
I WAS A TEENAGE SURFER ZOMBIE FROM MARS

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO CULT CINEMA

Andrew Graves

Week 3: Arkoff, Corman and AIP

The Times they are a Changin'

- As far back as 1948, old Hollywood began to lose its shine
- *United States v. Paramount Pictures, Inc.*, 334 U.S. 131 (1948) (also known as the Hollywood Antitrust Case of 1948)
- The Paramount case effectively ended the studio monopoly system, meaning companies could no longer block buy theater chains to distribute their movies
- This dealt a severe blow to the so-called studio system
- Fearing loss of income, studios initially turned to spectacle to maintain profitability
- Studios used techniques and new presentations to attract audiences
- Epics
- 3D
- Technicolor
- Cinemascope

Stagnation

- Though undoubtedly there were some significantly impressive films released in the 50s, Hollywood was largely dominated by musicals, epics and widescreen presentations that would benefit from larger screens and better sound
- However, audiences continued to decrease and several costly flops ensued
- By the mid-60s Old Hollywood was losing money

The Drive-in Theatre

- Though drive-ins had been around since 1933, this unique way of watching films came into its own in the 1950s
- In many ways, they were a way in which film makers could compete with the rise of television
- The setting also gave rise to teenagers being able to interact on a more intimate level 'cheapest motels in town'
- They could be problematic as the films being shown could be seen from a distance.
- This didn't prove a problem if what was being shown was a family film but more salacious material may have caused offence to casual passers by

- They provided an outlet for cheaper movies that would not have been picked up by more 'respectable' theatre chains

ANDREW GRAVES

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The rise of the Indies and the Teen Market

- By 1957 there were over 6000 drive-in theatres in the US
- In 1958 65% of American films were made by independent studios

'Filmmakers responded in two ways. Either they capitalized on the fear that juvenile delinquency engendered, or they made movies in which teenagers were shown not to be just neat or cool but really, really nice kids as well. Before long you couldn't move for movies with the word Teenage in the title. Horror, crime, science fiction, romance...'

Jonathan Ross

American International Pictures

- It was formed on April 2, 1954, as American Releasing Corporation (ARC) by former Realart Pictures Inc. sales manager James H Nicholson and entertainment lawyer Samuel Z Arkoff
- Their first release was the 1953 UK documentary film *Operation Malaya*. It was dedicated to releasing low-budget films packaged as double features primarily of interest to the teens of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s.
- AIP was the first company to use focus groups, polling American teenagers about what they would like to see and using their responses to determine titles, stars, and story content.
- AIP would question their exhibitors (who often provided 20% of AIP's financing) what they thought of the success of a title, then would have a writer create a script for it.
- A sequence of tasks in a typical production involved creating a great title, getting an artist such as Albert Kallis who supervised all AIP artwork from 1955 to 1973 to create a dynamic, eye-catching poster, then raising the cash, and finally writing and casting the film.

The Arkoff Formula

- Action (exciting, entertaining drama)
- Revolution (novel or controversial themes and ideas)
- Killing (a modicum of violence)
- Oratory (notable dialogue and speeches)
- Fantasy (acted-out fantasies common to the audience)
- Fornication (sex appeal for young adults)

Changes to the Formula

- Later, the AIP publicity department devised a strategy called "the Peter Pan Syndrome"

The Peter Pan Syndrome

- a) a younger child will watch anything an older child will watch;
- b) an older child will not watch anything a younger child will watch;

c) a girl will watch anything a boy will watch;
d) a boy will not watch anything a girl will watch;
therefore: to catch your greatest audience you zero in on the 19-year-old male

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I was a Teenage Werewolf (1957)

- Directed by Gene Fowler Jr
- Produced by Herman Cohen
- Written by Herman Cohen and Aben Kandel
- Music by Paul Dunlap

- It became the first film to use the word teenager in its title
- Samuel Z Arkoff of AIP faced much resistance
- AIP (American International Pictures) became the first to really explore the idea of genre based 'teenage' flicks and soaked up the market that more mainstream Hollywood studios were ignoring
- It cost somewhere in the region of \$82,000 and \$122,000 and made around \$2,000,000 at the box office

"Undoubtedly part of the reason for the movie's meteoric takeoff at the box office had to do with the liberating, vicarious feelings the movie allowed these war babies who wanted to be good. When Landon attacks the pretty gymnast in the leotard, he is making a social statement on behalf of those watching. But those watching also react in horror, because on the psychological level, the picture is a series of object lessons on how to get along – everything from 'shave before you go to school' to never exercise in a deserted gym"

Stephen King

Roger Corman

Mentored or discovered a number of directors/actors/writers and film makers

- Jonathan Demme
- John Sayles
- Jack Nicholson
- Francis Ford Coppola
- Ron Howard
- Martin Scorsese
- Corman was fundamental in the formation of 'New Hollywood'

- Born April 5th 1926 in Detroit
- Studied industrial engineering at Stanford University
- Served in the Navy from 1944-1946
- In 1948, he worked briefly at US Electric Motors in LA
- His career there only lasted four days
- "He'd made a terrible mistake"
- Using his agent brother as a contact he worked his way into the film business

Roger Corman (CONT...)

- Though he found work at 20th Century Fox, he was frustrated when his ideas were used but he was not credited
- Under the GI Bill – he went to study English Literature at Oxford University
- He returned to LA and wrote a script which was picked up by Allied Artists
- He used his script fee to part fund a new film which he would produce – *The Monster from the Ocean Floor* (1954)
- The film did quite well, so Corman decided to make another film – *The Fast and the Furious* (1955)
- He sold this film to new company ARC (American Releasing Company) - run by James H Nicholson and Samuel Z Arkoff
- ARC then changed their name to AIP (American International Pictures) and Corman was made their lead film maker
- In 1959 Corman and his brother Gene formed Filmgroup a company which produced low budget black and white double features for the drive-in crowd
- Then, in 1959 Corman made *Bucket of Blood* for AIP

***A Bucket of Blood* (1959)**

- Directed by Roger Corman
- Produced by Roger Corman
- Written by Charles B Griffith
- Cinematography by Jacques R. Marquette
- Edited by Anthony Carras
- Music by Fred Katz

The Beat Generation

- The Beat Generation was a literary movement started by a group of authors whose work explored and influenced American culture and politics in the post-war era

***A Bucket of Blood* (1959) CONT...**

- It's a black comedy
- A satire on the kind of pretentious 'acquired intellectualism' which was beginning to pervade 'Beatnik' culture, examining the artificial and slightly uneasy trend of seeking to be an individual who belongs to a crowd
- The arbitrary handpicking of 'genius'

The Plot

- Impressionable Walter, a bus boy who works at the Yellow Door Café decides to create a piece of art to try and impress the in-crowd
- When he accidentally kills his landlady's cat he incorporates it into the sculpture
- His cat sculpture is received well by the beatniks and one of them gives him some heroin.
- He is followed by a police officer who he kills in a violent struggle
- After using the dead police officer in a new sculpture, he goes about a killing spree in order to create new work to stay popular

Corman's best work...hilarious dialogue and a finale reminiscent of Fritz Lang's M [his] low-budget comedy horror pic works both as satire at the expense of the Beat Generation and as a trenchant little allegory about the New York art world in general."

Sight and Sound

The Masque of the Red Death (1964)

"The Masque of the Red Death has passages of such real distinction that one wishes he could be persuaded to take himself more seriously ... Where most films of this nature tend simply to pile on the blood, here there is a genuine chill of intellectual evil, because Vincent Price, initiating horrible tortures with a characteristic air of sadistic glee, also conveys a genuine philosophical curiosity as to the unknown territories into which his quest for evil may lead him."

Monthly Film Bulletin

The Intruder (1962)

We put our hearts, our souls - and what few people do - our money into this picture. Everybody asked us 'Why would you make this picture?' as if to say why try to do something you believe in when everything else is so profitable. Obviously, we did it because we wanted to, and we think it's a damn good job."

Roger Corman

X: The Man with X-Ray Eyes (1963)

- Directed by Roger Corman
- Produced by Roger Corman
- Rob Dillon (*French Connection II*) and Ray Russell
- Cinematography by Floyd Crosby
- Edited by Anthony Carras
- Music by Les Baxter

The Plot

- Dr Xavier (Milland) develops eye drops that can expand the range of human vision
- He tests the drops on himself and soon he realizes that he can see through clothing/walls etc.
- At first, he is able to use his powers for good but soon his powers increase and he is unable to gain any relief – closing his eyes doesn't help

