

The Museum of Modern Art Department of Film

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1978

CUT-OUT ANIMATION

EXPRESSIONISTS

Saturday, March 18 at 5:00

FILET OF SOUL. 1972. U.S.A. Victor Faccinto. Print courtesy American Federation of Arts. 16 minutes.

The assured tones of FRANK FILM are completely alien to the sub-articulate expression of pain one senses in FILET OF SOUL, but both films locate their obsessive worlds in a therapeutic context. For Mouris, a life-long obsession with the "fantasy and colour" of magazines led directly to "my most powerful obsession to date--animation," which works "to order and channel my other obsessions." Faccinto is more explicit: "I made the films as personal psychological explorations, and although I have not always been pleased by what I have found, I have found out a lot." Yet though the aims are similar the results are radically different: FRANK FILM "legitimized" its author's fantasies and won an Oscar to prove it; FILET OF SOUL has been met with nervous programmers, outraged audiences and cancelled screenings. As Faccinto ruefully acknowledges: "I seek to explore and document the limits of my fantasy behavior...Sad as it may be it is my duty to tell the truth. Animation is the ideal media for acting out behavior prohibited or repressed by social order."

The "truth" consists of four Psycho-Erotic Dramas made between 1970 and 1975. Shooting in sequence without a script--but drawing on "people and things that were happening in my life at the time"--Faccinto animated his jointed cut-out puppets against meticulously textured backgrounds, two-dimensional sets that incorporate objects, fabric and foil into a heightened colour design. The advance construction of numerous sets and characters that possess an individualized, somewhat sculptural presence, allows the animator, as in this case, to work out a sequence of interactions that proceed "until everything has been used...and I have mentally exhausted my energy with the material." The result is a surprisingly consistent series of variations on the theme of "God, Satan, Man and Woman" and an unusual example of a contemporary animator consistently developing themes of violence in cut-out metaphor.

Writing on FILET OF SOUL for a Chicago screening, Barbara Scharres correctly notes that "excessive violence has always held a prominent place in animation art, the Popeye cartoons being a notable example...Faccinto's film combines extreme sadism and violence with an almost superstitious concept of an all-seeing God who metes out reward and punishment from the interior of a spaceship...The real horror results from the swiftness and relentlessness with which a violent fate overtakes these characters, who despite their grotesquery display all the ordinary human emotions, weaknesses and fears."

The disturbingly sexual quality of the violence in Faccinto's work is conveyed through cut-out technique and imagery, the vividness of which contributes to much of its "horror." Castrations abound and the real and metaphoric act of cutting off the penis is openly acknowledged toward the end of FILET OF SOUL: Video Vic's castration fantasy is symbolized by an insert of a pair of scissors. In opposing manner the painful penetrations

ememplify the technique of inserting one cut-out form into or behind another. Such metaphors of penetration are not limited to Faccinto; Nancy Edell's CHARLIE CO, for example, is a reverse scatological joke in which a procession of sexual grotesques move laterally across a vernal terrain to penetrate an enormous pink buttock. In LES DENTS DU SERGE--a bizarre communal fantasy made by French mental patients under the supervision of Rene Laloux--dissection and penetration have strong sexual overtones: an evil dentist has his teeth pulled in a clearly emasculating gesture by a good monkey, thrusting a pair of pliers into a vaginal mouth.

Victor Faccinto's last cut-out film, SHAMELESS, exhibits a tension within the form. As real penises penetrate paper vaginas, and cut-out men investigate life-sized female parts, the film implies a potential synthesis of metaphoric and real action; the film also suggests the exhaustion of purely cut-out imagery and by extension of the fantasy it sustained. Significantly, Faccinto's subsequent films retain his interest in direct manipulation of materials, only now it is the film itself which is scratched, painted or cut.

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