

OPPOSITIONAL AND STIGMATIZED

Program Two: Cinema of Shock

Curated by Janis Crystal Lipzin and Caroline Savage

Sunday, March 11th, 2007 at 7:30 pm – Yerba Buena Center for the Arts

Since the origins of cinema, this medium has been under attack by censors, government, religious groups, and conformists that fear its potent influence. This series, **Oppositional and Stigmatized Cinema**, presents some notable examples of the aesthetically, sexually and politically subversive films that have emerged from diverse eras and cultural identities. These remarkable works have, at one time or another, been identified as oppositional or stigmatized by the mainstream. Many have been the source of heated controversy or censorship. Some actually have been banned or subjected to efforts at suppression.

The first recorded public protest against the exhibition of an erotic movie occurred in April 1894 in New York. Only two weeks after Thomas Edison's kinetoscope motion picture machine first appeared in New York, angry citizens demonstrated against the exhibition of an erotic Edison film, *Dolorita in the Passion Dance*. Since this early moment in film history, filmmakers have been under pressure to refrain from producing or exhibiting controversial films. Nevertheless, the San Francisco Cinematheque has, since its founding over 45 years ago, demonstrated a courageous exhibition stance in the face of omnipresent censorious efforts of the disapproving.

Amos Vogel asserts in *Film as a Subversive Art*, "We are inundated by ambiguity, allegory, and complexity, by an existential humanism devoid of certainty or illusion. The committed artists of our day, [have] the most nakedly sensitized antenna extended toward our collective secrets." The artists included in this four-part series illuminate these secrets with works providing radical challenges to typical cinematic modes of presentation, production and representation, cinema that is forbidden, shocking, blasphemous, extremist, defiant.

Tonight's films have variously been described as transgressive, unwatchable, liberating and disturbing. The artists share an intention to courageously examine and reveal the everyday but discomfiting realities of human existence and cause the viewer scrutinize the elemental actions of life more closely. (Janis Crystal Lipzin)

16/67: September 20th – Gunter Brus (1967) by Kurt Kren; 16mm, b&w, silent, 7 minutes, print from Canyon Cinema

Kurt Kren's symphonic montage of the mechanics of everyday sustenance and elimination cleverly, with provocative camera angles, estranges the most common of exercises.

"Defecation, as a human activity, must also be demystified and made public if the prevailing 'order' (which sanctifies violence and genocide but denies the body and its function) is to be destroyed." (Amos Vogel)

"It is very dirty, being about eat-drink-piss-shitting. Many friends will hate me after having seen that film. Sorry. It had to be done!" (Kurt Kren)

Remote, Remote (1973) by Valie Export; 16mm, color, sound, 12 minutes, print from Canyon Cinema

Human behaviour—in contrast to that of machines (animals)—is influenced by past events, no matter how long ago they occurred. This has led to the existence of a spiritual para-time that runs parallel to objective time and is constantly subject to the influence of the prayers of fear and guilt, of the incapability to overcome, of deformations that tear open the skin, of visual manifestations. I point to something representing past and present. (Valie Export)

Valie Export refers to [an] aspect of women's sexuality in her film *Remote...Remote*...Repressed aggression leads to compulsive masochistic acts, such as biting the flesh around her fingernails until they are raw and bleeding. (Birgit and Wilhelm Hein, in "Work of Young Europeans: Erotic Films by Women," *International Experimental Film Congress*, Art Gallery of Toronto, 1989)

Zock-Exercises (1967) by Otto Muehl; 16mm, color, silent, 12 minutes, print from Film-Makers' Cooperative

The *Zock-Exercises* show that connections can be made between Otto Muehl's work and traditions of various earlier twentieth-century art movements. The first "exercise" in the film consists of a very painterly progression of substances being poured onto and rinsed off of an ear, which is sticking through a canvas so that the head of the person belonging to the ear cannot be seen. The ear itself is disturbingly redolent of any number of surrealist exercises, including *Un Chien Andalou*, Salvador Dali and Luis Buñuel's landmark surrealist film. The next two *Zock-Exercises* involve passive actors and have sadomasochistic overtones—though the actors acquiesce to their various ritual dousings and bondages with such equanimity that discomfort and shock seem beside the point. In the last of the four sections of the film, Muehl and two other actors create a living naked tableaux that brings to mind slapstick comedy more than anything, topped off by Muehl's mischievous grin to the camera at film's end. (Andy Ditzler)

Mommy, Mommy, Where's My Brain? (1986) by Jon Moritsugu; 16mm, 10 minutes, print from the maker

Moritsugu was linked to the transgressive movement of filmmakers (Richard Kern, Nick Zedd) in the 80's who shared a desire to make confrontational modes of cinematic expression that broke with the formalism and acceptable aesthetics of the academic, structuralist avant-garde. Their influences stemmed from the work of Luis Bunuel, Jack Smith, Otto Muehl, John Waters, Dada and Punk.

This Marxist deconstruction of commodity aesthetics, *Mommy, Mommy, Where's My Brain?* is a Brechtian (and no-wave) mini-epic replete with skuzzy rock-n-roll, bloody meat, and incisive "critical theory." This is Moritsugu's second film, completed while a student at Brown University's semiotics department and is dedicated to Derrida and AC/DC (the band). (Jon Moritsugu)

The Act of Seeing With One's Own Eyes (1971) by Stan Brakhage; 16mm, color, silent, 32 minutes, print from Canyon Cinema

"In the fall of 1971 I began photographing in the Allegheny Coroner's Office in downtown Pittsburgh. Thanks to the help of Sally Dixon, head of the Film Department at the Carnegie Museum, and the kind cooperation of coroner [Cyril] Wecht, I was to be permitted to photograph an autopsy—a term which comes from the Greek meaning: "The act of seeing with one's own eyes." Within two weeks I had completed the photography; and I felt at that time that this film would be the third in a trilogy beginning with the film *Eyes* and followed by *Deus Ex*." (Stan Brakhage)

"... Stan Brakhage, entering, with his camera, one of the forbidden, terrific locations of our culture, the autopsy room. It is a place wherein, inversely, life is cherished, for it exists to affirm that no one of us may die without knowing exactly why. All of us, in the person of the coroner, must see that, for ourselves, with our own eyes.

"What was to be done in that room, Stan? And then, later, with the footage? I think it must have been mostly to stand aside: to 'clear out,' as much as possible, with the baggage of your own expectations, even, as to what a work of art must look like; and to see, with your own eyes, what coherence might arise within a universe for which you could decree only the boundaries." (Hollis Frampton)

Emperor Tomato Ketchup (1971) by Shuji Terayama; 16mm, b&w, sound, 28 minutes, print from Image Forum

Shuji Terayama (b. 1936) is one of the most productive and provocative creative artists in Japan, working in many media, including poetry, the novel, drama, and film. As an outspoken poet, playwright, and director for theater and film, he considers himself to be 'high on the list of dangerous thinkers in Japan.' He founded the Tenjo-Sajiki Troupe, which has as its message:

We consider theater to be crime.

We are not working toward the revolution of theater, but we will whip the world with our imagination and theatricalize revolution.

We, as a group, will reform the world through poetry and imagination.

Take power with Imagination!!

(Joan Mellen, in *Voices from the Japanese Cinema*, 1975)

One of Terayama's common themes involves attacks on the Japanese family system. In *Emperor Tomato Ketchup*, an intentionally provocative work with child led anarchy, children play ping-pong over a bound and gagged naked woman and children embrace Oedipus complexes with one inter-title that reads, "I seduce my mommy and I become my daddy." *Emperor Tomato Ketchup*, depicting a political dystopia, reflects on the Japanese social fears of the time, revealing the anxieties of the Japanese people caught in highly volatile political situations: protests, the renewal of the Japan-United States Security Treaty and the Vietnam War.

"Magical women act as the initiatory, yet protectively maternal sexual partners to children. The children, in revolt, have condemned their parents to death for depriving them of self-expression and sexual freedom; they create a society in which fairies and sex education are equally important and literally combinable." (Amos Vogel, *Film as a Subversive Art*)

Total running time of program: 101 minutes

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Founded in 1961, San Francisco Cinematheque is dedicated to the advancement of experimental cinema that challenges the limits of the art form and offers original aesthetic experiences.

Program notes by Jennifer Blaylock, Janis Crystal Lipzin and Caroline Savage