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## The Art of Trash: Evaluating Troma Entertainment as Paracinema

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# The Art of Trash:

## Evaluating Troma Entertainment as Paracinema

By James MacDonald

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A Thesis Submitted as Partial Fulfilment for the Award of Bachelor of  
Communications (Honours)

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## Abstract

The aim of this research is to explore the anti-establishment function of the work of Lloyd Kaufman and his film studio, Troma Entertainment. The research focuses on Troma's capacities as paracinema, and examines how in relishing their derided position in the cultural field, Lloyd Kaufman's films represent an anti-establishment cinematic form, combating an institutionalised idea of cultural value.

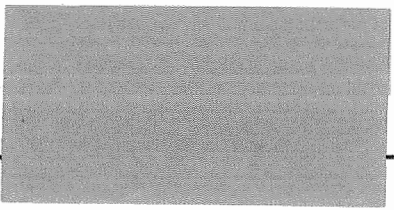
Through challenging the rules of taste, Lloyd Kaufman's films serve to push the boundaries of what is considered valuable in contemporary culture. Films that revel in their 'bad taste' through extreme themes, poor humour and amateurism, make a stand against the mainstream through deliberately positioning themselves as its binary opposite, and positioning themselves as counter cinema through their elevation of different pleasures. The creative portion of the thesis, *Dan The Dog Man* draws upon the work of Lloyd Kaufman and the films he has released through Troma Entertainment in order to highlight an understanding of how Troma films in particular use bad taste as a weapon against the mainstream idea of cultural value.

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## Introduction

The films of Lloyd Kaufman and his independent film studio Troma Entertainment challenge the rules of mainstream cinema, and explore how taste can be used as a weapon to push the boundaries of what is considered valuable in contemporary cinema culture. Troma Entertainment have been producing low budget, independent films since 1974, with Lloyd Kaufman having written, produced and/or directed some 25 films. Kaufman's most popular films, such as *Sgt. Kabukiman NYPD* (1991), *Tromeo and Juliet* (1996), *Terror Firmer* (1999) and the famous *Toxic Avenger* series (*Toxic Avenger* (1985), *Toxic Avenger Part II* (1989), *Toxie Avenger Part III: The Last Temptation Of Toxie* (1989), *Citizen Toxie: The Toxic Avenger Part IV* (2000)), are often considered a genre in themselves. These low-budget pieces of filmic detritus unashamedly flaunt their bad taste through Kaufman's love of toilet humour and illicit imagery, extending from decapitations, dismemberment and litres of fake blood and slime to cheap nudity and cheesy soft-core sex scenes. These spectacles of sex and violence are presented in a 'B-grade' fashion, with bad acting, cheap special effects and unprofessional lighting, due to low-budget constraints.

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Through these elements Kaufman's films have been positioned as the opposite to mainstream Hollywood film, challenging commonly understood rules of contemporary mainstream cinema. Kaufman's films, through the selective process of taste, have been relegated to a derided position in the cultural field, and devalued in comparison to a legitimised mainstream, becoming cultural 'trash'. When read paracinematically, trash films can be seen to go against mainstream filmic values of the time they are made, in order to refuse the dominant ideologies displayed in

conventional cinema. Like other 'trash' films, Lloyd Kaufman's films operate as paracinema or counter-cinema, meaning that in relishing their derided position in the cultural field, they function to attack and challenge dominant ideas of what constitutes cultural value. Through revelling in their 'bad taste', trash films make a stand against an institutionalised idea of 'good taste', deliberately positioning themselves as its binary opposite and challenging the commonly held idea of cultural value. In actively choosing to present his films in this way, Kaufman challenges the rules of contemporary mainstream cinema and positions his films as an anti-establishment cinematic voice, attacking ideas of cultural value in a contemporary cinematic environment.

### Synopsis of *Dan The Dog Man*

To demonstrate how Troma films function as Paracinema, I have made a short film entitled *Dan The Dog Man*, to accompany the written portion of my thesis. I have used this film to show the points outlined in this essay clearly, in an attempt to more accurately explain how Lloyd Kaufman's Troma films challenges ideas of taste and cultural value. Like a Lloyd Kaufman Troma picture, *Dan The Dogman* presents a storyline dealing with the struggle of an underdog; a theme not-so-subtly masked by the fact that the protagonist is indeed, a half-man, half-dog mutant. The films script was intended to be detailed, elaborate and of considerable length, in an attempt to successfully capture the feel of a Troma movie when it was shot cheaply, with unskilled and actors and an unskilled crew. Indeed, for all but one crewmember and two actors (and with the obvious exception of Lloyd Kaufman himself), this was the first experience anybody involved had had in filmmaking. I myself have had very little experience with directing films, as the bulk of my undergraduate studies were in

film theory. I feel that this has worked to our advantage though, in capturing a film of authentic amateur quality and the 'so-bad-its-good' aesthetic. The film also attempts to imitate a Troma film in featuring gore and nudity presented in a gross-out, slapstick manner and aims to elevate these above the plot to go against institutional ideas of 'good taste'. Obviously, the film also intends to entertain on its own merits and to this end I have incorporated many personal touches and interpretations on Lloyd Kaufman's established style. I have included here a detailed synopsis in order to give an idea of the content of the film, and have also included the full script as an appendix to this dissertation.

Dan, the protagonist of *Dan The Dog Man*, is a teenager who attends Leni Reifenstahl senior high school, a school very similar to Tromaville High in Michael Herz and Richard Haines's *Class of Nuke 'em High* (1986). The principal of the school, Frau Schicklegruber, is a not-so-closet neo-Nazi determined to eliminate the weaker students of her school and profit from them at the same time, through employing her very own final solution. Himmel employs her student prefects to carry out her wishes. These prefects, Shiv, Junk and Ernst, are a group of pierced and tattooed miscreants influenced by the post-apocalyptic punks from *Nuke 'em High* (1986) and also the neo-Nazi surf gang from Peter George's Troma release *Surf Nazi's Must Die* (1987),

On the first day of semester, weedy nerd Dan is unlucky enough to run over his teacher, Mr. Stanley Lloyd Kaufman on his way to school. Shicklegruber sees this as the perfect opportunity to put her plan into action. She sends the teachers of the school away to clean the remains of Mr. Kaufman from the road and places her Student Prefects in charge of all classes. When Dan attempts to miss his physical education

class by hiding behind the school gymnasium, he is discovered by a student prefect named Shiv, who forces him to stare into the girl's change room. Dan is not impressed by what he sees however, until his eyes drift across to Celia, the object of his teenage affection. Against the backdrop of the schools hedonism and debauchery, Celia is pure and innocent.

Unfortunately, while Dan is gazing lovingly at Celia, Shicklegruber appears behind him, and paying no attention to Shiv, accuses him of staring into the girls change room! Dan is sent to Shicklegrubers office... although instead of a regular detention he receives a different punishment and is minced and bottled with experimental growth hormones, then sold as Dog food!

This is not the end for Dan however, as a strange chemical reaction means that when Dan is sold back to his family and eaten by the family dog, he is reincarnated by a strange mutation that sees his dog take on his memories, personality and mutate a humanoid body. Dan awakes in his bed as the Dog Man, the world's first superhero from Perth, Western Australia. After a quick swig of bourbon, the freshly mutated and reborn Dan leaves the house on a quest for revenge.

When he comes across Junk and a group of his cronies harassing the lovely Celia on her way to school, Dan wastes no in engaging them in a martial arts battle, which culminates in Junk being beaten with his friends severed arms and then having his head crushed under Dan's Dunlop Volleys. Dan's next victims are Shiv and Ernst, who are interrupted making out in the shower, disembowelled and strangled while still fully naked. Finally, Dan heads off after Schicklegruber herself, unfortunately

finding that she has overdosed on Cyanide tablets in her office. When Celia arrives however, Dan attempts to stab her corpse with a pair of scissors in an effort to fool Celia, before she lets out the startling revelation that Schicklegruber is her mother. Luckily, Celia doesn't mind that her mother is dead, and gives Dan a kiss on the cheek, before skipping out of the room. Presumably, they live happily ever after.

## Defining Paracinema

In his discussion of what constitutes art, William Routt (1994) states, "elite refinement is to some extent, mere pretence," meaning that in identifying with an artwork, one must first understand the work on some level before choosing to embrace or reject it. From this we can infer that taste is not an inherent characteristic, and to some extent tastes are chosen by a person to represent themselves. Pierre Bourdieu (1984) commented on the social construction of taste, that "tastes are first and foremost distastes, disgust provoked by horror of visceral intolerance of the tastes of others," giving an understanding of how different cultural classes choose tastes in order to "segment themselves as distinct from one another by different attitudes towards art and beauty" (Bourdieu, 1984.) Using Bourdieu's ideas of taste to examine 'trash' films, we can see it as a study of trash film audiences, and how they define themselves in relation to their 'others'. From this it becomes evident that 'trash' film is to a large extent defined by its relationship to its binary opposite, 'legitimate' film. To understand what makes a film trash then, we must first define what makes a film culturally valuable.

Routt (1994) states that in the eyes of the vast majority, an artwork is only what is regarded as an artwork, and in this way art, and thus cultural value, become

institutionally defined. He stresses that “The institutional aspect of art actually makes for quick and easy identification: whatever is in a museum is art” (Routt, 1994.) Cultural value, then is not determined by personal taste, instead it becomes something that is bestowed by cultural institutions. In the study of film, we can substitute the cinema in the place of the museum as the institution where the artwork is legitimised, and re-word the quote, “whatever is in a cinema is art”. Through this we see how cultural value is taken away from the eye of the beholder and instead becomes adherence to a code, any film that is deemed worthy to be shown in a cinema is legitimate film, and film that is not shown in a cinema becomes inferior. Obviously, personal taste is not completely ruled out of the equation, rather nullified and rendered useless by the overriding factor of the institution. Routt (1994) addresses the problem of finding art lacking in a personal experience by stating that if “the museum piece fails to evoke a response called forth by a sunset or by a neighbouring museum piece” then most people will “abrogate personal experience and uphold the institution (“it is not art for me, but it must be art for those who know art”).” We can imagine then, the average film viewer in this predicament will perhaps have his view of the value of the film coloured by the institutional determinates of value, perhaps feeling guilt or shame at enjoying a film that does not fit into correct cultural consumption more than one that the majority enjoys. To summarise, the definition of legitimate film and thus, the determinate of trash, is an institutional seal of approval via the cinema, and a set of filmic codes that are recognised to represent this approval.

Obviously though, this theory is flawed in that, much as a museum is not the only place to view art, the cinema is not the only place to view films. For the intent of this definition, I feel it is necessary to clarify that the cinema’s power to legitimise film

lies not in the physical act of screening the film, but rather that the filmic conventions common to these screened films form an institutional code of cultural value, which audiences have been conditioned to recognise as determinate of filmic legitimacy.

It is plain to see then, that it is Hollywood films that become the legitimised mainstream to contemporary film audiences through exhibiting the codes that are recognised as indicative of prominence in the modern cinema. In the words of David James (2002), "Hollywood [is] the most successful case of a culture producing industry ever known," creating a "society in which knowledge and pleasure alike have become commodities." The idea of culture as a commodity is not insignificant, as an institutional understanding of value is what is sold to audiences as 'legitimate' cinema. It is quite evident that one of, if not the most important institutional determinates in the value of a film is its financial success at the box office, and thus commodification and consumption become a key concern of 'legitimate' cinema. Through this, film audiences can judge a film's worth by the amount of interest it has attracted and the number of cinemas it has played in, and those responsible for the films production can measure their success in profit. This is what generates the code of cultural value, with higher production values, name actors, special effects and traditional story lines being required to make the film appeal to the broadest possible audience, and therefore becoming the main determinates of cinematic legitimacy and 'good taste'.

Trash films, then are films that are positioned at the opposite end of the cultural spectrum from the mainstream Hollywood film model, and are derided by the mainstream for their 'bad taste', evidenced in their extreme themes and low

production values. Films like Edward D. Wood Jr.'s spectacular science fiction failure *Plan 9 From Outer Space* (1959), Lucio Fulci's irredeemably violent *Zombie* (1979), Gerard Damiano's porno classic *Deep Throat* (1972) or, indeed, any of the films distributed by Troma Entertainment fall into the 'trash' category of film. In light of Bordieu's concept of taste, these films can be seen as paracinema, anti-establishment cinema that goes against the institutional idea of cultural value promoted through mainstream films. Paracinema is a term coined by Jeffery Sconce (1995) to describe disreputable films held in opposition to what is widely considered to constitute cultural value. Sconce (1995) states that Paracinema is more a reading protocol than a distinct genre of film, describing it as "a counter-aesthetic turned sub-cultural sensibility devoted to all manner of cultural detritus." Sconce (1995) sees paracinema as a battle between "an elite cadre of cinematic tastemakers"; those who define good taste, or attribute cinematic value, and a group of film viewers who valorise trash in an attempt to refuse commonly accepted legitimate culture. These film viewers use taste as a weapon in order to attack the commonly held ideal of art, in an attempt to break down the barriers surrounding the understanding of cultural value in cinema. Sanjek (2000) notes that 'trash' fans "propose good taste acts as a repressive safety valve, filtering out entire areas of experience and expression, and relish the deliberate breaking of social and aesthetic taboos." The desire to "see oneself in the screen" (James, 2002) is an important idea in understanding paracinema, as through providing an outlet for an audience to see a reflection of their own tastes, paracinema provides pleasures that are not found in mainstream film. Through asserting their taste for bad taste, and refusing to value the predominant idea of 'legitimate' cinema, we can understand how a paracinematic audience distances itself from the cultural mainstream. Paracinema is cinema fundamentally opposed to mainstream cultural



institutions, and appeals to those who are fed up with the limited scope of 'legitimate' film culture.

## The Aroma Du Troma: Cheap Sex and Slapstick Violence

A large part of the paracinematic appeal of Lloyd Kaufman's work is presenting sex and violence in a bad taste, tacky, gross-out comedic form. "Puke and blood, slime and shit" (Kaufman, 2003) are the weapons in Troma's attack on mainstream media systems. "The best strategy to be a real nuisance to your enemy is to have more fun than they could ever have. If they rule the planet – at least you can rule the party" (Sonya Schultz, in Kaufman, 2003). According to Kaufman (2003), the "things that make life worthwhile" are:

"Cannibals, zombies, decapitations, head-crushing, projectile vomiting, defenestration, disembowelment, and/or a variety of lethal weapons including but by no means limited to guns, knives, crossbows, chainsaws, and out-of-control motor vehicles."

As a true auteur director, gratuitous depictions of violent deaths are a recurring element in Kaufman's films and as Sconce explains, such 'Gore' films are "a key element in the paracinematic aesthetic"(Sconce, 1995). Herschel Gordon Lewis' *Blood Feast* (1963) is maintained by most to be the birth of the 'Gore' genre and is a useful tool in showing how opposition to the mainstream defines paracinema's anti-establishment ethic. *Blood Feast* is an exploitation picture, a genre discussed by famous exploiteer Roger Corman in Greene's documentary on exploitation film, *Schlock!* (2004).

“There has never been a good answer to what is an exploitation movie. Some people would say its something that exploits the subject matter; other people would say its something that exploits the audience. I would say its probably somewhere in between or a combination of both”. (Corman in Greene, 2004)

Greene (2004) states that exploitation film exploited violence because in the era of their popularity “extreme violence was just another area of audience fascination the studios were afraid to explore.” Exploitation films are significant in a discussion of paracinema because at the time of their production in the fifties, sixties and seventies these films were in binary opposition to the films awarded cultural value by mainstream cinema institutions. The key concern of exploitation cinema according to Greene (2004) was to “grab an audience by offering them something unavailable anywhere else.” Exploitation was the opposite of institutionally legitimised mainstream film; instead it focused on producing the cheapest product in the shortest time, resolving to “pander to our baser instincts, pique our curiosity, and salaciously sell us the seamier side of life.” (Ross, in Greene 2004) Although Troma films are not “true” exploitation pictures in terms of their place in cinemas chronological history and the motive of their production, they are obviously informed by exploitation film culture. As Kaufman himself puts it “(Roger Corman is) a damn good director and his movies proved that you could make top quality, low budget movies with provocative scripts and good acting.” (L. Kaufman, Personal Communication, July 15, 2006).

Like Gordon Lewis’ *Blood Feast*, Troma films exploit the subject matter of extreme violence, and as Greene observed from exploitation cinema fans “once a certain

audience got a taste of blood in its mouth, it became insatiable.” Troma’s biggest success and most recognisable film, *The Toxic Avenger* (1985), is, in terms of plot, a parody of a superhero film. However, it is also a spectacle of slapstick violence and gore featuring a character who masturbates over pictures of road kill victims, senior citizens being bashed, a graphic scene where the Toxic Avenger crushes a weightlifters head with a barbell and a scene reminiscent of Paul Bartel’s *Death Race 2000* (1975) where four perverts play a game where they collect points for running down victims in their car, crushing a boy on a bike and reversing over his corpse. “The pleasures to be found in such raw, undiluted imagery” (Sanjek, 2000) are of vital importance to a paracinematic audience, in that through exercising such deviant tastes for the morbid and macabre they create a clear rift between themselves and the cinematic cultural mainstream. Gunning (in Watson, 1997) talks of how low budget horror films succeed by allowing theatrical display to dominate narrative absorption and even Stephen King (in Sanjek, 2000) has admitted that the best horror movies “operate most powerfully on this “wanna-look-at-my-chewed-up-food?” level,” a primitively childish consciousness “sometimes also known as the “oh my god, that was gross!” factor.” This is in binary opposition to the values of ‘legitimate’ film, as depictions of violence are seldom openly elevated above the narrative. Instead, such subject matter is kept in the realm of institutionally defined ‘good taste’ through justification in the narrative.

Like violence, a paracinematic audience will openly elevate sexually titillating images above any vague semblance of plot in a film in order to distance themselves from the cinematic mainstream. Troma films serve the purpose of stimulating their audiences “pleasure and desires... in exhibiting the limits, capabilities and form of the human

body” (Watson, 1997). One of Lloyd Kaufman’s first films, 1982’s *The First Turn-On* is a teen sex comedy similar in style to *American Pie* (1999). It features soft-core topless scenes from at least eight different actresses, and uses them as its main selling point, along with lowbrow toilet humour. The plot, focusing on a group of campers who get trapped inside a cave and relate the stories of their first sexual experiences, barely deserves a mention when compared to the amount of superfluous nudity on offer.

Chute (in Sanjek, 2000) points out one of the “rock bottom truths about movies [which] precede the operation of criticism” in “the plain fact that some of the things movies do for us can easily be done without finesse or imagination or wit.” We can see this in effect in the fact that representations of sex and violence can still provide pleasure for a paracinematic audience without the need to be legitimised by the institutional rules of cinematic value. In making the decision to accompany my thesis with a short film to outline more directly my understanding of Kaufman’s work, I was obviously required to attempt a fair amount of Troma-style sex and violence in my own film, *Dan The Dog Man*. *Dan The Dog Man* contains nine death scenes which include a disembowelment, head crushing, asphyxiation, two dismemberments, internal bleeding, an implied mincing, a cyanide poisoning and Lloyd Kaufman himself being run down by an out of control hatchback. In more concessions to bad taste, I have included two sexually charged change room scenes, one of which contains both male and female full-frontal nudity. I have also included several men in drag and a fart joke, attempting to throw in some Troma-style crude humour. I feel that the slapstick style and excessive amount of violence in *Dan The Dog Man* is very true to the paracinematic style of Lloyd Kaufman’s films, but I feel that I was required

to make some concessions and be more tasteful with the nudity to keep a clear conscience in not forcing the actors to do things they were not prepared to do, which has left these scenes a fair way short of Troma's trademark sexual gratuitousness.

I was lucky enough to have the opportunity to spend an afternoon with Lloyd Kaufman when he was in Perth for the Revelation Film Festival earlier this year, and when I asked him what he thought of the concept of bad taste, and whether he considered his films to be in bad taste, he responded "I don't see how any of the Troma Movies could be in bad taste, other than certain elements within them. Certain blue-nosers might find that the close-up of the hermaphroditic genitalia in *Terror Firmer* (1999) is in bad taste, so I can certainly admit that there are pieces of it in bad taste. But we are amateurs in obscenity; we are amateurs in bad taste, General Electric who own NBC universal, they made a movie called *United 93* (2006). That's bad taste, making a film that exploits the deaths of thirty six hundred people." (L. Kaufman, Personal Communication, July 15, 2006).

It is clear from this statement how Kaufman's own, personal construction of taste is put to use in distancing his films from the Hollywood mainstream. While we can be certain that *United 93* (2006) will not contain as many litres of fake blood or gratuitous lesbian sex scenes as some of Lloyd Kaufman's movies, it can be considered to be in worse taste than even while *United 93* (2006) promises to give ten percent of its opening weeks revenue to the families of the victims, it still stands to make a large amount of profit from taking advantage of a tragedy. While this is an extreme example of the values of Hollywood mainstream films, it is the idea of

corporate materialism inherent in these films that is what Kaufman is specifically trying to distance himself from through the paracinematic aspects of his films.

Kaufman's use of bad taste to combat popular taste has been compared in the past to Dadaism and their use of "anti-art" to combat the bourgeois interests that the Dadaists believed inspired World War One, and the rigidity surrounding valid expression in the post-war society. After the 1996 release of Kaufman's *Tromeo and Juliet* it was inferred in a French newspaper that Kaufman was to Shakespeare as Duchamp was to da Vinci when he painted the moustache on the Mona Lisa. (L. Kaufman, Personal Communication, July 15, 2006). Richter (1978) states on Dadaism, "The bourgeois idea of beauty," represented in such institutionally established bastions of good taste as Shakespeare and da Vinci, "had become ridiculous." This sentiment runs parallel to the paracinematic use of taste to define itself from institutionally defined cultural value. Indeed Lloyd Kaufman's use of taste as a weapon can easily be seen mirrored in the tenants of Dadaism.

"Revolted by the butchery of the 1914 World War, we in Zurich devoted ourselves to the arts. While the guns rumbled in the distance, we sang, painted, made collages and wrote poems with all our might. We were seeking an art based on fundamentals, to cure the madness of the age, and a new order of things that would restore the balance between heaven and hell. We had a dim premonition that power-mad gangsters would one day use art itself as a means of deadening men's minds." – Jean Arp (in Richter, 1978)

While it is impossible to state that Kaufman's films use Dadaist techniques, as Dada contained no unified formal characteristics (Richter, 1978), it is very possible to see in Kaufman's films the artistic ethic of Dadaism. These parallels between Troma films and Dadaism are extremely evident when considering one of the things Kaufman is most opposed to – the increasing struggle of independent film and freedom of expression in the face of what is becoming a more and more homogenised Hollywood film culture. Like Arp, Kaufman sees culture being used to “deaden” men's minds, and intends to position Troma as the opposite, stating “The people who come to the Troma movie, (are) those that wish to be challenged and have to do a little thinking.” (L. Kaufman, Personal Communication, July 15, 2006). Dadaism aimed to “free art from its role as the stupefying veneer on a society whose values no longer could be sustained, and whose collapse had shown that it was obsolete” (Dachy, 2006) and interestingly, it sought to do this “without the backing of any institution designed to dictate the role of culture, such as a museum or publishing house” (Dachy, 2006) echoing Kaufman's battle against the legitimising power of the mainstream cinema.

Dada is often referred to as Anti-Art, in order to describe its rebellion against the institutionalised art of the time. When I suggested the term “anti-cinema” to describe Kaufman's attack on the Hollywood mainstream however, he appeared fairly offended by the idea, exclaiming, “We are pro-cinema, one hundred percent. It's Hollywood that's anti-cinema, its Hollywood that are making movies by committee and making movies by focus groups. Making movies for a hundred million dollars where you have to appeal to all people at all times, hence they're making baby food and you can live on baby food but it's very, very boring” (L. Kaufman, Personal Communication, July 15, 2006). It is interesting to note the difference in Kaufman's

thinking here. Obviously, Kaufman does not consider Troma films to be Dadaist movies, rather movies that display Dadaist ethics. I have taken this into account with the production of *Dan The Dog Man*. Like Kaufman's films, *Dan The Dog Man* is a rebellious film, evidenced through its celebration of the spectacle of sex and violence. Also, like Kaufman's films, it is designed to appeal to a paracinematic audience and is not legitimised by the rules of institutionalised cultural values. However, Kaufman also stated "the primary consideration when I write and direct is to be entertaining" (L. Kaufman, Personal Communication, July 15, 2006). While not insinuating that Dadaist art is not entertaining, I believe that the entertainment factor was Kaufman's main objection with his films being termed "anti-cinema", as this term denotes a kind of abstract form not found in Troma films. This has informed *Dan The Dog Man*, as despite the immediacy of the spectacle, I have attempted to make the film entertaining without having to rely on these effects.

## Amateurism and The 'So-Bad-Its-Good' Aesthetic

In her essay "Amateur vs. Professional" Maya Deren (in James, 2002) argues that the word amateur was originally derived from the Latin for "lover" and thus an amateur filmmaker is not only a person who lacks skill or ability in the craft, but also a lover of film who engages in filmmaking for enjoyment and the forward progression of the medium, as distinct from making money. Amateurism in this sense is a key aspect in distancing Lloyd Kaufman's films from mainstream of Hollywood cinema, in making his films fall outside mainstream 'good taste. To this effect, Kaufman has capitalised on the fact that his films are made for very little money and are often not of the highest quality. Though Kaufman himself after 30 years of making films, has obviously developed skill in the medium, his actors and crew are mostly volunteers,



his special effects are cheaply done, and many other concessions are made in order to make the most of limited budgets. As Kaufman himself puts it ‘When you’re making a movie for no money, you’re going to have to make it raw. You can’t have all the refinements, you know. We have to make concessions on the quality of the acting, on special effects, on the look of the film, on the lighting of the film.’ (L. Kaufman, Personal Communication, July 15, 2006).

Kaufman believes that the often-ragged production values and sometimes-amateurish performances of actors in Troma films are what attract many members of his audience. Indeed, David Sanjek (2000) noted that some schools believe a paracinematic audience’s pleasure in viewing films containing graphic sex and violence is enabled not by the legitimisation of a proposed high culture, but by the “so-bad-its-good” aesthetic. As Greene (2004) states, the “so-bad-its-good” aesthetic is a key aspect of the appeal of early exploitation film to a contemporary audience, with audiences finding “humour in the occasionally amateurish performances and the almost always ragged production values.” Sanjek (2000) likens this to Stephen King’s discussion of the grey area “between art and porno-exhibition,” and questions whether it is used to rationalise the debased attitudes of “self indulgent voyeurs, living out repressed juvenile fantasies.”

Without passing such judgement on Troma fans, the “so-bad-its-good” aesthetic is obviously evident in Kaufman’s work. Like early exploiters, Kaufman is a highly prolific director. “They obviously didn’t care what it looked like, they just did it and kept on doing it” reminisces Trey Parker of his early experiences of viewing Troma films (In Kaufman, 2003). On a surface level, these films appeal as humour can be

found in the slap dash approach. Actors often lack ability, special effects are done cheaply without the aid of computer graphics, and the scene of a car flipping in *Sgt. Kabukiman NYPD* (1991) reportedly cost so much that it has been edited in to “virtually every movie since” (Kaufman, 2003). Kaufman uses these ‘in-jokes’ to his advantage, for example, stating that in *Terror Firmer’s* (Kaufman, 2000) head crushing scene he “liked the fact that the wig fell off and it was damn obvious we were seeing a melon being trampled.” “The idea behind any visual effect... is to create an emotional response in the audience.” he explains “We get a bigger response by using a 99c melon than if we crushed an expensive, lifelike fake head cast from the actors own melon” (Kaufman, 2003).

The “so-bad-its-good” aesthetic adds to the function of Lloyd Kaufman’s films as paracinema, in much the same way gratuitous sex and violence does. A paracinematic audience is attracted to the shoddy production of Troma films because this goes against the institutionalised idea of cultural value. According to the Hollywood code of value, in order to become the legitimised mainstream films must be totally immersive. It is a widely held view that culturally valuable films must be expertly crafted; there can be no elements of the film that break the illusion of the film being a complete reality. The breaking of this rule is a paracinematic aspect, in that it distances Troma films from the Hollywood mainstream. While watching a mainstream horror film for example, the special effects are computer generated and seamless, taking a way from the feeling you are watching a movie. Kaufman’s films do not attempt to immerse the viewer in a construction of reality. Troma’s obviously fake special effects are openly mocked in *Terror Firmer* (1999), for example, when a character is shot in the head with a real bullet while shooting a scene that requires

multiple “bullet-hit” effects. Upon noticing that the character has been shot in the head, Kaufman’s character remarks that the bullet to the head did not look right. Obviously, drawing attention to the fact that special effects are done cheaply makes it very noticeable that you are watching an independent movie, far removed from the value system Kaufman is protesting.

Low production values and cheaply done special effects are certainly present in *Dan The Dog Man*. The “so-bad-its-good aesthetic” is present through necessity, as having only completed the most basic film and video production units in my undergraduate degree; my skills as a filmmaker are rudimentary at best. I viewed this as an advantage while making this film though, and sought to write the most elaborate script, involving the most characters and special effects to try and ensure that, no matter what happened, my abilities would be strained and my film would take on the Amateur feel of a Troma movie. In regards to special effects, my blood effects were made from a cheap mixture of flour, syrup, water and food colouring and my body parts are made from various materials such as empty poster tubes, rubber gloves, stockings and hollowed out rockmelons. My head crushing achieved a very similar quality to the one in Kaufman’s *Terror Firmer*, in that it is very obvious that it is a hollowed out rockmelon filled with fake blood and dog food. The most money I spent at one time on items for my film was around seventy dollars, and this purchase included two hydroponic syringes to spurt blood from which were around ten dollars each. Also worth mentioning is the use of cheap black and white computer print-outs as labels for Schicklegruber brand products and in one case, to replace a sick actor at the last minute when sticky-taped to the head of a blow-up doll. I have taken advantage of a minimal budget in order to make sure my movie is authentically

amateur, to capitalise on the impression that you are watching a low-budget, b-grade film.

Another of the many techniques Kaufman uses to break down the audience immersion is in referencing Troma entertainment and his previous work during his films. This is evidenced in characters wearing t-shirts of other movies he has directed, Troma film posters on the walls of his sets and jokes like the film festival gag at the beginning of *The Toxic Avenger 2* (1989). In this scene, Toxie comments that after his victories in the first film, the people of Tromaville were able to spend their time watching excellent movies. As he says this, the camera pans up to show “Troma Film Festival” advertised on the front of the cinema, thus directly advertising Troma films and drawing the audience out of any illusion of reality. In his latest films, Kaufman has even started to insert infomercial-style plugs for his various books directly into the scripts. Kaufman believes that these jokes are “very Brechtian... they take down the fourth wall a lot and talk to the audience” (L. Kaufman, Personal Communication, July 15, 2006). These touches betray the film is just a construction, an elaborate joke that does not necessarily represent reality.

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In his essay *The Brechtian Theatre – It's Theory And Practice*, Esslin (1971) states, “before the second half of the nineteenth century... the theatre could not even pretend to create a complete illusion of actual life, observed through a missing fourth wall.” He likens the Brechtian theatre to art, in how when art achieved near photorealism, some artists chose to paint unnaturally in order to express their disdain for the status quo. Obvious parallels are prevalent between this description of Brechtianism and

techniques used in Kaufman's films, in how both attempt to overcome the "theatre of illusion."

"Looking around one discovers more or less motionless bodies in a curious state - they seem to be contracting their muscles in a strong physical effort, or else have relaxed them after violent strain... they have their eyes open, but they don't look, they stare... they stare at the stage as if *spellbound*, which is an expression from the middle ages, an age of witches and obscurantists..." – Brecht (in Esslin, 1971)

Brecht attempted to distance his work from what he saw as "culinary theatre", where audiences simply devoured whatever was served up to them and were manipulated into seeing unthinkingly from the actors point of view, in an effort to make the theatre a place of active thought and emotion. To do this he employed the *Verfremdungseffekt* (commonly translated as the alienation effect, although the original German phrase does not have any emotional overtones) or V-effect, which sought to keep the audience distanced from the action on the stage, by openly admitting that the theatre was a theatre and not a representation of the real world.

Kaufman believes that "part of the fun (of breaking the forth wall) is letting the audience share with you the rough edges" (L. Kaufman, Personal Communication, July 15, 2006). By utilizing Brechtian techniques, he seeks to actively involve the audience and stop them from watching the film passively. "In a sense (the audience are) making the Troma movie, they're participating in it, and when they see the latex, or when they see the blood that's coming out of somebody is coming out the wrong

way... they have fun with that, they enjoy it, the audience becomes part of the filmmaking experience. "(L. Kaufman, Personal Communication, July 15, 2006).

I have attempted to use Brechtian techniques in *Dan The Dog Man*, in order to break down the forth wall and make it apparent to the audience they are watching a film rather than try and absorb them in a false reality. As well as the Brechtian pleasure the audience can take in the "so-bad-its-good" aesthetic, I have also used other classic Brechtian techniques such as the aside, and the use of a narrator, both of which are common in Troma films and have also experimented with split frames and transitions to distance the audience from the film.

Kaufman's Brechtian approach in attempting to break down the forth wall allows his audience to focus on deeper themes and issues contained in his films. In a discussion of Doris Wishman's early nudist camp film, *Nude on the Moon* (1960) Greene (2004) states, "Like all exploitation films, *Nude on the Moon's* following breaks down into those who choose to laugh at the filmmakers perceived ineptitude, and those who find a kind of cock-eyed primal poetry in an unschooled but heartfelt approach to a medium that seems to be suffocating under the weight of nameless craftsmanship."

*Nude on the Moon's* "central preoccupation... is nudity as a metaphor for true love" (Greene, 2004). Its "poetry" is seen in the sincerity of the love story between the leads, a story drawn from Wishman's pain over the death of her husband. Seen in this context, it is apparent that despite the crass nudity employed to sell the film, and the amateurish direction; *Nude on the Moon* contains a deeper significance for an audience to connect with. I have established that, like Wishman's *Nude On The Moon*, the work of Lloyd Kaufman is characterised by the same perceived ineptitude, created

by poor production values. Also like Wishman however, different audiences connect with Kaufman's films on different levels.

According to Maya Deren (in James, 2002), this idea of the amateur as a lover is “the meaning from which the amateur filmmaker should take his clue. Instead of envying the script and dialogue writers, the trained actors, the elaborate staffs and sets, the enormous production budgets of professional film, the amateur should make use of the one great advantage which all professionals envy him, namely, freedom – both artistic and physical.” Kaufman echoes this sentiment “I truly believe that the great advantage of low budget filmmaking is the tremendous level of control you have over the movie. The more you can control your art, the better off you are.” (2003)

“Every movie I've made, no matter how bizarre or outlandish it gets, has always been centred on the themes and issues that are really important to me,” states Kaufman (2003). “The overriding theme (of Kaufman's films) is that there is a town of Tromaville and the little people of Tromaville are perfectly capable of leading their lives” Kaufman argues, “They don't need the champagne socialites, the limousine liberals, such as Hillary Clinton, to tell them how to run their lives. They're capable of doing it themselves but there is a conspiracy of labour elite, corporate elite and the bureaucratic elite.” (L. Kaufman, Personal Communication, July 15, 2006). In my interview with Kaufman (Appendix 1), he spoke at length about his perception of corrupt labour leaders, self-serving politicians and the corporate elite and how his movies have always dealt with the struggle of the underdog, reflecting his view of himself as a “renegade director”, making an effort to stand outside mainstream institutions, like corporate Hollywood culture.

In writing the script for *Dan The Dog Man*, I based the story around the problem of corrupt authority, and the struggles of the underdog. The fact that the main character does indeed mutate into a part dog creature is significant in this regard, as he represents the oppressed minority. Shicklegruber and her student prefects are in a position of power at Leni Riefenstahl high school, which serves as a very recognisable, contained environment perfect for presenting a power struggle between youth and authority. In an effort to be as blatant as possible, I have included many references to Nazism, such as Shicklegruber embodying the fuhrer-style figurehead (Shicklegruber was Adolph Hitler's grandmother's maiden name), the reference to Hitler's suicide in Shicklegruber's demise, the tongue in cheek reference to rumoured homosexual and Sturmabteilung commander Ernst Roehm and of course, the reference to German filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl in the name of the school, famous for her work on Nazi propaganda films such as *Triumph des Willens (Triumph of the Will (1935))*. *Dan The Dog Man's* most obvious theme is the high school student's view of the education system, but also deals with themes of corporate greed in Shicklegrubers self-serving scheme, and the idea of genetically modified foods, touched on in the harmful additives added to Shicklegrubers brand of Dog food.

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Troma employee Sonya Schultz (in Kaufman, 2003) states that opposition to “those that rule... the advertising agencies, the big film studios, the mega-moviemakers, the ones with the most money and the crappiest films” is what defines Troma. “Everybody is trying to sell the glamour. Worship the surface!” (Schultz, in Kaufman, 2003). Lloyd Kaufman's use of Amateur film, through the “so-bad-its-good” aesthetic and Brechtian techniques stops his work from being what could be seen in Brechtian terms as “culinary cinema”, thus making the audience stop to consider Kaufman's



deeper concerns and themes. This aspect of Kaufman's film further distances his work from institutionally legitimised work and establishes him as a paracinematic filmmaker, working outside of the value system of Hollywood culture.

## Conclusion

Throughout this essay, I have endeavoured to show how paracinematic films, through deliberately going against an institutionalised idea of good taste, challenge the establishment on what gives a film, or indeed, any piece of art, cultural value. Lloyd Kaufman's work with Troma Entertainment is to certain members of the paracinematic audience just as valid an artwork as *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941), because a paracinematic audience asks the question "Why shouldn't it be?" Indeed, to sum up the paracinematic aesthetic is to ask why a film viewer should be told what is good and what is bad? If a film viewer takes pleasure in a film that is technically or thematically lacking, is this film truly a "bad" film? Or is taste subjective and painted needlessly as black-and-white by the institutional guidelines of good and bad taste?

Speaking personally, Lloyd Kaufman's films are some of my favourite films. It is obvious that Kaufman's anti-Hollywood stance is extreme, and that it is a matter of some debate. Yet it is also obvious that to an extent, the appeal of the majority of films that come from this mainstream lies on the surface, in the spectacle of special effects or the attractiveness of the leading lady rather than any kind of creativity or art. It is also fair to say that at least part of the motivation in making these films is not necessarily the art of making a movie, but more the idea of personal gain, be it money or fame. I believe that the most important element of Troma Films and Kaufman's

anti-Hollywood stance is as Lloyd put it “People that go to see a Troma movie in the cinema, they know they’ll never forget it! They know they’ll go on an adventure; they’ll have a genuine emotion. And too many movies today are made with no emotion... I think people have come to realise that a movie made by Troma comes from the heart and that this is something that will give the viewer some kind of genuine emotion, even if it might be disturbing to the viewer, the viewer wants to be challenged” (L. Kaufman, Personal Communication, July 15, 2006). In this essay, I have argued that in focusing on paracinematic aspects and challenging the rules of mainstream cinema through his extreme sex and violence, anti-establishment themes and low budgets, Kaufman is ultimately creating films that although not the most refined and intellectual independent films available, stand as solid, entertaining and challenging films, making an informed stance against the shallowness inherent in the mass produced Hollywood mainstream.

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## Appendix 1: Interview with Lloyd Kaufman.

Conducted July 15, 2006

James MacDonald: Who are your filmmaking influences and what are your favourite films?

Lloyd Kaufman: Well the movies that have influenced me are the great movies. The movies of Jean Renoir, Charlie Chaplain, Buster Keaton, John Ford, Howard Hawks, Fritz Lang, Mizoguchi From Japan. Ah... Stan Brakhage of course, the greatest visual artist of our century, Andy Warhol, Sam Fuller, Roger Corman.

I wouldn't put Corman in the league of those names but the fact is he's a damn good director and his movies proved that you could make top quality, low budget movies with provocative scripts and good acting, and he's a very, very good director.

JM: How do you understand the label trash film?

LK: I don't understand it, it's a label – I don't know what it means really, its French, the Cahiers Du Cinema influenced me with the auteur theory of films where the filmmaker is the author. You know, where the filmmaker is the author of the movie and the filmmaker controls everything about the film, that's the auteur theory of filmmaking. I don't know what trash means. I assume it's something that's out of the mainstream, but I've never really investigated it. I know that the French do refer to Troma as trash films, and it has a good connotation.

JM: So obviously you don't know if it applies to your work or not?

LK: That's for somebody else to say. I think if my movies weren't low budget, if these movies were the exact same movies but they had Mel Gibson in them my guess is they would be that people would call them something else. If *Mad Max* (1979) was trash, then Troma's trash, and if Troma's trash then *Mad Max* is trash, that's for sure. That's certain, and I mean that in a good sense.

JM: What do you think attracts audiences to your work? Is it shock value, or...

LK: I think what attracts audiences to the Troma movies is that we're making movies in 35mm that they'll never forget. They may love *Tromeo and Juliet* (1996), they may hate *Sgt. Kabukiman N.Y.P.D.* (1991), but people that go to see a Troma movie in the cinema, they know they'll never forget it! They know they'll go on an adventure; they'll have a genuine emotion. And too many movies today are made with no emotion. They're made so that the A.F.C. can finance them, or they are made so that some suit in Hollywood will put the money up, or they're made as a remake of some 1980's movies with no inspiration and no heart. I think people have come to realise that a movie made by Troma comes from the heart and that this is something that will give the viewer some kind of genuine emotion, even if it might be disturbing to the viewer, the viewer wants to be challenged. Those are the people who come to the Troma movie, those that wish to be challenged and have to do a little thinking.

JM: In your mind, what is art and do you think your films have an artistic value?

LK: Well, the Cinematheque Francois, you know they're the most serious organization or film museum in the world and they've had two retrospectives, and the British museum, the Tokyo film festival, I mean, my movies have been feted all over the world so if that's any measure of what Art is... you know the American film institute has done a major retrospective, Jonas Mekas, you've probably heard of him? Jonas Mekas is one of the pioneers of experimental film, he runs the anthology film archive in New York, which is the most idealistic of film museums, and they did an eighteen-film retrospective of my movies. So I would guess that based on what the standards of the day are, my movies are art; certainly art itself is an expression of the artist's soul and an expression of what he, she or it believes in and to that extent our movies are one hundred percent art. Also the fact that they endured, thirty years later people are still watching *Squeeze Play* (1980) and *The First Turn On* (1983) and *Stuck On You* (1983) and twenty two years later they're still enjoying *the Toxic Avenger* (1985), would indicate a certain classic status which... I think art requires an endurance, and Troma certainly stands the test of time, in fact Troma's audience is bigger than it has ever been and its wider than it's ever been and my guess is that people have discovered that there is artistic value to the films like *Sgt. Kabukiman NYPD* (1991)... just his face is artistic.

JM: Do you think your films contain a deeper significance for the audience to connect to?

LK: Well I don't think Troma would still be around if our movies were only sex and violence. I happen to like sex and violence, and I happen to like nice bodies and

making a movie is a long, arduous and often times boring process where you have to stand around waiting for idiots to set lights, so it's nice to have attractive looking people running around in small clothing. Furthermore, the small clothing is a political statement, when you see a Troma movie the small clothing is a symbol of the shortage of natural resources, everybody knows that.

I think people have enjoyed the political content of the Troma movies. If you look at *Squeeze Play* (1980) it's a treatise on the Women's Liberation movement, made in 1976, when the Women's liberation movement was sort of peaking. *The Toxic Avenger* (1985), of course is an environmental superhero and it deals with the issue of both the environment and at the same time people putting their bodies into health clubs and eating organic food, the spoiling of the earth at the same time as cleaning the body, yin and yang. *Class of Nuke 'Em High* (1986) was about the conspiracy of the labour bureaucratic and corporate elite to suck dry the little people of Tromaville. That's the over-riding theme of all Troma movies, the overriding theme is that there is a town of Tromaville and the little people of Tromaville are perfectly capable of leading their lives. They don't need the champagne socialites, the limousine liberals, such as Hillary Clinton, to tell them how to run their lives. They're capable of doing it themselves but there is a conspiracy of labour elite, corporate elite and the bureaucratic elite. The labour leaders who make millions of dollars while their constituency are eating dog food, the bureaucratic elite, the upper echelons of the government who are there not to serve the people but to serve themselves and feed at the public trough, and the corporate elite, who are the big-time Rupert Murdoch's of the world. They all conspire together to suck dry the little people of Tromaville of their economic and spiritual capital, and sometimes those people need the Toxic



Avenger to save them, other times Sgt. Kabukiman, and then sometimes, as in *Troma's War* (1988), they must do it themselves. *Troma's War* being a very good example of a movie that has endured with time, it was the first movie to deal directly with Aids, it deals with Terrorism, it treated the Ronald Reagan era of glorification of war- these are issues which are universal issues and which are not going to go away. *Troma's war* has a much bigger audience now, people are rediscovering it, there's a TV show called *Lost* (2004) which has some very similar attributes and blah, blah, blah. So I would suggest that there is a lot more to Troma movies than sex and violence otherwise they wouldn't be here. The battlefield is littered with the bodies of dead movie careers who thought that the way to make a successful movie was by formula, and that doesn't work. If you're going to make film interesting you need to do something you believe in and that's what we've done. My guess is that is that has a lot to do with why audiences are still with us and why people like Peter Jackson and Quentin Tarrantino and Gaspar Noah in France and Alex De La Inglesia in Spain, and Takashi Miike in Japan and the guys who did *Shawn of the Dead* (2004) and you know people all over the world have been very respectful of Troma. James Gunn, Eli Roth, all these guys are very, very fond of Troma. Major, major mainstream directors who have grown up with Troma, you know, we've opened the doors for them.

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JM: Do you think your films succeed more on theatrical display or narrative and themes then?

LK: Well, Marcel Duchamp what did he succeed on? If anything, Dadaism. And the French newspapers have compared me to Marcel Duchamp. For example with *Tromeo and Juliet* (1996), they suggested that I was to Shakespeare as Duchamp was

to the Mona Lisa. When Duchamp painted the moustache on the Mona Lisa. So I would guess that the overriding factor is probably the dada-esque quality to our movies, but certainly the primary consideration when I write and direct is to be entertaining, so that people have something to see. *Poultrygeist*, the movie I'm working on, is far more entertaining and will have a much bigger impact on its audience than the rather pretentious *Fast Food Nation* (2006), which is on the same subject. Furthermore, *Fast Food Nation* is aimed at people who are older and already believe it, already have been converted to the evils of fast food, whereas *Poultrygeist* is aimed at young people who are the people that change the world. The old people don't have any influence on the world, it's the younger generation that go out there and stop eating fast food. So I think that *Poultrygeist* is a good example of the politics, the entertainment factor and the demographic. Young people are the people that make a difference.

JM: Do you think your films are Anti-Cinema, and what elements of conventional mainstream cinema do you reject?

LK: What do you mean Anti-Cinema?

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JM: Well... Anti-Hollywood.

LK: Well, we make independent movies. We make movies, to thine own self... to the extent that we have marched to our own beat. To the extent that I am one of the few genuine, American auteur artists. We are pro-cinema, one hundred percent. It's Hollywood that's anti-cinema, its Hollywood that are making movies by committee

and making movies by focus groups. Making movies for a hundred million dollars where you have to appeal to all people at all times, hence they're making baby food and you can live on baby food but it's very, very boring. I think we are producing films according to Shakespeare's maxim "to thine own self be true." Shakespeare was that guy who wrote that bestselling book 101 money making screenplay ideas, otherwise known as Hamlet.

JM: What do you think of the concept of Bad Taste, and do you think that your portrayal of sex and violence distances yourself from a cultural elite?

LK: No, the intellectuals love our movies! The ones who are educated are the ones who go to see our movies; they are the ones who get it. The ones who don't get it are old people, and people who are uneducated. Certainly our movies are cult movies, although, I guess they have a wider reach than cult movies. I guess that you could suggest that in the history of cinema Troma is probably the most powerful cult movie studio ever, because there has never been an independent movie studio that's lasted for 30-some odd years. Clearly the reason for that is that we have this amazing, very dedicated cult audience, this core audience, and then our movies do spread out to the mainstream population to some extent. I don't know if that answered the question or not...

JM: That answered the second part of the question; the start was "what do you think of the concept of bad taste?"

LK: Well, what is bad taste? Why would Troma movies be in bad taste? There might

be elements that some people find shocking, or disgusting or in bad taste but certainly the themes of our movies, *The Good, The Bad and The Subhumanoid* (1994) is a movie that, certainly the theme of which is rather democratic. The third Toxic Avenger movie, *Last Temptation of Toxie* (1989), is a Faustian thing where Toxie has to fight the devil, has to fight the giant corporate conspiracy, the big conglomerate which is in fact, Satan. I don't see how any of the Troma Movies could be in bad taste, other than certain elements within it. Certain blue-nosers might find the close-up of the hermaphroditic genitalia in *Terror Firmer* (2000) is in bad taste, so I can certainly admit that there are pieces of it in bad taste. But we are amateurs in obscenity; we are amateurs in bad taste, general electric who own NBC universal, they made a movie called *United 93* (2006). That's bad taste! Making a film that exploits the death of 36,00 people in the... two planes crashed into the world trade centre, did you hear about that? Yeah, so they're taking advantage of that and making money with it and to make it even more obscene universal is giving a percentage of the opening weeks gross to the survivors of the dead people, who now number like Eighty two thousand. You know, everybody's related to someone in the world trade centre. So universal is going to give ten percent of the opening weeks, and only the opening weeks revenue to the dead people. So that means the dead people should go out and flag for the movie too, they should go out there and promote a movie that is exploiting the dead people on the airplane. That is obscene. That is in bad taste, in my opinion. If you want bad taste, its spending one hundred million dollars on one fucking movie, and then having the major media, who are also owned by the movie companies, suggest to young kids that this is a good thing, this is what glamour is, glamour is wearing a fifty thousand dollar gown to the Oscars, and borrowing eighty thousand dollar diamonds for your ears, whilst a brief jet plane ride away you've got

two hundred thousand people in Darfur getting corn holed and beaten to death, and starving to death, that is obscene, that's the obscenity. Mary Antoinette was nothing compared to the value system that is in place and in the fullness of time my guess is that this era will be looked upon as one of the most disgusting and profligate eras, and dwarf Marie Antoinette.

JM: When you make films, do you make a conscious decision to make the film "raw"?

LK: Make it what?

JM: ...Unrefined?

LK: Well, when you're making a movie for no money, you're going to have to make it raw. You can't have all the refinements, you know we have to make concessions on the quality of the acting, on special effects, on the look of the film, on the lighting of the film, and we're still shooting in 35mm which is very expensive and we're making movies for... even your Aboriginal, A.F.C., politically correct Australian movies, even they seem to be costing a million to two million dollars, I'm making movies for three or four hundred thousand dollars, five hundred thousand dollars. So of course they're raw, there's going to be rough edges and its going to be not the best lighting but our audiences sort of like it. We are very Brechtian. Jonas Mekas, you have to look him up too, he was a survivor from the concentration camps who came out to America and started cinema 16 and made a movie called The Brigg and lots of

experimental movies and hung out with Stan Brackage... anyway, he's 90 now and he says that my films are very Brechtian and they take down the fourth wall a lot and talk to the audience, and indeed characters in my films do, I got that from hanging out around the Warhol Factory and I'm a big fan of Warhol's movies and Warhol's actors talk to the camera quite a bit. Anyway, breaking the fourth wall, part of the fun of that is letting the audience share with you the rough edges, for example we have been using the same car flip in several movies, the car flip from *Sgt.*

*Kabukiman N.Y.P.D.* (1991) where a car goes up in the air and flips around and crashes and explodes, we have re-used that special effect, that stunt I guess you could call it, numerous times. The audiences at this point in the game, they really enjoy knowing that it's from another movie. They have a good time with it and in a sense they're making the Troma movie, they're participating in it, and when they see the latex, or when they see the blood that's coming out of somebody is coming out the wrong way, like in *Terror Firmer* (2000) where the blood is spurting out with the force of a geyser or an oil rig at the beginning of *Terror Firmer*, the blood is not coming out the way it normally would, they have fun with that, they enjoy it, the audience becomes part of the filmmaking experience. So I think we have turned a liability into an asset. But we don't deliberately make a raw movie; we don't deliberately make a movie that's technically incompetent.

APPENDIX 2: SCRIPT OF *DAN THE DOGMAN*.

INT. MINCING ROOM - DAY

CELIA is fed feet first into the mincing machine. Screaming, she slides down the tube as her blood sprays up into her face. From the bottom of the Mincing Machine comes minced meat, flowing into tins marked Schicklgruber Brand Dog Chow. A jug of animal steroids and a used syringe lies nearby. SCHICKLGRUBER stands over the scene, cackling.

INT. DANS BEDROOM - DAY

DAN wakes from his dream to the sound of his alarm. Sweating, he looks over at his alarm clock. It reads 8:35 and he is late for school. He reaches out and turns off his alarm clock and puts the needle down on his record player before picking up a bong from his bedside table and packing a cone from a pre-chopped bowl of Marijuana resting on some porn magazines. He pulls the bong then slowly gets out of bed already wearing his jeans, sprays some deodorant and throws on an old T-shirt before picking up his schoolbag and heading out the door. As he walks through the Kitchen, his mother grabs him.

DAN'S MUM

Dan, I made you some lunch!

DAN takes the brown paper bag off of his mother and keeps walking.

EXT. DANS HOUSE - DAY

Morning is breaking as DAN walks out of his front door. He pushes his dog BANDIT back into the house as he exits and walks to his car. He gets into the car and drives off.

EXT. LLOYDS HOUSE - DAY

LLOYD exits his house pulling up his pants. He runs out onto the street and see's DANS car driving towards him at high speed. He screams. DAN screams. DAN hits LLOYD and LLOYD splits at the torso spraying blood all over DANS car. DAN stops and reverses back to check if LLOYD is OK, yet accidentally crushes his head under the back wheel of his car. He panics and drives forward again.

EXT.. SCHOOL - DAY

DAN parks his blood splattered car outside the school and runs inside. The school yard is deserted as he enters, as he is late.

INT. SCHOOL - DAY

DAN runs into class late and sits down next to CELIA. There is general chaos, with students making out, smoking, drinking alcohol, fighting etc. CELIA smiles at DAN and DAN shyly begins to scribble a black flag logo on his desk. There is no teacher in sight. Suddenly the door opens and SHIV, JUNK and ERNST enter carrying some wilted cheap flowers and a framed picture of LLOYD. SHIV, JUNK and ERNST place the photograph and flowers on the teachers desk and stand to attention like a military unit. Overhead, the P.A. System crackles to life.

SCHICKLGRUBER

Good Morning students, and welcome back to another happy, productive day at Leni Riefenstahl memorial high school. Unfortunately, I have some very sad news to report. This morning one of our most beloved staff members, Mr. Stanley Lloyd Kaufman, suffered an agonizing death. Mr. Kaufman was brutally crushed into unrecognizable road kill under the wheels of a speeding hatchback while on his way to work. In light of this tragedy, I have placed the student prefects Shiv, Junk and Ernst in charge of most classes and arranged a service to the memory of Mr. Kaufman that will keep most teachers busy for the remainder of the day.

EXT. LLOYDS HOUSE - DAY

A group of teachers stands around LLOYD'S corpse with shovels, scraping his bloodied remains off the road.

INT. SCHOOL - DAY

SCHICKLGRUBER

Please keep Mr. Kaufman in mind as you happily and productively carry out your work today.

ERNST moves to the front of the class and slams a fist down on the desk.

ERNST

Alright Scumbags physical education time lets go!



The class gets up and begins to shuffle out the door into the hall.

EXT. GYM - DAY

DAN sits outside the changerooms. SHIV approaches him.

SHIV

What the shit are you doing out here you little bastard! Get in the changerooms and get your fuckin' phys ed. Gear on!

DAN

Um... I forgot my phys ed. Uniform....

SHIV

Why? Are you a little faggot nerdy boy? Cant run around with the other kids? Don't get a boner when you see this?

SHIV grabs DAN by the hair and hoists him up so he can see through the changeroom window.

INT. GIRLS CHANGEROOM - DAY

Girls in various states of undress are walking around, taking clothes off and putting them on. Some girls are smoking in the corner, some making out, others are hitting each other with pillows for no reason. In the midst of all this chaos, DAN see's CELIA standing shyly in the corner.

EXT. GYM - DAY

SHIV continues to hold DAN by the hair and force him to stare into the girls locker room. He looks shocked staring at the girls getting changed, but his expression changes to dreamy wistfulness as he notices CELIA. As he stares at CELIA, SCHICKLGRUBER appears behind him.

SCHICKLGRUBER

Hey, what are you doing you little pervert? That's not the kind of thing that happens at Leni Riefenstahl senior high school.

SHIV

Frau Schicklgruber, I just caught this boy staring into the girls locker room.

SCHICKLGRUBER looks DAN up and down.

SCHICKLGRUBER  
Is this true Daniel?

DAN  
No... she forced me to do it!

SCHICKLGRUBER looks at SHIV

SCHICKLGRUBER  
Now Daniel really, I doubt  
Shiobhan would make you do a  
thing like that. I think you  
better stop lying and meet me in  
my office please.

DAN opens his mouth to speak but SHIV slaps him across the  
face. Blood begins to flow from a cut on his mouth. SHIV  
pushes him after SCHICKLGRUBER as she walks off.

SHIV  
See you later you pansy little  
cunt...

EXT SCHICKLGRUBER'S OFFICE - DAY

DAN waits outside SCHICKLGRUBER'S office. The door opens a  
crack and ERNST steps out.

ERNST  
Get in here.

DAN gets up and files past ERNST into SCHICKLGRUBER'S  
office.

INT SCHICKLGRUBER'S OFFICE - DAY

As DAN enters, he is grabbed from both sides by SHIV and  
JUNK. ERNST closes the door behind him as SHIV and JUNK  
force DAN down into a chair. SCHICKLGRUBER stands in front  
of him.

SCHICKLGRUBER  
What you did today was  
unacceptable Daniel. We won't  
stand for that kind of behavior  
at Leni Riefenstahl Memorial High  
School. However, we may have a  
position available for you in the  
little business I started on the  
side. Start the machine ERNST.

ERNST turns and exits SHICKLGRUBER'S office.

SCHICKLGRUBER (CONT'D)

You see Daniel, I've started to get sick of expelling so many of you young slackers so you can sit home, smoke Mary Jane, listen to Guns'n'Roses and jerk off to nudie magazines. So this is my solution to finding you scum a place in the workforce.

All I have to do is add a little growth enhancer and you'll make an excellent, cheap meat substitute in Schicklgruber Brand Dog Chow.

SCHICKLGRUBER gestures to a container of glowing green liquid sitting on the bench!

SCHICKLGRUBER (CONT'D)

So long Scumbag!

Daniel looks concerned as the screen fades to black...

INT. MINCING ROOM - DAY

DAN is sucked into the mincing machine and is minced into cans of SHICKLGRUBER brand dog chow.

INT/EXT. GRAVEYARD/SHICKLGRUBER'S OFFICE/SUPERMARKET- DAY

DAN's remains are distributed to supermarkets as Dog Food. At the same time DAN'S MUM posts notices around the neighborhood that her son is missing, and stops by the supermarket on the way home to pick up various items - including a can of Himmel Brand Dog Chow.

~~EXT. DAN'S PARENTS BACK PORCH - DAY~~

MUM, still crying over DAN's death, feeds can of Himmel Brand Dog Chow to BANDIT. BANDIT gobbles it down then goes to sleep.

EXT. DAN'S PARENTS BACK PORCH - NIGHT

BANDIT Wakes up and runs around manically. He slowly morphs back into DAN and screams a half-human howl.

INT. DANS BEDROOM - DAY

DAN wakes to the sound of his alarm, transformed into the dog man. He reaches out and smashes his alarm clock.

His room is in a state of chaos, posters are crooked and there is mess everywhere. He reaches out and picks up a bong from his bedside table and throws it across the room. He gets out of bed, flexing his muscles. He pulls on a T-shirt, a leather jacket and a pair of sunglasses before heading out the door.

EXT. DANS HOUSE - DAY

Morning is breaking as DAN walks out of his front door. He runs out onto the street and around the corner, cocking his leg on a pole. His urine steams and burns the pole like acid before he tucks it away and begins to walk down the street towards the school.

EXT. STREET - DAY

DAN turns the corner of the street and runs into CELIA, standing by a bus stop. He stops and smiles for a second as he looks her over. Suddenly, his bliss is halted by the arrival of JUNK and two cronies. JUNK walks up to CELIA and leans on the pole next to her. CELIA does his best to ignore him.

JUNK

Hey honey, how's it going

CELIA

Piss off asshole.

JUNK

Oh, little girl's got a bit of an attitude... careful talking to me like that or you might end up just like your lover Danny boy.

CELIA

Look you fuckin creep, I don't know what you did to him but...

JUNK reaches out to try and touch CELIA'S breast. The cronies stand behind him giggling. DAN runs up to them.

DAN

Get your hands off her you degenerate subhuman trash!

DAN throws a punch and smacks one of JUNKS cronies in the face, before grabbing the other one throwing a punch into his stomach. They both stumble backwards. JUNK pulls out a knife and presses it to CELIA's neck.

JUNK

Come any closer and she gets it, freak!

CELIA elbows JUNK in the testicles and squeezes out of his grip. DAN throws a punch at JUNK but misses, and JUNK hits him with an uppercut knocking him backwards. JUNKS cronies grab DAN by the arms.

JUNK (CONT'D)

Who the fuck is this weirdo?

JUNK picks up his knife from the ground and walks closer to DAN.

DAN

Don't you recognise me Junk?

JUNK looks closer.

JUNK

You almost look like... but that's impossible...

DAN

They put all kinds of preservatives in Dog Food these days buddy...

DAN surges forward, tearing an arm off of each of JUNK's cronies. They fall to the ground screaming as their arms pulse out blood.

DAN (CONT'D)

You never know what side effects they might have!

JUNK's jaw drops as DAN begins to beat him over the head with the bloodied, dismembered arms of his cronies. He falls to the floor screaming as DAN beats his head until there is nothing left but a bloody mess of brain and skull lying on the ground. Exhausted, DAN drops the cronies arms. DAN looks up from the pile of twitching corpses at his feet and see's CELIA standing by the bus stop, looking at him, scared.

DAN (CONT'D)

Celia, I...

CELIA (CRYING)

All this time I thought you were dead, Daniel...

CELIA picks up her schoolbag and walks off. DAN throws his hands in the air.

DAN

But...?

DAN shrugs and walks off in the other direction.

INT. CHANGEROOMS - DAY

SHIV enters the changeroom and goes into the showers, Where ERNST is waiting for her. She kicks off her shoes then takes off her shirt and pants. Finally she takes off her bra and underpants before stepping under the warm water and letting ERNST start to soap her up and make out with her.

Meanwhile, the changeroom door opens and a pair of shoes step in. SHIV hears a noise and stops kissing ERNST.

SHIV  
What the hell was that?

ERNST  
What?

SHIV  
That noise?

ERNST  
(Sighs) I'll go check.

ADOLF steps out of the shower to take a look. DAN stands silhouetted in the doorway. ADOLF does a double take and yells at him.

ERNST (CONT'D)  
What the shit are you doing in here? Get out!

SHIV appears behind ERNST wrapped in a towel. DAN steps into the light.

DAN  
I just came in to see if a little faggot nerdy boy could get a boner...

SHIV takes a step back scared.

SHIV  
But... you're dead?

DAN  
I sure am, and in a minute, you will be too.

SHIV  
What do you think you're gonna do to us you little faggot. Just because you died and came back with a worse hair cut than you had before...

DAN grabs SHIV by the hair and pulls her up off the ground. SHIV screams as DAN punches into her stomach and brings out a handful of entrails. He holds the organs up to SHIV's face as her eyes roll back into her head. Dan drops her and she falls to the ground dead.

ERNST

Oh my god! You killed my girlfriend!

DAN

What are you looking about? You killed me.

DAN takes SHIV's entrails and wraps them around ADOLF's neck.

DAN (CONT'D)

At least you can still spend your last moments holding each other tight.

DAN strangles ERNST with SHIV's intestines until he drops to the floor, also dead. He turns and exits the changeroom.

EXT. CHANGEROOMS - DAY

DAN exits the changerooms and begins to stride purposefully towards SCHICKLGRUBER's OFFICE. CELIA appears behind him and runs to catch up.

CELIA

Dan! You killed them too!

DAN

Yeah.

CELIA

But you can't just go around killing people!

DAN

Why not? They turned me into this undead canine with super-human strength.

CELIA

But can't you see? That's actually kind of cool!

DAN stops and turns around.

DAN

Look Celia... I like you... but that's not going to stop me wreaking bloody retribution on the staff and students of this high school, and that's that.

DAN continues walking off as CELIA stands stunned.

CELIA

But Dan! You can't...

EXT. SCHICKLGRUBER'S OFFICE - DAY

DAN dramatically bursts through the door of SCHICKLGRUBER's office to find her sitting quietly at her desk, facing the opposite direction.

DAN

Your time has come bitch!

SCHICKLGRUBER is silent. DAN looks at the desk and notices a packet labelled "Schicklgruber Cyanide Tablets". He picks up the packet and shakes out a few pills. DAN spins SCHICKLGRUBER around and notices that she has indeed taken the cyanide pills and killed herself.

DAN (CONT'D)

Aw... That sucks.

DAN turns to leave but notices CELIA standing in the doorway. He panics and quickly turns, picking up a pen off the table and stabbing SCHICKLGRUBER's corpse in the head with it.

DAN (CONT'D)

Er... Yeah! Take that!

CELIA

Dan! Stop it!

DAN

What?

CELIA

That's my mother! Haven't you listened when they call the roll? My name is Celia Schicklgruber!

DAN stops stabbing the corpse with the pen and looks shocked.

CELIA (CONT'D)

Oh screw it.



CELIA leans over and kisses him on the cheek then skips out through the doorway. DAN stands shocked for a moment. Then jumps in the air pumping his fist.

DAN

Yes!!

The frame freezes.

FADE OUT.