

Long Live the New Flesh: "THE SOCIAL MEDIA MASSACRE," An Uncomfortable Intimacy

Written by David Pace
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I've only watched the film in its entirety twice, before writing this. I've seen a lot of horror movies. I've seen a lot of indie and homemade horror movies that try really hard to shock and freak out the viewer with extreme gore or violence. What is special to me about the SOCIAL MEDIA MASSACRE series and this episode ("From the Heart") in particular, is how uncomfortable it made me before I ever saw a drop of blood.

Ron Purtee is the creative mind behind the series of shorts and, I have to say, he is on to something here. Social media and the internet are a huge part of our lives now and I think everyone can relate in some way or another to what they are seeing in "From the Heart." The film is essentially about two lovers meeting over a webcam session for an illicit tryst. It's a simple enough concept, but the genius of it lies in that it was shot as if the audience were voyeurs on either end of the web chat. Purtee creates this webcam-verite world where we are drawn into this very intimate moment between two characters and seeing them in circumstances which they would naturally prefer to remain private. There is both a voyeuristic thrill and a sickening sense of too much intimacy. When we witness the real horror of the situation, it's almost anticlimactic.

The cheap and dirty feel of watching this webcam session on your laptop, as if you are experiencing a part of it yourself, is a real demonstration of art from adversity. Purtee clearly isn't making big budget shorts here and in looking for a way to do this within his means, he's tapped into this powerfully intimate and creepy experience. This is the kind of thing Facebook stalkers would die to see. In our information age, people are putting so much of themselves online and relying on the internet to deliver so much of their interaction with others. Whole relationships are being conducted on the internet without people ever physically meeting. Seeing this webcam session is something we can all sort of relate to in a strange way and it strikes a chord within us; the one that tells us maybe there is something wrong with this way of life. Closing yourself off to the people physically around you and opening up to virtual strangers probably isn't healthy. Reducing our most intimate moments to YouTube clips cheapens the experience.

It also points a finger right back at the voyeur that the internet has revealed so many of us to be. Technology has allowed us to capture these images—these moments—and hordes of

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people are waiting to see them exposed and humiliated. Whole websites exist now for people to post intimate photos and videos of their exes in some kind of creepy revenge. A window into other lives is oddly compelling, so is it any wonder this stuff is out there? The question is, what happens when a fragile moment is exposed to too much light and burns away. What remains of the real people behind them and what of the atrocity tourists (I count myself among them) who are both compelled and repulsed by the spectacle?

There is a struggle on for us to understand each other, or to find others who understand us. This is of course reflected in our social media. My fear is that this is a vain struggle and so many in that act of putting themselves out there will come back bearing the scars of it—or never come back at all, lost in the shallow reflecting pools of internet subculture.

I want to offer readers some warning with "From the Heart." It gets its weird hooks into you and makes you squirm a bit. It's a genuinely disturbing piece and has some sexual content that might offend some. I don't personally get why people will get bent out of shape over sex, but not gore, but that is another topic for another time.

{youtube}ebAgEHsuBJ8{/youtube}