

Shock Corridor (1963) Fuller

P Michell, 2020

Predates *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975). Fuller draws on asylum scenes from earlier films - particularly *Snake Pit* (1948), *Suddenly Last Summer* (1959), *David and Lisa* (1962) as well as war time experience. *Shock Corridor* made in 'brutal gonzo' film style. Much of the film is set in a lunatic asylum. Fuller's work was dismissed at the time as exploitationist. He has been extremely influential on contemporary film makers and the French New Wave admired his work. His films of 1950s and 1960s were low budget allowing an auteur approach. Often had same film crew and actors.

Synopsis:

Bent on winning a Pulitzer Prize, a journalist commits himself to a mental institution to solve a strange and unclear murder.

Creative Personnel

Director, producer and screenwriter: Sam Fuller

Cinematographer: Stanley Cortez

Editor: Jerome Thoms

Music: Paul Dunlap

Sound: Philip Mitchell

Set design: Charles Thompson

Principal Cast: Peter Breck (Johnny Barrett), Constance Towers (Cathy), Paul Dubov (Dr. Menkin), John Matthews (Dr. Cristo), Philip Ahn (Dr. Fong), Chuck Roberson (Wilkes), James Best (Stuart), Hari Rhodes (Trent), Gene Evans (Boden), Larry Tucker (Pagliacci).
B&W & Col - 101m.

Sam Fuller (46 films) – Director, Producer, Screenplay

American [screenwriter](#), [novelist](#), and [film director](#) known for low-budget, understated [genre movies](#) with controversial themes, often made outside the conventional studio system. Fuller wrote his first screenplay for *Hats Off* in 1936, and made his directorial debut with the Western *I Shot Jesse James* (1949). Fuller shifted from Westerns and war thrillers in the 1960s with his low-budget thriller *Shock Corridor* in 1963, followed by the [neo-noir](#) *The Naked Kiss* (1964). He was inactive in filmmaking for most of the 1970s, before writing and directing the war epic *The Big Red One* (1980), and the experimental *White Dog* (1982), whose screenplay he co-wrote with [Curtis Hanson](#).

Cited as a major influence on Steven Spielberg, Martin Scorsese, Jonathan Demme, Quentin Tarantino, and Jim Jarmusch.

As a reporter in New York in the 1930s, Fuller reported on many suicide cases and always asked if he could keep the note if the deceased had left one. Famous for his extensive collection of suicide notes.

Quotes:

I write with the camera. It is my typewriter.

Film is a battleground. Love, hate, violence, action, death . . . In a word, emotion.

Am I a cult director? Yeah, I love all that. I want to join the cult of the \$100- to \$200-million grossers and still make an artistic picture.

Stanley Cortez – Cinematographer (86 films)

Fuller filmed the dream sequence.

Brother of actor Ricardo who also turned in hand at directing low budget films.

Worked on pedestrian films for years. When he worked for charismatic filmmakers like [Orson Welles](#) and [David O. Selznick](#) was able to fully develop some of his experimental techniques. One of his low-budget outings, a gothic old-dark-house horror/comedy entitled [The Black Cat](#) (1941), rather impressed the genial Mr. Welles who promptly hired him for [The Magnificent Ambersons](#) (1942). This was the first of two Cortez films generally regarded as visual masterpieces, with beautiful lighting effects, clever angles and lingering close-ups. The second outstanding Cortez contribution was the chillingly dark, haunting thriller [The Night of the Hunter](#) (1955) -- a brilliant allegory of good versus evil masterminded by [Charles Laughton](#) in his sole directorial effort. Cortez's lighting and use of irises are reminiscent of German expressionist cinema, or, at least, the work of [Karl Struss](#) and [Charles Rosher](#) on [Sunrise](#) (1927).

In his later years, Cortez showed skill in filming psychological dramas including *Three faces of Eve* (1957).. In [Shock Corridor](#), the labyrinthine hallways of the studio set are transformed by Cortez's camera into a symbol of incarceration and insanity.

Trivia - Cortez started *Chinatown* (1974), but director Roman Polanski replaced him after a few days shooting due to a disagreement over visual style. He was replaced by John Alonzo.

Paul Dunlap – composer (200 films)

Studied with great composers [Arnold Schoenberg](#), [Nadia Boulanger](#), and [Ernst Toch](#). He wanted to be a concert hall or opera composer; however, there was a greater opportunity to build a career as a composer in the film industry for 30 years. When he was 31 years old (1950), Dunlap left for [Hollywood](#) to begin his career. First film was for Fuller. In 1956 alone wrote 10 film scores.

Trivia

According to [Samuel Fuller](#), the film was shot in 10 days, on one set, with no exteriors.

Fuller originally wrote the film under the title *Straitjacket* for [Fritz Lang](#) in the late 1940s, but Lang wanted to change the lead character to a woman so [Joan Bennett](#) could play the role.

[Martin Scorsese](#)'s 2010 film [Shutter Island](#) is said to be influenced by this film.

Because of the film's budget and the size of the sound stage, [Samuel Fuller](#) hired little people to walk around in the far section of the corridor to give audiences a greater sense of depth.

Director [Samuel Fuller](#) convinced longtime friend and associate [Gene Evans](#) into playing a role, saying "I don't know anyone else who can do this part". Evans has stated that he would have done the film for nothing. Before Evans went to work on the film, however, he got into a fight in a bar with a tough customer. Evans said he hit the guy as hard as he could but only succeeded in breaking his own finger. When he reported to work with a splint on it, Fuller

objected, so Evans did the picture without it, resulting in a permanently bent finger. Fuller reportedly said in appreciation, "Well, that's what you get for fooling around."

Censorship - Both this and [Samuel Fuller](#)'s following movie [The Naked Kiss](#) (1964) were rejected for UK cinema certificates and remained unavailable until 1990. Here's the link to the BBCF 'View What's Right for you' (!) comments:
<https://bbfc.co.uk/case-studies/shock-corridor>

Early in the film, during the strip club scenes, a photograph of [Samuel Fuller](#) (famously with a cigar) can be seen on the wall.

Reviews

Author and film critic [Leonard Maltin](#) awarded the film three out of a possible four stars, calling it "[a] Powerful melodrama with raw, emotional impact." [Andrew Sarris](#) praised the film as "...an allegory of America today, not so much surreal as subreal in its hallucinatory view of history which can only be perceived beneath a littered surface of plot intrigue... a distinguished addition to that art form in which Hollywood has always excelled: the Baroque B-picture."

Criterion Collection #19

In *Shock Corridor*, the great American writer-director-producer Samuel Fuller masterfully charts the uneasy terrain between sanity and madness. Seeking a Pulitzer Prize, reporter Johnny Barrett (Peter Breck) has himself committed to a mental hospital to investigate a murder. As he closes in on the killer, insanity closes in on him. Constance Towers co-stars as Johnny's coolheaded stripper girlfriend. With its startling commentary on racism and other hot-button issues in sixties America and its daring photography by Stanley Cortez, *Shock Corridor* has had far-reaching influence.

The Guardian, 9 July 1999, 'Derek Malcom's Century of Film'

Shock Corridor is not only outright trash, but stands also as one of the most vicious and irresponsible pieces of film-making that the screen has given us in years." This kind of American review, which characterised Sam Fuller as a semi-fascist vulgarian - a yellow journalist translating himself into a purple film-maker - was once so prevalent that when the French started fashioning him into an auteur on the same level as Nicholas Ray, another of their saints, absurdity seemed to be being piled upon absurdity.

There is no doubt that Fuller was a remarkable film-maker. But that doesn't mean we have to accept every film he made as some kind of gospel. You certainly can't accept Shock Corridor as such. But I defy anyone to see it for the first time and not be in some way amazed by its energy or even by its passionate crudity.

Johnny, the central character, is a crime reporter, like Fuller once was. A man called Sloane has been murdered in a mental hospital and he persuades his editor that he should be passed off as insane to get inside the asylum, solve the case and win the Pulitzer prize. Cathy, his stripper girlfriend - "Her body is a symphony, her legs a rhapsody," according to the

screenplay - is reluctantly forced to say that she's his sister and he's been making incestuous advances. After questioning, he's admitted for sexual therapy.

But faced by the inmates, one of whom was once a genius who helped make the atomic bomb and who may or may not have witnessed the murder, Johnny's own mind begins to snap. Attacked by voracious patients in the nympho ward, he starts to believe Cathy really is his sister and he's given shock treatment. In the end he finds the killer, looks like getting his Pulitzer prize but is too insane even to feel Cathy's desperate hug.

Such a story, if put before your average producer now, would be laughed out of court. It's trashy, lurid and preposterous. But you can't take your eyes off the screen because, despite the tatty sets and often ludicrous lines, the film-making is incredibly brave, direct and furious. The whole film is like a thunderstorm. What does it say? Not a lot about mental asylums, awful as they probably were at the time; but, when you consider the patients, quite a lot about America.

One of them let down his country as a soldier in Korea and was branded a traitor, another couldn't stand the pressures of being a black guinea-pig at an all-white Southern college, a third realised what he had done working on the A-bomb. As for Johnny, he is obsessed not with justice but with his own ambition. The only truly sympathetic character in the movie is Cathy, the stripper. If her mouth is a tunnel, as the screenplay suggests, it's the only one that speaks consistent sense.

Possibly Fuller made better films, such as *The Naked Kiss* and *Pick Up on South Street*. *Shock Corridor*, though, is a good introduction to the artless art of a true original. I did two Guardian interviews with him at the National Film Theatre, when he was a still incredibly energetic old man. But by then, chewing his regulation cigar and spitting out aphorisms, he had cast himself in the guise expected by his adoring fans. Vastly entertaining as it was, you couldn't get beyond that to the real man. Truffaut put his worth as well as any. "Sam Fuller," he wrote, "is not a beginner, he is a primitive; his mind is not rudimentary, it is rude; his films are not simplistic, they are simple, and it is this simplicity I most admire."

Undercover Madness - Fuller style.

4 March 2008 | by [hitchcockthelegend](#)

The striking thing about this film is just how unnervingly barmy the characters are, and even more amazing is just how they seem so apt with Sam Fuller's sledgehammer direction. Written, directed and produced by Fuller it weaves a cautionary tale of how faking madness just might bring about the downfall of ones own sanity, and here it begs the question of if the price of fame has no boundaries to those who clamour for glory ?. The film cleverly manages to make the viewer think about the thin line between sanity and insanity and this is shot with such style it lingers long in the memory after the credits role. Some great sequences allied with clever switches to {almost surreal} color make this more than a curiosity piece because of the directors "American Primitive" reputation.