

U.S. OF SLAY

THE KILLING OF AMERICA (1981) Blu-ray

Starring Chuck Riley, Ed Dorris and Thomas Noguchi
Directed by Sheldon Renan
Written by Leonard Schrader and Chieko Schrader
Severin Films

"While you have been watching these scenes, a murder has been happening somewhere in the United States." That statement ends the trailer for the 1981 documentary *The Killing of America*. It's also one of the things that elevates the film above the other "mondo" movies that it's lumped in with; the film makes the viewer consider the implications of its violence, rather than simply gawk at it.

A Japanese-American co-production written by the late Leonard Schrader (brother of filmmaker Paul Schrader) and his wife Chieko Suhrader, it's a meditation on the violence that was exploding in America in the late-'70s/early '80s. The imagery is anything but meditative, however, as, in the spirit of shockumentary films such as *Mondo Cane* and *Faces of Death*, it exploits footage of murderers, corpses and actual slayings taking place on camera. With a dramatic electronic soundtrack and grave narration courtesy of Chuck Riley, *Killing* shares the same grim 'n' gritty tone as other narrative films of the era, depicting a country in crisis.

It begins with police gunning down a suspect in the street, and soon moves to a candid interview with retired detective Ed Dorris and LA coroner Thomas Noguchi, who discuss the murders in the city. As Riley rattles off crime stats, the film takes us inside a bustling autopsy room where bodies are stacked up and dissected in graphic detail. Archival footage (director Sheldon Renan was also an archivist and knew how to source compelling clips) of riots, assassinations, hostage taking, cults, serial killers and shoot-outs, plus an exclusive interview with erudite serial killer Ed Kemper, create a miasma of bad vibes that lingers long after the credits roll.

Even in the Internet age when grue is a click away, *Killing* remains a powerful, expertly constructed film — so affecting that no one had the guts to release it in the US. It was put in Japanese theatres, however, in a different cut (sunny scenes of American life were added), which is included on Severin's Blu-ray, along with captivating interviews with Renan ("We were really interested in extreme versions of homicide."), editor Lee Percy and journalist Nick Pinkerton, who contextualizes the film within the mondo world.

The Killing of America deserved a much better fate than it received, and Severin has done an exceptional job to right that with this must-have release. Now try not to think about how many homicides occurred while you were reading this.

DAVE ALEXANDER



The Driller Killer

Still, fans of the film will dig Arrow's extensive array of extras, including a wealth of behind-the-scenes footage, lengthy interviews with effects artists Howard Berger and Greg Nicotero, plus a commentary with Gornick, who draws on his long history with Romero (also interviewed here). Creepheads may even want to shell out for Arrow's limited edition, featuring a comic book adaptation of "Pinfall," a segment intended (but never made) for the film. All that's needed now is someone to exhume the original for the North American market with the same level of creepy care.

JEFF SZPIRGLAS

POWER (TOOL) SLAVE

THE DRILLER KILLER (1979)

Starring Abel Ferrara, Carolyn Manz and Baybi Day
Directed Abel Ferrara
Written by Nicholas St. John
Arrow Films

I came to Abel Ferrara's *The Driller Killer* late in life. No copy existed within the video store constellation I grew up in the centre of. None of the periodicals I trusted at the time went out of their way to advocate for it. And the actual title always struck me as silly. Does someone kill drillers as the language would imply? Cut to decades later when a copy almost literally falls into my lap, and I discover that this ain't yer run-of-the-mill slasher joint.

The Driller Killer is an artist's descent into chaos as he loses control of his career, relationships and urges to commit murder using an electric drill. Ferrara places himself in the lead role as Reno Miller, a hip painter living among punks

and wins in late '70s New York. He can't pay his rent or please his girl, and the stress on his ego ignites a fascination with power tools that eventually leads to killing homeless men with a drill in Manhattan's grime-caked back alleys. Ferrara never lets you know if the killings — shown in sloppy gushes of thick red goo — are real or imagined, and it doesn't really matter. He doesn't let too much plot interfere with a good old-fashioned drill-killing spree.

This looseness makes way for the film's biggest strength: bucking several conventions at once while remaining compelling and artful. It's not really a traditional horror film, but could only ever exist in the horror section, somewhere between Lucio Fulci's *A Cat in the Brain* (1990) and Jeremy Saulnier's *Murder Party* (2007). And where other noteworthy examples of New York sleaze scrape their grime from peepshow booths, grindhouses and street corners, Ferrara takes us into the era's punk clubs, artist lofts and gutters, and comes out with a great time capsule and a wild, early expression in what became an interesting career.

Arrow Video's release boasts new interviews and commentary with Ferrara, and offers multiple versions of the film, including a never-before-seen pre-theatrical cut. Unless you were there with the raincoats, punks and hustlers at the tail end of a 42nd street double feature, this seems like the perfect introduction to this eccentric title.

TAL ZIMERMAN

