

"Damn it, Smithers! This isn't rocket science, it's brain surgery!" - The Simpsons (1989)

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THE
HARDCORE
COLLECTION:
THE FILMS
OF RICHARD
KERN (DVD)

by Graham Rae
(2007-08-08)
1999, Un-rated, 176 minutes, Music
Video Distributors

CREDITS



Now here's a blast from the Film Threat past. Around 1987 or so the magazine incarnation of this website used to be full of articles about and ads for stuff by the 'Cinema of Transgression,' a fringe

film collective of edge-dwelling [New York](#) nihilist punks and crazies whose main pathological protagonist triumvirate were (arguably) voyeur (now ex) smackhead Richard Kern, pouting artpunk Nick Zedd (aka James Harding) and damaged psychescream queen Lydia Lunch (aka Lydia Koch).

These nihilistic wacky characters produced a load of envelope-pushing - well not so much envelope-pushing as envelope-tearing-up-and-throwing-away - seditious, serious, stupid, sick, splatterific, sexual, psychotic [short films](#) for Deathtrip Films. These nihilistic punk-influenced shorts, made by the filmmakers with the help of other marginalized damage cases, were initially made to attack every value Reagan's America (punk bands should think themselves lucky we get idiotic conservative governments, otherwise they'd have nothing to scream about - and thus no careers) held sacred and scare the shit out of its populace. But did these movies succeed in challenging the status quo? Well, yes and no, though obviously not on any wide scale.

It's funny. I first saw most of these black and white and color movies in a grainy illegal bootleg copy in Scotland around 1989 or so, when I was 20 and thought they were great. However, after nearly two decades more of life experience, I am obviously watching them through different eyes and evaluating them objectively is pretty much impossible. Shit, there is no such thing as an objective review of anything anyway, because whatever the reviewer writes is always going to be subjective, subject to their own secretly-nursed pathologies and prejudices and loves and hates. So I'll just tell you what I now see on this DVD and, if you want to, you can buy it and make up your own mind.



Video



"ROCKET SCIENCE": GINNY FERRELL
"ROCKET SCIENCE": AN AGENDA
THE LOOP: WILL WEB CELEBS EVER
HOLLYWOOD?



FilmThre

Do we really need a "Rush Hour 3"?

- 1) Yes. There was so much more said, and this is the only way.
- 2) No. Then again, we don't need more, so who can stop them?
- 3) Maybe, but only if Chris Tucker and Jackie Chan. Or both.



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**THIS AD
SUCKS!**

The first thing anybody watching these films, which range from 1984-1993, has to bear in mind is this: much of the imagery and attitudinizing and cynicism and stupidity they display has been thoroughly absorbed into mainstream alternative and punk culture now, from the whole tedious 'noir-clad depressed poetic goth chick' Suicide Girls cliché (which started with Souxsie Sioux in the 70s in England anyway) to the leather/bloodletting/piercing/whipping/bondage fetish imagery often running through the films. How much influence these films actually had is debatable, in that they ripped off a riff or three from earlier punk incarnations, but they must have been like a shot of battery acid into the eye of the average 80s viewer, that's for sure.

Indeed, some of them still are. I personally think that the entire schlock shock horror rep of the Cinema of Transgression rests on "Fingered," a 1986 Kern short featuring a sexually insane Lydia Lunch being fisted and fucked (in cunt and ass with penis and gun)(yes, gun) and trading quips and blows with real-life ex-fuckbuddy Marty Nations. It's a vile, stupid, shocking, sick 25-minute hurricane of sensibility blows, and still has the power to disturb (sexual-assault-traumatized hitchhiker Lung Leg being brutally beaten and a rape attempt made on her) and disconcert. It's amateurish and nobody in it can act, but when you have imagery that is so far beyond the normal societal pale that hardly matters - you think you're going to get Reece Witherspoon to do this sort of stuff? Have to say though, I personally found the most offensive part of the DVD to be Lunch's putrid purple prose she spouts to rough-sex suitors like [Henry Rollins](#) in "Right Side of My Brain" cos there's nothing worse than hearing pretentious 'artistes' gibber insidious pseudo-nihilist doom/death/desire/decay/damage/dementia/demons/destruction/disease

sub-poetic waffle. And when somebody's even more pretentious than

Rollins, you know you're onto a loser.

But that's the thing about these films: they are genuinely made by damaged people for, I would suppose, damaged people, or trauma voyeurs, or bored drunks or junkies, or gorehounds, or misanthropes, or misogynists, or perverts, or sex dwarves, or scumpunks, or whoever. Lunch, for instance, was abused as a child by her father, as documented in her sick, cold, disturbing, other-people-as-sensation, teen-cock-travelogue book "Paradoxia," and is no stranger to rough sex and sexual abuse. You're acutely aware that you're not watching normal people in watching these films, especially the likes of the "Submit To Me" films, which are basically just fetish-parade music videos of angry or despairing loons doing stuff (gouging out their eyes with knives, tying whips round their heads, indulging in bondage, smearing menstrual blood over their fingers, cutting their clothes off, playing with themselves, etc etc, ad infinitum, ad nauseum) that will either turn you on or off (or any combo thereof) depending on your own particular sexual or masochistic kinks and quirks and thrills.

One thing's for sure, though: a fair bit of the material in these films is still challenging, even if it's very amateur and has terrible subpar splatter-movie-influenced FX. It's not intelligently challenging though, it's more challenging in an 'oh wow I can't fucking believe they just did or said that' sort of way. These people were pissed off with everything and had nothing to say, and they screamed this quite (in)eloquently from the depths of their own private cells and hells. It has to be said, though, that this is very cold [filmmaking](#), as is to be expected from a drug-addicted filmmaker, and is not emotionally engaging at all; just a constant occasionally-ho-hum atrocity exhibition of tortured angry hateful people finger-painting in blood and bone and semen and sex and shit and nothingness for the bored apathetic disengaged gaze of the recording Super-8 camera. Hollywood can do that sort of splatter-porn shit these daze with much bigger budgets and better FX and just as little emotion; it's just that these guys and gals were doing it first.

Cinema has come a long way.

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Bottom line here: these very uneven films are worth watching, a sporadically interesting historical cinematic curiosity, a timeless time capsule from a time when nobody gave a fuck and would say this loud with a sneer. Which makes it, well, pretty much right up-to-date, when all is said and done. Watch this DVD once and file it under 'who fucking cares.' Then go and watch some new episode of please-make-me-me-me-famous-for-fifteen-nanoseconds personal degradation on YouTube or mainstream reality TV or wherever. Life's too short to miss every new idiotic and disgraceful act the human race can perpetrate on itself by watching old ones. And you know that's the straight sad boring truth.

Who fucking cares indeed.

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