milland is at a moral crossroads. Some people claim that he should use his talent to “help people, to stop people fighting” others claim “he could have a hold on people, he could see secrets”. Milland however can do neither as both would lead to him being discovered. He is only acceptable to normal society in a sideshow as a freak.

Though similar veins also ran through other sci-fi films of that time (*The 4D Man*, *The Amazing Colossal Man*) *The Man With X-ray Eyes* is more exact in its aims. For one it is not anti-science. Milland's invention is fine, he just abuses it. *The Man With X-ray Eyes* is, as a result, more concerned with the applications of scientific discovery than their actual effects. When Milland confronts people they react with anger. Society has much to loose by telling people the truth. The proverbial man who knows too much is more of a danger to the social order then to himself.

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Introduction 1960-1965

It is believed that Corman launched a series of films based on Edger Allen Poe stories because of the fact that some of his earlier films had received strong moral criticism. However this is not the case. Corman's films were, if anything, a defender of family values and in favour of a continuity of the social order. Rather it was A.I.P.'s¹ films that were criticised. Because of their sexual suggestion, their portrayal of juvenile delinquency, the inherent violence and their sensationalism of murder in these films it was believed children were being tainted and corrupted by these films. Parent-teacher associations across America protested against them. However, though A.I.P. certainly portrayed such concerns they were rarely the genesis behind them. If they displayed contempt for the older audience it was because it was already present in the youth audience. Virtually all of A.I.P.'s audience were under twenty-nine. A.I.P. displayed their audiences' point of view, rather than the older generation. Dody remarks that "by the end of the decade every studio was producing films which implied that in a world of drunk, dense or vicious adults only young people preserved style and wit"(Dody, 1980, p146). Drawing from these facts it is safe to assume that the older generation were not protesting at sex and violence in these films but rather their collective loss of dignity, social stature and their assumed natural place at the head of the table which was displayed in these films. Their loss of social and family standing is not a cinematic problem but a social one. However, as history has taught us, before and since, people rarely try to fix the social problem, rather they seek a scapegoat and blame that. Because A.I.P. representing this new trend away from family values, and because they were an easier target than the majors, they were singled out and ostracised. A.I.P. decided to play their critics at their own game and struck in an area where society had been facing its share of lower attendance levels-the library. At that time when "about four times the expenditures of public libraries was being spent on comic books"(Quart & Auster, 1984, p41) an association with such a prestigious social institution as the library would lift A.I.P.'s reputation. Under this facade Corman directed a series of films based on the works of Edger Allen Poe and H.P.Lovecraft. As a result of these films A.I.P. were able to display lurid promotional posters of these films beside the relevant books in libraries and on school shelves.

At this time there is a paradox in Corman's work. At the start of the sixties courts overturned rigid obscenity laws and censorship was relaxed. Film makers responded to this in two ways. Initially

¹American International Pictures was set up by Samuel Z. Arkoff and James H. Nicholson in 1954. They soon allied themselves with Corman in the B-movie genre. A.I.P. through

movies like I Was a Teenage Werewolf quickly became associated with scandal. Corman was often unfairly tarred with the same brush.

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there were those who exploited the new laws to sell their products (the pornographic¹ industry was set up). The second group were those who realised that the widening of bands would allow for a greater variety of permissible topics to be debated. Hollywood films were given the "possibility of depicting a realism in human relationships that they had previously so sorely lacked (Quart & Auster, 1984, p76). One might have expected Corman to jump at the chance of portraying sex with greater realism. Many of his films had been screaming for this. However he did not. Curiously enough his first socially conscious film of the decade dealt with racism, the film was The Intruder (1961)².

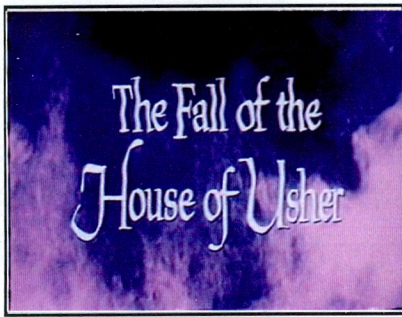
This is the essence of the paradox. The experience of The Intruder taught Corman to keep his statements submerged. The fifties audience wanted the suggestive, now the sixties wanted the subtle. As a result the Poe series, though layered with themes and images, makes few bold statements. Corman did not seize on the chance to exploit when he could. As a result he produced one of the finest, most successful and most unique series of films of all times. He created a lasting series of icons and images and these films are perhaps what he is best remembered for. In the course of Corman's career he has often shown uncharacteristic caution and remarkable restraint, sometimes to his benefit, sometimes to his loss. This is the former.

¹Its first film The Immoral Mr. Teas was shot by freelance photographer Russ Myer for \$24,000. It ran for years and

netted over two million.

²This film stars William Shatner as a racist who drifts from one small south American town to another inciting the townspeople to riot against court ordered school integration. Corman used actual locations to add to the authenticity of the film. Corman

actually put up his own money for the film after no production company would touch the project. However it failed at the box office.



The Fall Of The House Of Usher Roger Corman 1960

Philip Winthrop (Mark Damon) arrives unannounced at the forbidding House of Usher to visit his fiancée, Madeline (Myrna Fahey) and her brother Roderick (Vincent Price). The suffocating atmosphere of the house is suggested by Crosby's probing, hesitating, incessantly agitated camera. Price tries to send Damon away. When Madeline dies suddenly he agrees to leave. But then the ultimately horror is revealed to him. Roderick has buried her alive.



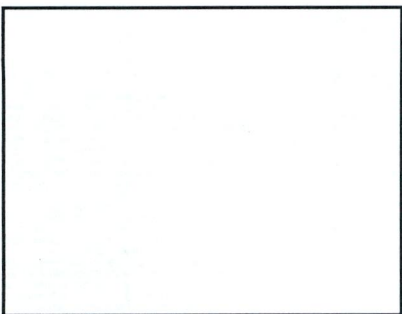
The Raven Roger Corman 1963

Boris Karloff, Vincent Price and Peter Lorre are a trio of rival magicians who do battle in this self-parody of the magic genre. Lorre is the Raven in question until Price turns him back into a human. More noted for its entertaining and imaginatively staged finale when Karloff and Price do battle. Jack Nicholson plays his first madman of his career and eagerly bears his teeth for the camera. Flamboyant Price is at his best.



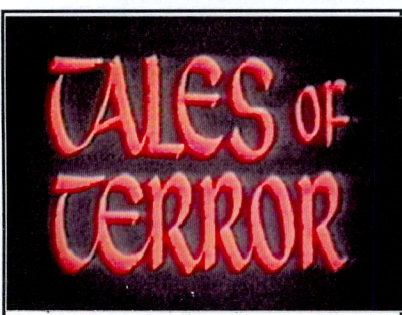
The Pit and the Pendulum Roger Corman 1961

John Keer arrives at a gloomy Spanish castle to visit his sister, Barbra Steele. Price, Steele husband, is in a state of agitation. Steele just died recently and he fears that she was buried alive. The castle was originally used in the inquisition. Steele, who faked her death, is conspiring with her lover to drive Price mad. Price finally does go mad but thinks he is his father and locks Steele in an iron maiden. Price dies leaving Steele really buried alive.



The Premature Burial Roger Corman 1961

Ray Milland replaces Price as the protagonist. This time he fears that he will be buried alive himself and concocts an elaborate tomb with several methods of escape in case he is. However he is buried alive in the wrong tomb. He is then dug up by grave robbers for medical purposes and promptly goes mad. One of the least successful of the series. Milland lacks Prices vulnerability and flamboyance.



Tales of Terror Roger Corman 1961

A series of three short tales- Morella, The Black Cat and The Case of Mr. Valdemar. Rather successful, it benefits from the fact that most of Poe's stories were short anyway. The Black Cat introduces the sardonic humour which would find more expression in The Raven. Curiously the first story, Morella, is probably the best of all the Poe series. It has an excellent love triangle between daughter, mother and father. The Case of Mr. Valdemar has one of the best finales: Price, as Valdemar, liquefying in the hands of Rathbone.

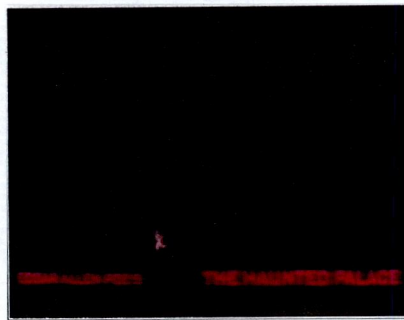


BROOK



The Masque of the Red Death Roger Corman 1964

By far the most ambitious in the cycle. Corman's first film in England features lavish art direction by a young Nicholas Roeg. In addition it is graced by a uncharacteristic intelligent script which probes the concept of diabolism with remarkably subtly. Most impressive is the dream sequence where Steele gives herself to the devil (She is raped and ritually sacrificed several times). As the title suggest colour itself becomes a motif for the film .



The Haunted Palace Roger Corman 1962

Corman adopts a H.P.Lovecraft story under the guise of Poe. Charles Dexter Ward (Price) arrives in a New England Castle that was left to him in his will by his great-great grandfather, who the villagers burnt at the stake a hundred years ago. The dead ancestor tries to possess Price in order to finish his plans to enable the "Dark Ones" to conquer earth. Rich but flawed it has real narrative drive as Price wrestles with his dead ancestor for control of his body. Ultimately the Poe influence is a hindrance to the Lovecraft plot.



The Terror Roger Corman 1963

This film is most famous for being made in two days on the sets of the The Raven, after the latter was finished early. It features alleged direction by Coppolla, Nicholson, Bogdanovich and Hellman. Boris Karloff plays the mad magician who is haunted by his dead wife.

The Tomb of Ligeia Roger Corman 1964

The only film in the series to be shot on location it has a marked different tone. It has a tangible solidity as well as a psychological subtly. Verdun Fell (Price) lurks behind dark glasses in the vastness of a Gothic abbey (actually an old Norfolk abbey). His mourns his first wife who later possess his new wife. Price's eyes, a recurring motif in Cormans films, are burnt out at the end bringing not only a symbolic end to the series but a physical one as well.



BROOK

The Cult of Corman

"As the magnificent sets of *The Raven* were being pulled down around us, Roger was dashing around with me and a camera two steps ahead of the wreckers", Boris Karloff on the making of *The Terror*.

It could be argued that Corman created a cult through his self-imposed sensationalism and scandal (he offered \$10,000 to the first person who died of fright during *The Pit and the Pendulum*). However though this sensationalism is a trait common to most of Corman's films it distinguishes few of them, except perhaps *The Trip* (1966) and *The Wild Angels* (1967). It would also fail to include the popularity of the Poe series, which attracted virtually no scandal. Corman's cult status comes from several factors. Initially his unique methods and cast-iron determination helped to create his cult status. The reason why he shot *The Little Shop of Horrors* (1960) in two days was because he wanted to beat his own record of five days for *A Bucket of Blood*. *The Terror* was partially directed by Francis Ford Coppola, Jack Nicholson and Monte Hellman. These films also demonstrate Corman's unique ability to turn his disadvantages into assets. For example, rather than hide the poverty row sets and tacky monster of *The Little Shop of Horrors* he decided to flaunt them and wear them as a badge of honour.

The system that Corman used for making films resembled that of the Hollywood studio system of the forties. Stars were held on contracts and often had little choice in what films they made. The reverse of this was that many of Corman's films only got made because he had certain stars in them. The end result of this was that most of his stars (Vincent Price, Barbara Steele or Peter Lorre) have become synonymous with the horror genre. Corman had a rapid turnover of films. In addition Corman marketed many of his films using methods similar to the forties. Consequently many of his posters resemble posters of the forties. Due to the fact that Corman regularly used young talent, his films often have exciting and creative elements (despite the limited budget that Corman often made films with).

Corman's cult is certainly strong. *The Little Shop of Horrors* was not only remade but also turned into a smash Broadway hit and became an indelible part of American camp culture. *It Conquered the World* and *The Day the World Ended* were also remade. Dick Miller is also another factor in the cult of Corman. Miller appeared in virtually every Corman film ever made. He is an oil drill operator in *The Wild Angels*, a hippie in *The Trip*, a grave digger in *The Premature Burial*, a leper in *The Undead*. He is Corman's living mascot. Interestingly enough some of Corman's students have carried on this tradition².

¹This film stars William Shatner as a racist who drifts from one small Southern American town to another inciting the townspeople to riot against court ordered school integration.

²In James Cameron's *The Terminator* Miller can be seen in a

Actual locations to add to the authenticity of the film. Corman put up his own money for the film after no production company would touch it. However it failed at the box office. famous cameo selling Schwarzenegger his "Uzi 9mm"

The Poe Era

"To die....to be *really* dead.....that must be glorious" Dracula, Todd Browning, 1931

In the space of one year Corman made a remarkable leap from The Wasp Woman (1960) to The Fall of the House of Usher. At the turn of the decade Corman had realised the the age of the double bill was over. His audience knew that if a Z-grade movie was a dog, a double bill was a dog with fleas. Also the fact that a film was in black and white, in a era when television changed to colour, meant that it was viewed as low grade. Corman also gained a valuable lesson from Hammer horror and their revolutionary films by Terence Fisher. Fisher's The Curse of Frankenstein (1957) was a milestone in cinema history, albeit a largely unrecognised one. For the first time since the early Universal films of the thirties (Frankenstein, Dracula et cetera) the horror film contained substance. The Curse of Frankenstein's Baron and creature are perfectly off-set, each possessing what the other lacks. Hammer recreated the genre that was dominated by Universal since the thirties. The film was an unprecedented success, taking a remarkable seventy times its original budget in America alone. By contrast, at that time, American horror was in the doldrums-having been reduced to an endless stream of men in rubbery monster suits terrorising young virgins. In a genre which is generally considered the lowest of the low by most film critics Corman tried to establish an air of respectability. He did so by looking to literature, as Fisher had done. Corman looked further back, however, and to an American writer-Edger Allan Poe. The most valuable lesson that Fisher had taught Corman was that a low budget film did not have to be a B-movie. Horror movies have to necessarily be B-movies. They could be accomplished, critically accepted and finically successful. Fisher believed that the Gothic horror had a natural assumed place in cinema.

"The moment you turn out the lights man reverts to the primitive. And what is the cinema? It's a place where the lights are put out. Enjoyment of horror is one of the deepest things. Electric lights can't kill horror anymore than it can kill nightmares"(Taylor, Klemensen & Bonham, 1978, p34)

The Poe series were horror films. However the series greatly differs from the horror films that preceded it. The horror genre had by now passed through the fifties, which was one of the most unproductive decades for the genre. Even though Terence Fisher's films were successful, they dealt with the physical manifestation of horror, via the mutilated body of Frankenstein or the fangs of Dracula. Corman's Poe series deals with the inner corruptness of the tortured soul. There is no outward deformity, such as in the case of the Wolfman or the Mummy, to be fascinated with or scared by. Since the threat in

the Poe series actually surfaced in man, society had more to fear from this threat, as opposed to the threat of Dracula which could be dispelled by garlic.

Sobchack believes that "the cripples and hunchbacks who appear in the horror film exteriorize moral deformity, Maimed bodies indicate maimed souls" (Sobchack, 1980, p34). However there is no exterior deformity in the Poe series. There is instead actions for us to fascinate and be disgusted by. The external deformity has transplanted itself into these actions. If the deformed bodies represented a physical reverting to the primitive then the mind now represented a psychological reverting to the primitive.

The individual in the Poe series is in conflict with society or with some extension of himself. In the case of Roderick Usher (Vincent Price), in The Fall of the House of Usher, it is a personal conflict. Because of this conflict Roderick is isolated in a remote house. Roderick incestuous desires for his sister have transferred themselves into the house which crumbles with guilt. However the isolation of Roderick Usher is not absolute. Madeleine's (Roderick's sister) fiancée arrives. Roderick is attempting to create an alien landscape in this world. Yet the world that he creates is tempered with reminders and artifacts of the civilised world. Similarly in The Blue Lagoon (1980) the world that is created by Emma (Brooke Shields) and Richard (Christopher Atkins) still has remnants of civilisation. These reminders are physical (telescopes and knives), oral (songs) and visual (calenders).

The theme of incest links The Blue Lagoon and The Fall of the House of Usher (even though in The Blue Lagoon Emma and Richard are adoptive sister and brother they are still a family). Emma and Richard could be viewed as Adam and Eve, the island that they were shipwrecked on is their "Garden of Eden". The "Forbidden Fruit" are the "never-wake-up berries" on the island. Similarly Roderick has "fallen from grace", he has been expelled from Eden. He tries to redeem himself with love. However, Roderick wrongly confuses platonic love with sexual desire. When his sister Madeleine confronts him with his incestuous desires he retorts that "it is my love for you that makes me act as I do". When Emma rejects Richards similar advances he throws her out of their house until she preforms. Ultimately Richard has to wait until she is poisoned by stepping on a fish and slips into a coma until he can fulfill his desires. Roderick Usher must wait until his sister dies before she can meet his sexual needs. Any attempt to assimilate Roderick back into society or Richard and Emma back into society is destructive. Roderick dies as the house collapses on top of him. Richard and Emma eat the "never-wake-up berries" and fall into a coma.

Does separation and isolation from society always lead to a rejection of accepted sexual practice? In William Golding's book The Lord of the Flies, and the subsequent films, the problem is

similar but the situation is different. There is no inter-sexual tension as all the shipwrecked people are male. Once again there is evidence of civilisation. They set up toilet and bathing facilities. Votes are cast and a leader is elected. The conch represents social order. Yet Golding argues that once man is separated from civilisation he regresses to his primitive state. Form laws and rules are twisted and abused. The strongest boy becomes leader. He then rewards his friends and punishes his enemies. The emotions and desires of the boys become warped. These miscast emotions mimic Gothic horror. J.T.Walsh writes on the subject:

"Films of Gothic horror are expressionist in their style and atmosphere and humanist in the drive of their meaning and concern. They are most akin to expressionist art in their overriding on distorted emotional capacities and quests, on energies wildly miscast" (J.T.Walsh, 1972, p2)

These energies find expression in the sadistic punishment whippings in The Lord of the Flies and the incestuous desires of Roderick Usher.

So is there an automatic reverting to the primitive due to the isolation and the darkness of the cinema? Eric Rhode writes that "there is clearly some impulse to relate Gothic Romance to the sensations of contemporary life" (Rhode, 1976, p624). The isolation in the cinema transfers itself to the isolation on-screen. This isolation is not always physical (as in the remote house or castle). Clarice Starling (Jodie Foster) in The Silence of the Lambs (1991) has isolated herself psychologically from society since the death of her father when she was ten. This isolation has other psychological side-effects. Due to her mental state Clarice is unable to decide if she should take a father-figure or a lover. The two men jostling for her affections, and to who she is most attracted to, appear inaccessible. Her boss at the F.B.I, Jack Crawford (Scott Glenn), looks after her and comforts her, and Hannibal Lecter (Anthony Hopkins) who is incarcerated for life at a maximum security mental prison. Crawford acknowledges the threat that Lecter poses to his desires for Clarice. He warns her to "be very careful with Lecter, Dr.Chilten at the asylum will go over all the physical procedures with him / tell him nothing personal". Lecter also realises the threat that Crawford poses. He asks Clarice "do you think Jack Crawford wants you, sexually. True he is a much older man. But do you think he visualises scenarios, exchanges, fucking you". Lecter's "quid pro quo" (you show me something and I'll show you something) game with Clarice resembles a childhood game of "doctors and nurses". Lecter also believes that it would be "quite something" to know Clarice "in private".

Lecter tells us in The Silence of the Lambs to "look deep within yourself" and to confront our own fantasies. When we do he asks the question "what do we first covet? We covet what we see every

day". Richard sees Emma every day in The Blue Lagoon, Roderick sees his sister Madeleine every day in The Fall of the House of Usher, Crawford sees Clarice every day in The Silence of the Lambs.

What Lecter is really challenging the viewer to do is to examine the difference between him and the normal citizen. What separates the serial killer from society? Could Roderick Usher, Clarice and Emma and Richard be serial killers waiting to happen. There is evidence to suggest that they could be.

They were all brought up as orphans. They had dysfunctional families (which echoes the family of the villain in The Silence of the Lambs). Similarly actual serial killers have had dysfunctional childhoods. Ted Bundy¹ was brought up by a woman whom he thought was his sister but turned out to be his mother. Another murderer² of woman experienced similar early childhood sexual confusion (he slept in the same bed as his mother for 6 years and the same room for a further 12). The trait common to Clarice, Roderick and Emma and Richard is the lack of parental supervision when they were young. There were no social or parental mores to guide them. When this situation surfaces in society, as in the case of Monte Ralph Rissel³, the lack of parental supervision results in social destruction. Bad childhood experiences can lead to dysfunctional adulthoods:

"Potential murders/rapists become solidified in their loneliness first during the age period of 8 to 12. Such isolation is considered the single most important aspect of their psychological make-up" (Ressler & Shachtman, 1992, p94)

The isolation that Clarice experienced as a child in The Silence of the Lambs may easily have led her to be a dysfunctional adult. However the loss of a father affects males more severely.

"When there's no father figure for 8-12 year old boy this is embarrassing for the child in front of his peers. He begins to avoid situations in which Father-and-son teams are usually present, such as Little League or the Boy Scouts. His preadolescent sexual activity, rather than being connected to other human beings, starts as autoerotic."(Ressler & Shachtman, 1992, p 95)

Richard and Emma have already accepted the death of their parents before the film begins. They believe that their parents "have gone to heaven". Despite having incestuous desires that mimic Roderick and Madeleine, Richard and Emma have not had troubled preadolescent sexuality. They only become sexually active in late puberty. When they cast off their clothes and walk around naked Richard and Emma reject all social sexual laws. They do not know that sexual relations between brother and sister are socially unacceptable. Just as they do not know that having sex can lead to having babies.

¹Ted Bundy was executed for murdering between thirty-five and sixty young women in a dozen American states. Ressler calls him an "animal. He often mutilated dismembered bodies-

²The killers name remains anonymous, for legal reasons

³Monte Ralph Rissel raped a dozen women and killed five

for instance he ejaculated into the mouth of a disembodied head"(Ressler & Shachtman, 1992, p77)

(Ressler & Shachtman, 1992, p93)

before he was nineteen.(Ressler & Shachtman, 1992, p93)

Roderick Usher, however, is still troubled by the legacy that his parents have left him. His father was a murderer, his mother a murderess and a "harlot". Madeleine's fiancée claims that the sins of a parent cannot transfer themselves onto the child. Roderick Usher, however, believes that he carries the original sin of his parent's actions. The truth is he carries the guilt of bad childhood memories.

Preadolescent sexual activity can also involve a sister (if one is present). However the sister is usually merely a tool for autoeroticism. Edmund Kemper¹ played "gas chamber" with his sister. Another adolescent male² masturbated openly into his sister's undergarments, often in front of his sister. Roderick Usher's behaviour shocks his sister's fiancée. In his self-imposed solitary Roderick's sexual fantasies and behaviour were nurtured. Because of this isolation it is likely that he has never had a consenting sexual relationship with an adult, a trait common to 50% of all serial killers (Ressler & Shachtman, 1992, p 89). Roderick resents society and social order. Since "sexual maladjustment is at the heart of all fantasies" (Ressler & Shachtman, 1992, p101) Roderick is incapable of interacting properly with the outside world. Roderick's sexual desire has become fused with the need to damage the outside world. He does this by abusing his sister and trying to kill her fiancée.

It is inaccurate to say that Roderick is a necrophile. Rather he shares the desire for sex with corpses with Ed Kemper. Ed Kemper expressed the view that;

"What I needed to have was a particular experience with a person, and to possess them in the way I wanted to; I had to evict them from their human bodies" (Ressler & Shachtman, 1992, p 103)

Roderick wants to possess, he covets. He has to fulfill certain fantasies. In order to do so he must evict a person from their body. Jeffrey Dahmer³ also preferred to have sex with his dead victims. Dahmer also believed that in order to fully possess his victims he had to eat them. Roderick Usher wants to completely possess his sister. He does this by locking her in the ground where no-one else can get her. The reason why Roderick is not a necrophile is because he does not want to have sex with every dead body, just the ones that he has killed. Then that person becomes part of him.

Roderick's sister represents not only a sexual link to the outside world but a psychological one as well. However since Roderick's desires for her are incompatible with society he is unable to bridge this gap. Sexual encounters with other women for Roderick would almost certainly lead to rape/murder. In The Fall of the House of Usher we are also lead to believe that Roderick was sexually abused as a

¹Ed Kemper killed twelve people, including his grandparents

²The killers name remains anonymous, for legal reasons

³Dahmer killed and mutilated seventeen young males (Ressler

⁴Gacy killed and mutilated thirty-three young black males

his mother (Ressler & Shachtman, 1992, p57)

(Ressler & Shachtman, 1992, p102).

& Shachtman, 1992, p93).

(Ressler & Shachtman, 1992, p93).

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child, possible by both of his parents. John Wayne Gacy⁴ and Monte Ralph Rissel were similarly abused. Ed Kemper was banished to a windowless basement by his mother when he was ten. His isolation relates to that of Roderick (who insists on all the curtains be drawn in his house-lest anyone sees inside).

The obvious argument against this theory of Roderick Usher as a serial killer is that he never kills anyone. However it is Roderick's cognitive mapping¹ that is important. Since Roderick never interacts with society we do not know what the result of such an interaction would be. Roderick's cognitive mapping strongly resembles that of a serial killer:

“(A serial killer) moves more and more into an anti-social position, viewing the world as a hostile place. He becomes almost incapable of interacting with the outside world, because his thinking patterns are all turned inward, designed only to stimulate himself in an attempt y to reduce tension, which only reinforces his isolation” (Ressler & Shachtmann, 1992, p 104).

If The Fall of the House of Usher could be viewed as one of the first serial killer films² what social fears does it represent? The serial killer per se was not actually a primary social concern in the 1960's. Of the approximately ten thousand murders committed in America in any given year in the early sixties most were committed by someone known to the victim. However as the decade progressed the amount of murders p.a. increased as did the amount of unsolved cases. By the 1970's between 25-30% of all murders were unsolved.

The serial killer was still in his infancy in the sixties and, as portrayed in The Fall of the House of Usher, had yet to be released into society. Even though the situations that create a serial killer were present in society, as they are in The Fall of the House of Usher, the serial killer had not yet surfaced. America, as a result, was unsure as to what would happen when the serial killer was released into society.

¹Cognitive mapping is the development of thinking patterns that effects how a person relates to himself and his
²Psycho (1960) is often cited as the first. Curiously The Fall of the House of Usher and Psycho often supported in other in a

environment (Ressler & Shachtman, 1992, p104).

double-bill when they first came out.

Introduction 1966-1971

Corman's final period as a director was his least prolific. In the period 1966-1971 he directed only five films. Corman was an anomaly at this time. He was a prolific low budget independent film maker who producing both critically acclaimed and financially successful films. The late sixties were also the the first time that Corman worked for the majors. However neither of the two films he made for the majors, The St. Valentines Day Massacre (1967) and Bloody Mamma (1970), were financial successes. Though Colombia did once hint that Corman might oversee their production schedule nothing became of this (the chief executives at Columbia were probably afraid of working to the Corman schedule).

The turbulent latter half of the sixties was a time when assassinations, war, corrupt politics and economic recession dominated the national landscape. Quart and Auster call it "a truly momentous decade....when for many Americans their image of themselves, their society and their place in the world underwent a painful transformation"(Quart & Auster, 1984, p68). The revolts in Western Europe were echoed by riots on the streets of New York, Chicago and Detroit. Protesting students were beaten in Chicago. In Kent State protesting students were shot. The currents that created these uprisings were largely ignored by mainstream Hollywood. Hollywood was more concerned about producing such saccharine films as The Sound of Music (1965) and its ilk. It would take until Easy Rider (1969) for the majors to listen to young talent.

Corman realised that the beach party movies of the early sixties had outstayed their welcome. The Poe series had also run its course. Corman however has always been informed of contemporary movements, if rarely ever a part of them. He still yearned for young people's ticket money, as did the Hollywood majors. Though the majors were afraid of going too far too fast. Corman seized, with half genuine and half opportunistic motives, on counter culture themes. He directed two important movies in this period, The Wild Angels and The Trip. Since these films gained their strength from current social topics, namely the Hell's Angels and L.S.D., they are often considered to be more exploitation than exploration. But at a time when college lecturer Timothy Leary was preaching "tune-in, turn-on, drop-out" there were definite signs that the social order was changing. It is one of Corman's greatest abilities that he can translate such movements onto film.



The Wild Angels Roger Corman 1966

Peter Fonda, Nancy Sinatra and Bruce Dern play three Hells Angels who, along with the real Hells Angels, journey across America seeking out a "good time". Fonda's first film for two years. He admitted to being stoned throughout most of the filming..Nevertheless it is an often brutal, striking and harrowing film. Peter Bogdanovich makes a brief appearance as a Hell's Angel.

The Trip Roger Corman 1966

Peter Fonda, Bruce Dern and Dennis Hopper star in this L.S.D. exploitation film. Jack Nicholson wrote the screenplay. Fonda plays a television executive whos life is dull and boring until he takes L.S.D. Kaleidoscopes were handed out at screenings of this film. Hopper admits that the first time he took L.S.D. was on the set of The Trip.Corman allowed Hopper and Fonda to direct some of the drug-induced sequences.

The Wild Angels

"If you dig POT why don't you dig that the whole generation who don't dig the heat war also dig POT and consciousness & spontaneity & hair & they are your natural brothers.....WHITMAN's free soul, camarado, also of Open Road! I asking you to be Camerado, friend, kind, lover, because vast majority of peace marchers actually respect & venerate your lonesomeness.."
Excerpt from Allen Ginsberg's poem *To The Angels*

Corman's The Wild Angels¹ is a true exploitation film. Its initial primary aim was to exploit the growing public awareness of the Hell's Angels, not only in California, but throughout America at that time. Corman's The Wild Angels is rarely referred to unless the seminal movie of the sixties, Easy Rider, is discussed. However this is a case of The Wild Angels suffering from the same affliction that affects Corman, both are judged and overshadowed by the films that have come after them. The movement that joins both The Wild Angels and Easy Rider together is the counterculture of the latter half of the sixties. The primary difference between these two films is that The Wild Angels was made at the start of the counterculture movement, Easy Rider was made at the end. The main link between these two films is the fact that Peter Fonda starred in both. However The Wild Angels never attempts to accomplish what Easy Rider has done, and vice versa. The Wild Angels is not about one man looking to find America. Rather The Wild Angels rejects all American society. Primarily The Wild Angels is a film about Hell's Angels. Easy Rider owes its genesis to The Wild Angels. The Wild Angels owes its genesis to Corman. Initially, in order to judge The Wild Angels, it is necessary to see where it drew its strength from. Since The Wild Angels is based on actual events it relates directly to its time. Indeed the real strength of Corman's film is that it tells the story from the inside (Corman's film was curiously well accepted by Alan Ginsberg, whom Corman earlier satirised in A Bucket of Blood).

During the period 1964-1967 the Hell's Angels provided the focus point for the counterculture movement. Indeed for a short period of time they shared this platform with the hippies until each became alienated from the other. The Hell's Angels could best be described as the hippies' favourite outlaws. Even though these two strands of the counterculture, the hippies and the Hell's Angels, share a common ethos (namely to get high, have sex and grow their hair long) they are ultimately unreconcilable. Initially the Angels were viewed with admiration by the hippies, much to the Angels' amusement and bemusement. Hunter Thomson remarked that "it puzzled them (the Hell's Angels) to be treated as

¹Even though the film was based on the Hell's Angels Corman could not use their name because it was copyright protected.

symbolic heroes by people with whom they had nothing in common" (Jane & Micheal Stern, 1990, p191). The Hell's Angels were, after all, fascist and, more importantly, in favour of American intervention in Vietnam. When a dozen Hell's Angels charged with the police against a crowd of anti-war hippies and students on the 16th of October 1966 it signalled the end of the Hell's Angels/hippie alliance. Sonny Barger, the head of the Angels, even sent a telegram to President Lyndon Johnson that read-"on behalf of myself and my associates I volunteer a group of loyal American for behind-the-lines duty in Vietnam"; he called the hippies "a mob of traitors" (Jane & Micheal Stern, 1990, p189). The Rolling Stones tried to rediscover the Hell's Angels in 1969 at a free performance at the Alamont Speedway. The Rolling Stones, however, were more on a quest to portray themselves as bad motherfuckers than to express the true ethos of the Hell's Angel. The bad reputation of the Hell's Angels suited the Rolling Stones who duly hired them as security guards. This turned out to be a rather unwise and naive decision by the Rolling Stones. The Angels, drunk on free beer that the Rolling Stones provided, raped and beat concert-goers. When Mick Jagger sang Sympathy for the Devil they stabbed an eighteen-year-old black concert-goer to death because he had a white girlfriend. The Angels were not social toys, nor were they celebrities. They were an uncontrollable faction of society. This attempt by American society to interact with the Hell's Angels proved to be destructive rather than creative.

It is perhaps best to find out if there is any truth in the belief that the Hell's Angels were the noble savage heroes of the counterculture. The paradox is that despite reports of the Angels raping, robbing and pillaging their way across America they still were romantically believed to be the last free men by many people. Was the Hell's Angel the misunderstood leather clad boy who had the heart of a poet? Was he the last American outlaw making one final stand? Corman believed the Angels to be America's born losers. The Angels were not juvenile delinquents anymore. "They were not so much the children of Brando and Dean but Brando and Dean ten years later"(Dray& Cagin, 1984, p59). The Angels were rejected by, and rejected, society. Corman believed that "these people were not unique and not particularly young. They are all the stupid, ignorant people of the world who are rebelling against a highly mechanised, specialised society that has gone by them"(Dray& Cagin, 1984, p57).

Where did the Angels' appeal for society lie? It did not lie in the fact that they urinated on a newly initiated members jeans and jacket. Nor did it lie in the primitive, promiscuous sexual contacts that the Angels practiced. The appeal that the Angels had lay in their rebellion and their liberation. The Angels' ability to generate public outrage and their refusal to adhere to social standards gained them equal amounts of notoriety and popularity.

"They became a seductive vision of liberation to an ever-increasing segment of the Great Society that was getting angst about rules and angry about government hypocrisy, and generally feeling itself frustrated by the confines of polite, middle class life". Jane and Micheal Stern, 1990, p184.

Despite having no active or proper social role the Angels' call for rebellion and disruption of the social order led them to be folk heroes. Though the ground that they stood on, namely living to ride and defy authority, was ultimately to be proven unsteady these lost American heroes were to capture the public's imagination. The genuine motives of the Angels and their exclusive membership was also part of their appeal. The Hell's Angels were the symbol of anti-establishment before the hippies came along. If The Wild Angels is not the seminal film of the counterculture than it is because the Hells Angels were not the seminal heroes of the counterculture. Though Dray & Cagin professes the common belief that The Wild Angels plus The Trip equals Easy Rider this is not the case. Easy Rider holds few, if indeed any, beliefs that were precious to the Hell's Angels. By the time that Easy Rider was released the Hell's Angels were almost totally alienated from the counterculture. The Wild Angels represents the embodiment of the start of the counterculture. Easy Rider represents the end. The Trip is the transition between the two. The Wild Angels explores the Hell's Angels beliefs, primarily through Peter Fonda's character Heavenly Blues.

Initially the focus point of the film is on the fact that the Angels are a society unto themselves. Neither Corman nor the Angels try to justify their actions. However the audience is left unsure as to who the real fascists are. The police have even less tolerance for the Angels than the Angels' have for the police. Also rather than confront the social problem of the Angels the police would rather move them onto the next town than deal with them. Indeed our initial view of the Angels is that they have been ostracised from society merely for being different. The Angels provide a convenient scapegoat for societies ills when no other answer suffices. The Angels' belief is that once an Angel is separated from the collective group and apprehended by the police they automatically go to prison. It is more accurate to say that the Angels are socially incompatible rather than being social losers. The social loser is personified through the character of Loser (Bruce Dern) who cannot hold a steady job. Loser only finds happiness on the road. The first time Loser confronts society, after going on the road, he is killed by the police. Blues initially blames himself for Loser's death. But later he blames society and Catholicism.

"The Lord never did nothing for the loser. What's all this about the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. Let me tell you what life made of the Loser. How life never left him alone to do what he wants to do. 'Bout how life always made him be good, always pay the rent and to shovel it."

It is also through this speech that Heavenly Blues best expresses the ethos of the Hell's

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Angels.

"We just want to be left alone. We don't want nobody telling us what to do. We don't want nobody pushing us around. We want to be free to do what we want to do. We want to be free to ride our machines without being hassled by the man. We want to get loaded. We want to have a good time"

This is more of a proclamation of their ethos than an answer to their problems. However this speech just as easily have been spoken by Wyatt (Peter Fonda) in *Easy Rider*. Certainly the desire for social anarchy was common both to the Hell's Angels and to the hippies. However the hippies would not have engaged in the destruction of the church, nor in the rape of Loser's widow. Corman anticipates the Angels' ultimate downfall through Heavenly Blues. Initially Heavenly Blues is the celebrity of the Angels as well as being their leader. He is revered by the male Angels and lusted after by the "mamas" i.e. female Angels. However he is later accused of rape (of a black nurse) and alienated by the Angels and hunted by the police. When Heavenly Blues stays to fill in Loser's grave at the end of the film while the rest of the Angels run from the police he claims that there is "no place to go". This echoes Wyatt's similar statement at the end of *Easy Rider*, "we blew it". Heavenly Blues' statement signals the failing of the Hells Angels experience, Wyatt's refers to the failing of the American experience as a whole.

The Hell's Angels return to where they started, albeit without the enigma of Heavenly Blues. The main failing of Heavenly Blues was his display of morals in an amoral society. More significantly he also signals the incursion into politics by the Hell's Angels in the late sixties. Heavenly Blues demands that his girlfriend Mike (Nancy Sinatra) leave the radio on when reports about Vietnam are broadcast. This signals the start of the division of the hippies and the Hell's Angels. Heavenly Blues believes that the Hell's Angels and society are interdependent. He fails to fully grasp Angels' beliefs and is alienated because of it. Similarly Loser's "Old Lady" (Diane Ladd) attempt to create a moral code of sexual monogamy eventually results in her brutal rape by two Angels behind Loser's coffin. Corman neither tries to explain nor justify the rape. Its best explanation is that it is a display of the meeting of two different sexual codes. Similarly the meeting of Catholicism and the Hell's Angels is equally explosive, shocking and brutal. Loser's funeral turns into an orgy. The initial debate between Heavenly Blues and the preacher ends violently as Heavenly Blues is unable to answer the questions that the preacher poses. The Hell's Angels are confronted by what they have rejected. They are the fallen Angels of Christendom as well as society. The actual disturbing brutality of the orgy in the church registers as one of the most striking and shocking scenes ever committed to film. The preacher is beaten, Loser is taken from his coffin and replaced by the preacher, Losers wife is raped, gay couples can be viewed off to one side.

The acid trip in *Easy Rider* is the expression of the confrontation at the end of the sixties. It is

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similarly as shocking as the scene in the church. The prostitutes in Easy Rider echo the promiscuous contacts that the Angels' preached. Wyatt is no more committed to his women in Easy Rider than Heavenly Blues is in The Wild Angels. The killing of George Hanson (Jack Nicholson) in Easy Rider is far less effectual than the death of Loser in The Wild Angels. Both death result from social confrontation. George Hanson's death is less evocative because it merely depicts the confrontation. Loser's death gives expression not only to the ethos of the Hell's Angels but to the whole counterculture. Loser is rescued from the hospital by his buddies. Even though this leads to his death he is able to have his final wish, to get high, and he dies happy.

The greatest failing of The Wild Angels and the similar success of Easy Rider is perhaps in the soundtrack of both films. The soundtrack of The Wild Angels which was composed by Mike Curb (later conservative lieutenant governor of California) is ineffectual compared to the contemporary sounds of Easy Rider, (whose soundtrack included Jimi Hendrix, Steppenwolf and the Byrds). One important overlooked fact is that before Easy Rider the most successful independent film was The Wild Angels, it took over \$10 million at the box office. Paradoxically enough The Wild Angels was critically rejected in America but it was lauded overseas (The Wild Angels was the only American entry at the Venice film festival in 1966 by invitation). If The Wild Angels is not an integral part of modern American culture and Easy Rider is it is because the Hell's Angels were never a part of American society. The Hippies returned to society at the end of the counterculture, the Hell's Angels did not. The Hell's Angels were a small section in American society of the sixties whose lifestyle captured public imagination for a brief period of time. Society tried to fashion them for to their own rebellion but ultimately the Angels returned to their roots.

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Peter Fonda the counterculture & The Trip

"I like films. Without all that big studio crap" Peter Fonda. (Dray& Cagin, 1984, p49)

Peter Fonda's film career and the counterculture of the sixties became synonymous. The Wild Angels in particular was important to Peter Fonda's career. It lionised him as the great American biker: a poster of him riding a motorbike outsold those of Marlon Brando or Steve McQueen. Peter's personal life mirrored his on screen presence. He got busted on a marijuana charge during the filming of The Wild Angels. The subsequent trial¹ only served to enhance his reputation, or notoriety. After The Wild Angels Fonda was enthusiastic about The Trip.

"I don't believe it. I don't believe that I'm really going to have a chance, that I get to be in this movie. This is going to be the greatest film ever made in America." Peter Fonda on reading the script for The Trip (Collier, 1991, p102)

The Trip's place and importance in film history can not be measured by the film itself, which incidentally did not live up to Peter's initial hopes, but by the significance of the Easy Rider crew working on it. Nicholson wrote it, Hopper and Fonda starred in it. Hopper, Fonda and Nicholson also took more from Corman than just pure Hollywood experience, as so much of Corman's students had done. They learned from Corman's mistakes and improved by them.

Peter Fonda, in particular, felt connected with his generation. Like his father before him, Henry Fonda, Peter became an icon for his generation. He was present at counterculture riots on Sunset strip, where he claimed to have punched a club-swinging policeman. Peter thrived on his adversity and aggression. "At 27 Peter Fonda parades his bit: non-conformity", wrote Variety magazine. "Why must you understand him? Because he's there" proclaimed The New York Times (Dray& Cagin, 1984, p49). Was Peter Fonda the new prophet of the drug culture? His film career certainly represented a link with the Hells Angels (The Wild Angels), L.S.D. (The Trip) and the hippies (Easy Rider). This was mimicked in society when novelist turned merry prankster Ken Kesey giving L.S.D. to Hell's Angels². Linking Fonda's success to Easy Rider would provide some answers to his success:

¹Peter Fonda's trial became one of the great show trials of the 60's. Peter showed up in dressed in shades and a flowered shirt. He joked and wisecracked at the judge and waved to his friends. However midway through the trial his father, who was also present, took him to one side. Henry Fonda, embarrassed at his son's performance, gave him a bitter fingerpoking

lecture. Later Henry Fonda testified on his son's behalf. The trial itself was more of a clash of generations, personified through Peter Fonda and his father Henry, than a platform for Peter to preach his ethos. Thanks mainly to his legendary fathers appearance Peter got let off.

²This was considered to be a "seminal event in the history of the counter-culture, since it permanently altered the social mix

on Haight Ashbury" (Dray& Cagin, 1984, p59).

"Crucial to Easy Rider's enormous commercial success and importance was its ability to capture on a visceral level certain prime themes and concepts of the counterculture and the sixties- mysticism, freedom, "the land", drugs and communes." (Quart and Auster, 1984, p 95)

At the end of The Wild Angels, The Trip and Easy Rider Peter Fonda's characters or either dead, isolated or back where he began. Fonda represented the failed hopes of the counterculture rather than their imagined successes The American experience of the 60's as a whole prophetically died at the end of Easy Rider..

"In fact, the fate of Wyatt and Billie seemed a reflection of what had been the fate of Martin Luther King, Malcolm X and Robert Kennedy, and some felt could be the lot of anyone whose dissent and protest truly threatened the power structure in America" (Quart and Auster, 1984, p 97).

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Conclusion:

“Other writers, producers and directors of low-budget films would often put down the film they were making, saying it was just something to make money with. I never felt that. If I took the assignment, I’d give it my best shot....the ones who said ‘it’s just a crummy little picture, I’m doing it for the money, I’ll do something better later on’ failed and are no longer working in films” Roger Corman (Fennell, Spring 1995, p17)

There is a belief that Corman never really reached his full potential. Certainly he had the technical ability to make films. He had experience in every area from being a gaffer to directing. Yet after The Wild Angels and The Trip, “when he seemed poised for better things his, career slowed almost to a halt” (Halliwell, 1993, p188). However the reasons for Corman regressing into a full-time film producer are not straightforward. Indeed the root of this regression can be traced back to The Intruder. Corman claimed that:

“That movie was the biggest disappointment in my life. When it failed in the box-office I was devastated.....My only solas was that it received many fine reviews. Had this movie succeeded, who knows what other areas we might have examined for future projects?”(Fennell, Spring 1995, p18).

However Corman’s real failing is in his belief that financial and critical success should be synonymous. He also wrongly believes that financial success is far more important than critical success. Corman’s formula for making films (namely the inclusion of some sex, some action, a bit of humour and a little social statement in all his films) remains as one his main contributions to film. Jonathan Demme believes that:

“To one degree or another almost all films finally adhere to the Corman policy. The Godfather films are the most expensive Roger Corman films ever made. I think that everyone is trying to exploit that formula, one way or another. Bur most people are less candid about it than Roger is”(Halliwell, 1993, p188).

Corman regenerated the horror genre in America, while Fisher revived it in Europe. His fifties B-movies, though generally forgotten about, struck political and social chords. Corman has always believed that “there is always a political undercurrent in my films, with the exception of The Intruder I tried not to put it on the surface”(Halliwell, 1993, p188). Indeed, apart from the Poe series, most of his films do involve social problems. If Corman exploited current social problems in his films then he must have struck social chords with them. In order to exploit these social concerns they must have been present in his films in the first place.

So, where does this leave Corman. Corman believes that “all my films have been concerned with simply man as a social animal”(Halliwell, 1993, p188). Few critics agree with him. The main criticism levelled at him was that he was just making films for the money. Richard T Jameson believes that:

“Corman’s own work on the twenty or so films he is credited as director in the period 1955-1960 was not motivated by the desire to serve a personal vision. Rather, by directing the films himself, Corman saved the salary that he would have had to pay another director” (Jameson, 1990, p194).

Jameson is rather shortsighted in this opinion. For one Corman paid his directors a pittance anyway (Paul Bartell, a talented film-maker from New York, was paid only \$5,000 to direct Death Race 2000 [1974]. Two weeks after it was released Corman claimed a box-office take of \$4 million).Corman claims he directed as well as produced so that he could have more control over his films and make them how he wanted to. Ed Lowry is perhaps closer to the truth:

“Corman’s audacious independence has at least earned him the right to symbolise the myriad contradictions between artistic ambition and fiscal responsibility which seem inherent to commercial film-making” (Lowry, 1992, p169)

If Corman was only making films for the money they why did he not stay with the majors? He certainly could have adapted to suit them. The reason is because he preferred the independent movie making scene. He liked to make films his own way.

Corman is the last of the great independents. “A dying breed” in his own words (Hiller, 1992, p20). He operates outside the Hollywood studio system. As well as often representing a confrontation within society his films also represent a confrontation with the Hollywood system.

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