

# *Forced Entry*

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'There is no better way to know death than to link it through some licentious image'

*The Marquis De Sade* (Quoted in Bataille 1986: 11)

*Forced Entry* (Shaun Costello, 1972) is a sexually violent feature film which blurs perceptions of 1970s American hardcore cinema as a 'golden age' of creative ambition, commercial possibility and broader mainstream acceptance, a phenomenon that has been identified most resonantly as 'porno chic'. This term originated in Ralph Blumenthal's (1973) New York Times article bearing the same name, and soon entered into discussions on pornography's role within that decade's liberal trends of morality and sexuality, before achieving later ubiquity in various inquiries into porn's 21<sup>st</sup> century cultural status (See McNair 2012).

This was prompted by the *succès de scandale* of *Deep Throat* (Gerard Damiano, 1972), *Behind The Green Door* (Artie and Jim Mitchell, 1972), *The Resurrection of Eve* (Jon Fontana and Artie Mitchell, 1973) and *The Devil in Miss Jones* (Gerard Damiano, 1973). All of these films were male authored, but dealt in some way with both the potential and the limitations of a female protagonist's sexual assertion relative to masculine primacy, in scenarios which were either conventionally dramatic, comedic or even steeped in the supernatural. However, in *Forced Entry*, not only is the film male authored, but its point of view is channelled through a psychologically disturbed Vietnam war veteran - now a New York gas station attendant - who stalks selected female customers before raping and murdering them in their homes, seemingly as a punishment for sexual assertiveness and social independence which threaten his fragile claims to masculine authority. As far as any 'porno chic' sensibility was concerned, the grim realist aesthetic, its direct correlation of knife, gun and penis as phallic weapon, and an emphasis upon terrorisation, assault, dysfunction

and anti-pleasure instigated by a male protagonist, was distinctly at odds with the popular cultural discourse of liberal-feminist reclamation that would emerge around pornographic films and gradually seep into academic discourse. Instead, its depictions of sexual violence seemed to confirm the fears of anti-pornography feminists and Christian moral campaigners alike, whose ideological differences dissipated in a convenient alliance which attempted to eradicate a common object of concern. Therefore, this joint assault upon ideological polarities prompts the key question: how do we assess and evaluate a text like this when there is apparently so little in its purpose, intent and dominant modes of discourse that might refute the impulse to reject and vilify it?

To answer this question (as is true of many hardcore films of the period), it is as useful to approach *Forced Entry* as a cinematic object with varied points of cultural intersection as it is to treat it purely as a work of pornography. None of this is to suggest that these are mutually exclusive areas of critical practice, and Robert Cettl (2013) makes a compelling case for the film both as a work of violent pornography that accommodates radical insights into the limits of patriarchal power, and as a precursor to a wave of based-on-fact serial killer themed films that would emerge in ensuing decades, some of which focalised the apparent role of pornography in the enactment of infamous sex crimes. Indeed, it is often limiting to construct generic boundaries around pornographic films when they have utilised so much of what is present in classical, post-classical and even experimental cinema, and elements of generic crossover and socio-cultural allusion in *Forced Entry* demand that we locate the film as a key text in relation to other films from the exploitation and mainstream sectors. Quite understandably, it has never figured prominently in the retro-fitted, nostalgia tinged porn histories that have emerged gradually over the ensuing decades (see

Paasonen and Saarenmaa 2007), despite the presence of a key New York porn director, Shaun Costello (using the pseudonym, Helmuth Richler), and one of the most renowned male performers of the era, *Deep Throat* star Harry Reems (also under an alternative pseudonym, Tim Long). Shot on 16mm over two days in New York in 1971, for a total cost of \$6,200, it preceded the production and distribution of *Deep Throat* and *Behind The Green Door* (See Costello, 2014, for an account of the film's development). However, delays in selling the film, which was bought for \$6,500 by independent New York distributor, Jerry Intrator, (who shot additional non-sex footage and added his name onscreen as a possessory credit above the film's title, further confusing authorial provenance) meant that it didn't actually appear until *after* those other films had achieved widespread attention and notoriety.

Drawing his conclusions from material available for inspection at the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender and Reproduction, Joseph Slade discovered that, from 1970 onwards, there was a creeping escalation of 'brutal force' in specialised areas of S and M erotica (1984: 161). *Forced Entry* re-located this tendency within the realm of the feature length film, with sexual sadism becoming a focal component of its textual and extra-textual modes of address. However, in terms of its immediate historical forbears, the most significant precursor to *Forced Entry* was the so called sexploitation 'roughie' cycle of the 1960s, in which male characters often indulged in extended bouts of rape, sexual abuse and humiliation with their female victims. Although lacking the gynaecological detail that would become so central to providing later hardcore roughies their culturally transgressive edge, *The Sadist* (James Landis, 1963) *Scum of the Earth* (Herschell Gordon Lewis, 1963), *The Defilers* (Lee Frost, David F Friedman, 1965), *Bad Girls Go to Hell* (Doris Wishman, 1965), and Michael Findlay's so called 'flesh trilogy' (1967 – 1968) had a sense of the socially

and sexually abject built into their titles, marking a point at which increasingly explicit sexual imagery in American exploitation films intersected with developing realist horror trends (See Cynthia Freeland 1995) . Moreover, it was in exploitation films such as *Motor Psycho* (Russ Meyer, 1965) that the image of the psychotic Vietnam veteran first materialised as a cinematic trope, with rape utilised as a primary signifier of the character's social deviance. However, the roughie which has the most significant link to *Forced Entry* is *The Ravager* (Charles Nizet, 1970), which commences with a US military demolitions and explosives expert witnessing a sexual atrocity committed by Vietcong (as opposed to American) fighters. This serves as the causal event for psychotic episodes that occur whenever he witnesses any intimation of sexual activity after the war. However, instead of rape, there is an emphasis upon non-penetrative sexual assault, which is committed against a variety of male and female victims before they are exploded by dynamite, displacing his sexual dysfunction onto violent behaviour with a distinctly militarist inflection.

Pre-echoing a key sequence in *Forced Entry*, it also features the disruptive presence of two lesbian characters, rendered initially through a standard passage of 1960s sexploitation titillation, as the two actresses frolic and fumble awkwardly for the camera before the killer dispatches them through immolation, a form of punishment deployed especially for their transgression of his warped view of heteronormative standards. However, in *Forced Entry*, the lesbian characters appear in the film's last section, as radical manifestations of the counter-cultural sensibility that was so vehemently opposed to the conflict in Vietnam. They effectively defeat the rapist-killer, who is unable to process their drug-fuelled, hysterical laughter and rejection of him as the bearer of the patriarchal sexual authority he has come to so violently embody. Consequently, he shoots himself in the head, the aftermath of which forms the simple

bookend structure of the film. Regardless of the prolonged representation of his atrocities, the film signals immediately the punishment of its monstrous protagonist, a narrative guarantee which is akin to the dictates of the then recently collapsed Hollywood production code which demanded that criminals were punished for their crimes.

This image of the Vietnam veteran brandishing a literal or symbolic gun, often pointed to their own head, is part of a broader trend in American cinema which only came to proper fruition and mainstream acceptance later in films such as *Taxi Driver* (Martin Scorsese, 1976), *Coming Home* (Hal Ashby, 1978), *The Deer Hunter* (Michael Cimino, 1978), *Combat Shock* (Buddy Giovinazzo, 1984) and *Lethal Weapon* (Richard Donner, 1987). Furthermore, the dramatic device of sexual violence and dysfunction extended into the oft-used metaphor of the physical violation of young women during the conflict itself, presented in varied terms in films such as *Full Metal Jacket* (Stanley Kubrick, 1987) and *Casualties of War* (Brian De Palma, 1989).

Of course, the key distinction between *Forced Entry* and most of these later examples is a complete disregard for conventional dictates of taste, restraint and decorum, its evocation of links between post-traumatic stress disorder and the social reintegration (and disintegration) of the war veteran presented in terms forbidden to films seeking wider acceptance and distribution. Nevertheless, amid its instances of coercion, humiliation, torture, murder and suicide, the film makes manifest the links between the institutionalised violence of militarism, and the hysterical expression of a working class masculinity that had been socially marginalised and neglected in the wake of the war. This strategy is in place from the very first frames, which consist of a newspaper clipping enlightening us on the plight of the returning war veteran, which cuts to an epigraph by an eminent air force psychiatrist. Moreover, in immediate

historical terms, the associational value of rape within these Vietnam narratives stems from the reportage of US atrocities such as the infamous My Lai Massacre of 1968. *Forced Entry* actually intercuts stills of that incident within the rape sequences, alongside documentary images of combat, the rough treatment of prisoners and fatal war casualties, including children, drawing parallels between the film's expressions of excess and the psycho-sexual ramifications of a conflict edging towards its ignominious climax at the time of production. This deliberate stylistic provocation compounds the incongruity of the film within the 'porno chic' era, yet it is worth noting that the montage juxtaposition of sexual imagery with stock footage was also deployed in the final sequence of *Deep Throat*, in which Linda Lovelace finally achieves her orgasmic narrative goal accompanied by rapid cutaways to images of rocket launches, fireworks and chiming bells. In contrast, *Forced Entry's* final delirious sequence reflects the killer's psychological breakdown and the final relinquishment of power, incorporating flashbacks of his victims into an editing pattern which is an elaboration of the montage strategies of the film as a whole, and replacing the familiar spurt and splash of semen with exposed, splattered blood and brain matter.

The very title *Forced Entry* is a gutter sensibility double entendre. It appears onscreen over an image of the protagonist's exploded skull, immediately defining the film's identity through an image of its monster's physical and psychological ruin, while emphasising his dual status as home invader and rapist. The film's promotional poster image presents a distressed female face juxtaposed with the figure of the rapist-killer super-imposed over a bloodied, vertically positioned hunting knife. His skull-like appearance, and the positioning of his hands, one clutching a gun over the crotch area, the other seemingly prepared for masturbatory activity, complete an iconic promotional discourse which encapsulates the film's oppressive, claustrophobic and



abrasive textual aura. This is compounded by the tagline: 'He was taught to kill. Rape was his own idea', its linguistic confluence of sex and death anchoring the iconic rendition of the film's textual properties. Variations of this image appeared in various newspapers across the USA, and Costello (2015) believes the film may have been exhibited as early as Autumn, 1972. However, the earliest known projection was in San Diego in March 1973 (see Bougie, 2015), with verifiable screenings in Bellefonte, Pennsylvania in May and Seattle, Washington in August.

There are several notable promotional phenomena during this erratic 1973 release pattern: in the May 2 edition of the Centre Daily Times, a Bellefonte college newspaper, the full uncensored promotional imagery was placed alongside that for mainstream and art films, including the Barbra Streisand vehicle, *Up The Sandbox* and Ingmar Bergman's *Cries and Whispers*; conversely, in The Seattle Times on August 9, the ad-mat is located among other key 'porno chic' titles, *Deep Throat*, *Behind The Green Door* and *The Devil in Miss Jones*, and features the distressed victim's face, but removes the knife and killer along with the tagline, emphasizing instead the status of Laura Cannon, who plays the film's second victim, as a Playboy model and potential rival to *Deep Throat's* Linda Lovelace; however, in an industry in which re-titling and recycling was rife, an ad-mat for the film in Youngstown, Ohio in late 1973 was already promoting it as *Ever A Loving Victim*, carrying the alternative tagline 'He Found Pleasure In Being Close To Their Pain', and placing a censorious black mask over the killer's crotch area. Equally noteworthy is the absence in the advertising of *Deep Throat's* Harry Reems, a joint symptom of not only the general de-emphasis of male performers in promotional activity for adult films, but also the fact that he used a different pseudonym and lacks the soon to be trademark moustache, rendering him physically different in the film. Costello (2015) expressed that, in all

likelihood, the distributor would have been unaware of his presence for additional marketing potential.

Shaun Costello (2014) has suggested that the Vietnam theme was essential in order to somehow justify the excess that he was quite brazenly realising onscreen, infusing it with a socially redeemable element essential to the production and distribution of material vulnerable to state and federal obscenity charges. Such legal issues would soon become a national talking point in the wake of numerous prosecutions against the makers of *Deep Throat*, and *Forced Entry's* conjunction of sex and violence - 'it worked for James Bond' is Costello's wry justification – represents a particular paradox: an exploitable and calculated commercial element that was also an outward signifier of social value. Therefore, what is commonly seen to be the film's chief transgression is, according to its author, the product of an attempt to avoid charges of criminality. A confluence of legal and economic imperatives informs the film's style, form and narrative denouement, and while it is never a self-reflexive meditation upon the boundaries of extreme representation, it recalls the exploitation film 'square-off' of the 1930s and 40s, a pre-title sequence message which warned audiences of the dangers of sexual promiscuity, prostitution, drug taking and inter-racial coupling (see Schaefer 1999). Just like the classical exploitation films of a previous epoch, a nominal expression of social responsibility can be read quite clearly as a cynical play upon contemporaneous social anxieties in the pursuit of sensory reactions by the audience.

The hardcore evolution of the roughie cycle in the wake of *Forced Entry* consolidated the generic fusion of realist horror and sex film conventions, often focusing upon the activities of lone sexual sadists as the US gradually became accustomed to the increasingly visible activities of sadistic serial sex murderers such

as Albert DeSalvo, Ted Bundy and Kenneth Bianchi/Angelo Buono. Films like *Femmes De Sade* (Alex De Renzy, 1976), *Sex Wish* (Tim McCoy, 1976) and *Waterpower* (Shaun Costello, 1977), alongside later titles made by Phil Prince under his Avon Productions moniker, such as *The Taming of Rebecca* (1982), all feature vivid renditions of deviant sexual behaviour, going beyond *Forced Entry* in their quantities and variations of violent excess. Providing an extreme model for Linda Williams' (1989) observation on the hardcore film's oft-unrealised potential for a 'pornotopian' vision of female pleasure, these films formed a collective *pornodystopia*, a sub-generic movement developed in the shadow of explorations of sexual violence through other more readily accessible cultural channels. While on the one hand exploitation films such as *The Last House On The Left* (Wes Craven, 1972, and conceived originally as hardcore film), *Rape Squad* (Bob Kelljan, 1974) and *I Spit On Your Grave* (Meir Zarchi, 1978) traded in images and ideas forbidden to the mainstream, Hollywood productions like *Straw Dogs* (Sam Peckinpah, 1971), *A Clockwork Orange* (Stanley Kubrick, 1972), *Death Wish* (Michael Winner, 1974), *Lipstick* (Lamont Johnson, 1976) and *Looking For Mr Goodbar* (Richard Brooks, 1977) foregrounded spectacular set-pieces of sexual violation, often bound by a narrative of violent revenge and retribution. By the end of the 1970s, detailed representations of sexual violence had been established with different degrees of explicitness in all levels of American film production, with the hardcore roughies embodying the unpalatable face of an industry seeking wider legitimacy, a radically transgressive echo of increasingly common themes and tropes in popular cultural spaces.

By any reasonable standard, the narrative construction and continuity of *Forced Entry* is primitive, providing three variations upon the same basic scenario. The duration of the two rape sequences can be measured at 11 minutes and 13 minutes

respectively, discounting the prolonged bouts of stalking and spying which prefigure them. The first rape is preceded by a conventional straight sex sequence involving the first victim and her lover (observed furtively by the killer), and the final (non-rape) sequence features a drug-fuelled lesbian encounter prefiguring the breakdown and suicide of the killer. Stylistic choices are obviously governed by economic expediency, with the crude aesthetic of cheap porno loops carried over from Costello's previous films. However, despite a preponderance of hand-held shots, several instances of a visible boom microphone, an often audible camera motor, and an accidental smearing of the camera lens by semen in the first rape sequence, the film often evinces technical invention through its creative editing and photography. These evoke the killer's relationship to the claustrophobic urban environs, something underpinned by the naturalistic performances of Reems and Cannon in particular. Within the limitations of the film's dramatic architecture, Reems physically transmits his character's deviance through posture and gesture, along with verbal taunts and threats incorporating explicit and direct observations on the faecal and sanguinary consequences of his oral and anal assaults, and cruel and persistent reminders of the imminent demise of his victims.

These verbal performative elements offer one final piece of evidence for *Forced Entry's* deeper cultural impact extending as far as the 21<sup>st</sup> century. *Irreversible* (Gaspar Noe, 2002) has proved one of the most controversial films of recent years and starred two European superstars, Monica Bellucci and Vincent Cassel, becoming a Cannes festival cause celebre. The director has since revealed 'I even took dialogue from [Forced Entry]... when the killer rapes a girl and tells her: "watch out, don't shit on my dick!'" (2010) At the very least, this mischievous appropriation illustrates how the

transgressions of oft-despised and marginalised underground sub-cultures in one epoch gradually seep into the art cinema of another.

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