

## OUT OF HOURS

### Text example 3

Collection Displays | Still Life/Object/Real Life | **Jan Svankmajer: Dimensions of Dialogue**

Ordinary objects take on a sinister life of their own in this animation by Czech filmmaker Jan Svankmajer. From a motley collection of fruit and vegetables, household utensils and lumps of clay, Svankmajer conjures human-shaped figures that touch, mingle and finally devour one another or tear themselves to pieces. The 'dialogue' referred to in the title is notable by its absence. Instead, the three sequences that make up the film are essays in **communicative breakdown** and intolerance.

The first section features a series of disembodied heads that turn cannibal, **vomiting up the remains** in a savage game. These are followed in the second by two clay figures who come together in apparent harmony, only to erupt into a **frenzy of destruction**. In the third part, another set of heads play a version of the scissors-paper-stone game, which devolves from **co-operation to chaos**.

In 1972, the Czech Communist government banned Svankmajer from making films, believing his work to be critical of the state. After seven years, he was allowed to resume, providing that he stick to literary adaptations. Then in 1982 he made this animation, which, despite international acclaim, was banned in his homeland.

Svankmajer calls himself a Surrealist, and in keeping with the revolutionary aims of the pre-war movement, believes that art should be an irritant, satirising the oppressions and complacency of modern society. Though it was vetoed by the Czech Communists, **Dimensions of Dialogue**, with its all-consuming characters, can be seen at one level as a barbed rejection of Western-style capitalism. Svankmajer has commented: 'This **civilisation eats everything**. It eats nature, whole cultures, but also love, liberty and poetry and it changes these into the odious excrement of the society of consumption and mass culture.'

Jan Svankmajer was born in Czechoslovakia in 1934. He lives and works in Prague.

Text written by Jane Burton