

THEMROC (1973) The Police Eater

For starters, Themroc isn't spoken in any human language we know. It's a cult classic that questions most of mores, habits and hierarchies of modern civilisation. It is one of the most radical and radicalising movies I have seen lately. Directed by Claude Faraldo and played by Michel Piccoli (whom we've seen in the recent prescient *Habeamus papam* playing the newly elected pope). It's a banned movie, because of its depictions of incest and cannibalism.



Basically it's the story of infectious primitivism, but I wouldn't call it the primitivism of the moderns, the primitivism cherished by the avant-garde that handpicked exotic (colonial) cultures and recast them as allies in an aesthetic battle against its internal classicist or academic traumas.

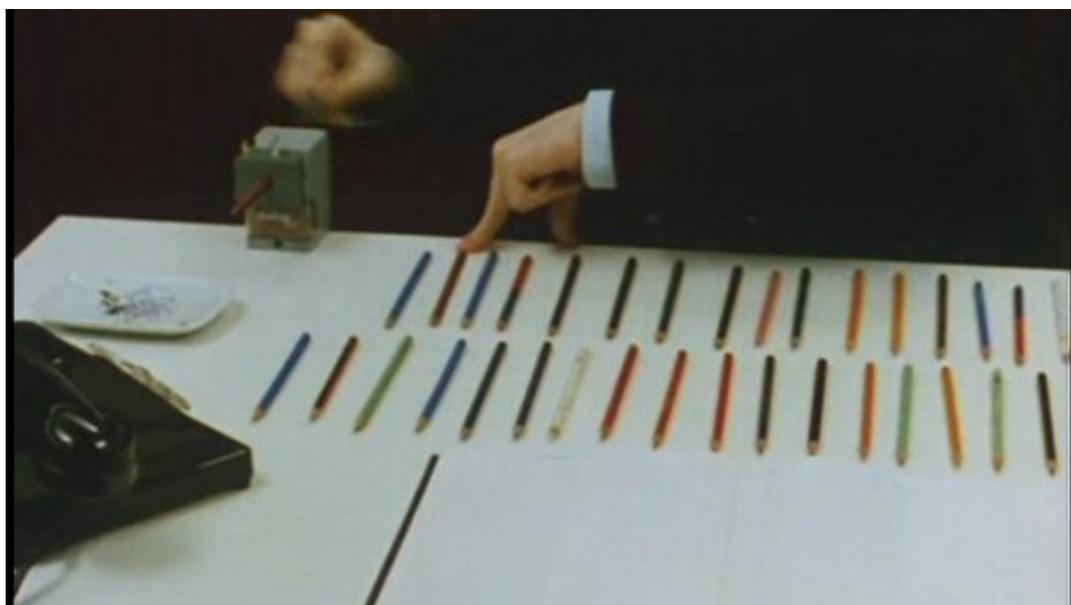


Even before the direct alliance of the historical avant-garde with collected African or Oceanic arts, there was a backlash of classicist and eugenicist responses to expressionist, 'decadent', or symbolist through the violent alarmism of degenerationist theories of art, starting with Max Nordau's book 'Degeneration'.

What was regarded as the return of the repressed or the rise up of the instinctual through heightened emotionalism, aestheticism or shock tactics was roughly based on Social Darwinistic fears about reversals, civilisational fallback's and a catastrophic turn towards what was perceived as an earlier stage in human evolution: the pre-modern, the tribal or the prehistoric. Particular segments of the society were more prone to degeneration, and especially the masses (or the crowd as it became known – studied by the newly established crowd psychology), women, or the 'lower' classes, the migrants were especially targeted and seen as harbingers of the atavistic and the instinctual. Also certain occupations under suspicion such as artists, poets that seemed to employ animalistic shock tactics and 'lower' instinctual drives for their work. Although in Max Nordau's frame, 'degeneration' could also mean a cultural as opposed to a psychological physiognomical – return to a pre-Enlightenment era of de-emancipation and increasing anti-semitism. Later on, demonstrative degeneration shows and exhibitions became a highlight of the NS regime.

But there is also a progressive core in what is usually regarded as animalistic or despised as anachronistic. Anarchists in the 19th century were literally depicted as violent and atavistic, labeled as a fallback on stone age brutality.

Themrock is especially interesting because it is possibly a manifesto that somehow enacts a sort of open neanderthalian revolt against the 1970 Fordist society that circumvents all the ordered negotiations of usual unionist or democratic tools of empowerment. A blue collar worker becomes a cave man somehow stimulated by external stimuli, by anomie, by a certain permanent subliminality of sexual drives that permeates modern society through fashion and advertising. The crowd and the living units family environment functions as an unlikely catalyst to the rebirth of the cannibal as the ultimate enemy of the police state and the wage labor system. His direct action is brutal and unfettered by hegemonic rules, protocols or manners. Themrock also raises the question of the ultimate sexual norms through consensual incest. Somehow job relations and relations of production are infused with raw and brutal pecking orders and caste systems masked by repetitive and absurd tasks such as sharpening pencils continuously or using two specialised worker teams to paint a gate on both sides simultaneously.



Unleashing a Fourierist or Reichian sexual energy upon society seems to endanger its very

foundations. Police brutality is needed to contain the new(old?) anarchitecture of apartments transformed literally into caves of seduction.



Doors are being walled and rooms emptied of any objects that now pile up underneath. The new troglodytes don't need any protection for their open air pedagogy of intimate life. The more visually accessible it is, the more carnal, the more infectious it becomes, with other surrounding families imitating the destructive, demolition acts of tearing down walls, throwing the furniture and transforming their home into a caverns, or more precisely love caverns. The nighttime brings nocturnal mating rituals and howls that shake the hood.



There is always an escalation and heightening of the narrative of the senses within the movie – when the police anti riot is moved in, but somehow the teargas itself becomes a new aphrodisiac for the neo-neanderthals who inhale it with passion. One of the last acts is preying and scavenging on the forces of order, hunting and eating the hunters. A proud, stylish and narcissistic policemen in his uniform is singled out and taken down to be dragged as food to the caves.