

THE FRIDA ZINEMA

FIGHT THE POWER

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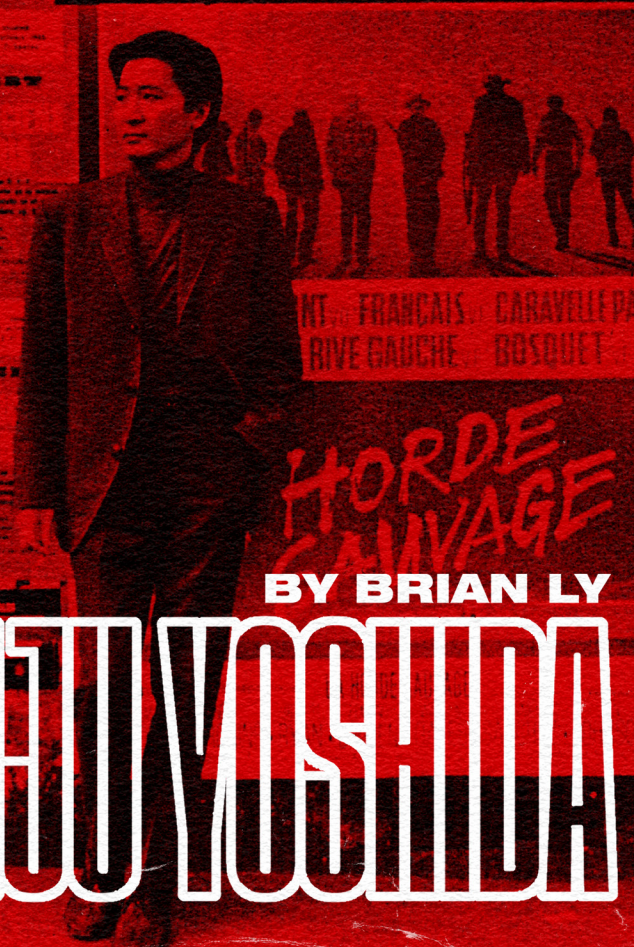


THE NEVER-ENDING REVOLUTION OF KIJU YOSHIDA

「エロ」の街角での吉田喜重監督
であるパリの



Un film de Yoshishige Yoshida



When it comes to directors of the Japanese New Wave, perhaps one of the names often left off of lists in popular journalism, though absolutely recognized by any scholar worth their weight, is Kiju Yoshida, more often written out as his birth name as Yoshishige Yoshida despite his change for the express purpose of being less unwieldy and easier to pronounce, who tends to be forgotten in Western discourse of the canonization due to his omission in a certain boutique physical media label's collection that had been instrumental in establishing the so-called important films of this period alongside some of his other fellow comparatively unrecognized contemporaries such as Toshio Matsumoto and Koji Wakamatsu, perhaps not by sheer accident due to their more radical political leanings and uncompromising approach to filmmaking that made them less palatable to a more conservative art house audience when these filmmakers were first being introduced to the West.

Not dissimilar to other New Wave directors, Yoshida got his start in the studio system at Shochiku as an assistant to Keisuke Kinoshita, cutting his teeth with contemporaries Nagisa Oshima and Masahiro Shinoda, both prominent New Wave directors in their own right with their own particular relationship with the studio. Oshima was something of a studio darling until he wasn't and formally broke ties with

the studio after *Night and Fog in Japan*, the film that directly confronted his frustrations with the ideological paralysis between the bureaucracy of the establishment in the Japanese Communist Party and the unorganized, chaotic nature of the New Left, was pulled from distribution, and he decided to totally lean into his more controversial political themes and experimental tendencies within the independent film ecosystem, though largely fitting within a narrative and stylistic framework that was recognized by Western critics at the time. Shinoda, meanwhile, was a far less confrontational director who worked within and out of the system through a rather prolific career. However, it was Yoshida who probably experienced the most overtly creative interference from the studio system when his film, *Escape from Japan*, was essentially hijacked from him, leading him to start his own production company, *Gendai Eigasha*. We can see the initial signs of his thematic resistance within his early studio works, contemporary films that concerned the postwar social realities, whether chronicling the disenfranchised young students in the Sun Tribe-adjacent *Good-for-Nothing*, where on the surface the film appears to have its origins in *kayō eiga*, popular song films not dissimilar to the Hollywood starring vehicles for Elvis Presley, with its rocking theme, yet in stark contrast to the films that captured youth rebelling against society in outbursts of sex and violence, we instead see a certain level of remove and disassociation that encapsulates the existential loneliness and social alienation that comes with growing up in a generation where society has failed its young people despite promises of greater prosperity and economic growth, or the subversion of the typical capitalistic optimism in the corporate film in *Bitter End of a Sweet Night*, which has the trappings of a lighthearted comedic business drama, but

it's actually a deep criticism of capitalism and corporate culture that relies on the exploitation of workers with promises of career advancement in exchange for sexual favors, but it becomes increasingly clear that this is the exact game that everyone is forced to play and not everyone wins, leaving those who have fallen by the wayside to grapple with their trauma, diminished self-esteem, and loss of agency. Following his departure from Shochiku, Yoshida began working on films typically known as his "anti-melodramas," six films with his producing and life partner, actor Mariko Okada, in which we see his thematic concerns begin to coalesce around a rejection of societal norms and power structures, particularly in the experience of women in patriarchal society, that would continue to be explored in his later works across several domains, starting from his disdain for the studio system to loftier criticisms of political movements.



There is probably no film that greater represents the Japanese New Wave than *Eros + Massacre*, an experimental drama film that is ostensibly a biopic about Sakae Osugi, an anarchist and writer who was murdered by the Japanese police in the Amakasu Incident, yet the film itself is an experimentation on the form of film, with the parallel storyline of a contemporary group of student radicals researching and making a film about the subject matter that blends into the historical narrative, along with Brechtian qualities where the characters from different eras begin to occupy the same physical space, the camera appears on screen, and real-world events are brought into the narrative with the documentary-like elements of interviews, archival footage,

and the filmmaking process of the students within the film. That's not even mentioning the film's visual flair with the stark contrast in the black-and-white cinematography, surrealistic and haunting visuals, and a kinetic energy that makes the film a rather exhausting experience. Even the historical biopic segments themselves don't feel like a conventional telling of the story, where the heightened sensibility is immediately palpable from the stage play-like setting and theatricality of the performance, exemplifying this sense of artificiality that defines the constructed reality and performative nature of history, storytelling, and cinema itself as an art form. With the film's nonlinear narrative structure and its combination of multiple modes of cinema, it's an incredibly challenging yet rewarding text that exemplifies the stylistic flair of the movement, with film scholar David Desser even naming his book, *Eros Plus Massacre: An Introduction to Japanese New Wave Cinema*, after the film.

You can sense Yoshida's frustration with the inefficacy of the alleged leading figures of the political movements from the way he portrays Osugi as a slovenly, lazy individual with no contribution to society, espousing ideas of free love and financial independence from the system while having his mistress essentially finance and enable his lifestyle of polyamory and lofty, idealistic sophistry, all the while being emotionally abusive. It's the deconstruction of a folk hero, stripping away the myths and the romanticization of the anarchic philosophy that manifests itself as nothing more than a small man exploiting the movement for his own personal gain while merely acting as a cog in the greater system he supposedly desired to dismantle. Likewise, the student revolutionaries in the contemporary era are also romanticizing the movements

of the past, viewed through the lens of a well-crafted agenda, and approaching political activism with a sort of superficiality and pseudointellectualism, lacking a greater understanding of the machinations of the world at large, making them not all so different from their lionized figure, writing away at zines that were never managed or distributed properly that no one ever really read anyway. In his critique of polyamory, Yoshida comes less from a place of any true repudiation of the practice itself and approaches it more as the idealized concept of free love that's inherently incompatible with the patriarchal realities that inherently define the relationship dynamic between the sexes in heteronormative society and that deprive women of agency in a male-dominated revolutionary movement. Though it may appear as though Yoshida targeted his concerns toward certain political leanings, his grievances stem more from the sheer hypocrisy and naïveté of revolutionaries that acted in their own self-interest rather than in the advancement of the cause, providing a nuanced perspective that contrasts with the admittedly default sympathy from his fellow contemporaries not as a pure exercise in contrarianism so much as disillusionment from modern political uprisings' inability to materially challenge the establishment.

If *Eros + Massacre* was Yoshida's love letter to the visual and thematic concerns of the French New Wave viewed through the lens of prewar political turmoil and how it relates to postwar Japanese society, *Heroic Purgatory* is a marked departure both aesthetically and philosophically, completely stripping away even the slightest bit of narrative coherence and the heightened, theatrical sensibility that characterized his earlier experimental cinematic language. The Brechtian approach is less about a stylized deconstruction of time and space and instead

manifests itself as something much more disorienting, warping the reality of the diegetic space and channeling the pervasive anxiety and existential instability of postwar Japan in the atomic age. In the construction of the physical space of the film, the set design is defined by a largely minimalist approach to its rather cold, austere presentation that belies the alienating sense of loneliness that comes with the dedication to the pursuit of radical change within a conformist society. It's within this solitude that a deep longing for solidarity naturally emerges, feeling as though real change can only come about through the collective effort of a formal movement, mirroring the very organized structure of the establishment political regime, the norms of social conformity, and the collectivist instinct that they had so strongly resisted, demonstrating just how strong this inherent human desire to belong exists even among outsiders on the fringe of society.

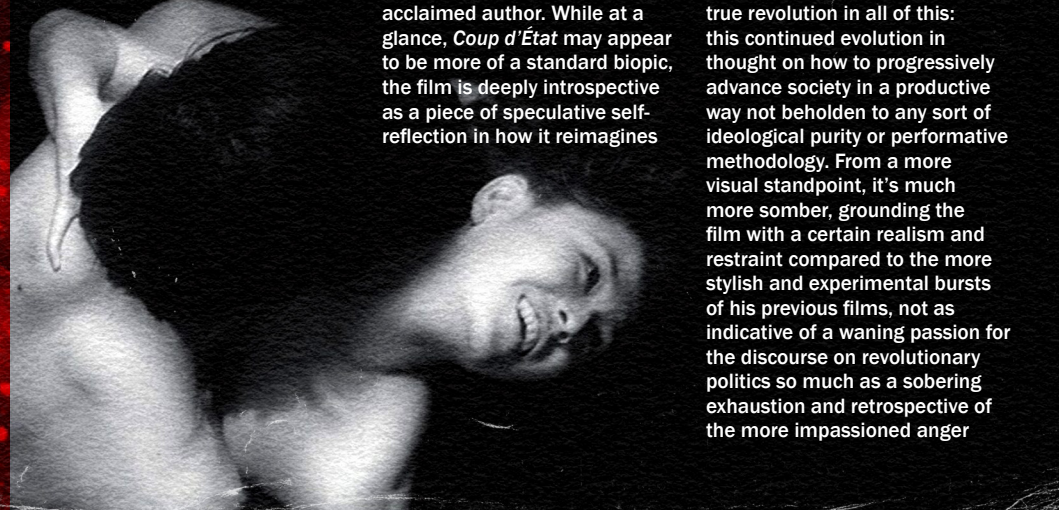
It's an absolute puzzle box of a film that refuses to offer any clear answers, built from fragmented segments deeply infused with a sense of paranoia, with characters drifting through episodes of psychological turmoil haunted by failed revolutions and the compromised efforts of real progressive change, emblematic of the very skepticism that Yoshida had been beating the

drum for throughout his career. Without any real ideological consistency in their actions or identity, they exist as flawed revolutionaries trapped in this perpetual limbo that is a purgatory paved with good intentions but ultimately marked by failed ambition. Though Yoshida had previously been more pointed in his criticism of the lionization of revolutionary figures, there's just the slightest bit of empathy for the would-be radicals, recognizing that many are drawn to the cause for the right reasons, only to fall victim to the inevitable traps of movements that promise transformative change but often are little more than nominal displays of rebellion as a temporary reprieve from the oppression of the establishment before falling in line and reentering mainstream society.

In stark contrast to the political contexts of the previous two films, Yoshida ostensibly shifts his target toward the other side of the political spectrum with a takedown of the far-right revolutionary movement, made famous in the larger global cultural consciousness through the literary works and tangential film endeavors of troubled queer anti-icon Yukio Mishima, this time specifically focused on political philosopher Ikki Kita and the failed military coup in 1936 that had served as the source of inspiration for the more famous acclaimed author. While at a glance, *Coup d'État* may appear to be more of a standard biopic, the film is deeply introspective as a piece of speculative self-reflection in how it reimagines

the experience of a later-in-life revolutionary famous for writing the seminal text acknowledging the flaws and naïveté of his thinking in earlier years while still operating as a key influence on the youth movement that would bring his admittedly futile manifesto to fruition. It's the complex feeling that his legacy is ultimately meaningless, ill-informed, and empty, perhaps even somewhat embarrassing, which sort of casts a shadow on his entire life. Though it's very much a train going off the tracks, he has no choice but to keep on riding along, even if everything he's said has been twisted and mangled beyond recognition. It's less of a celebration of the relative success of right-wing militias in comparison to the disarray that defined the more distracted and meandering movements so much as it's a tacit acknowledgment that the inherently more organized structure of local militias naturally lends itself to carrying out actual missions, even if the coup ultimately fails in a rather magnificent fashion.

The film comes full circle in the political journey for Yoshida, initially skeptical of self-serving leaders of the movement, developing into a greater sense of empathy for well-intentioned individuals roped into the cause and ultimately even for the ideologues who see the errors of their ways, and that's the true revolution in all of this: this continued evolution in thought on how to progressively advance society in a productive way not beholden to any sort of ideological purity or performative methodology. From a more visual standpoint, it's much more somber, grounding the film with a certain realism and restraint compared to the more stylish and experimental bursts of his previous films, not as indicative of a waning passion for the discourse on revolutionary politics so much as a sobering exhaustion and retrospective of the more impassioned anger





that is ultimately unproductive compared to a more constructive and less patronizing view toward ultimately well-intentioned, if misguided, individuals. It's a subtle sort of less-is-more type of approach to filmmaking, using more traditional techniques of framing and long takes to create a constrained space as well as a rather liberal use of Dutch angles to evoke a sort of sense of unease as a representation of the shifting psychological and mental state of a character in constant reflection. At the end of the day, Yoshida is a radical academic at heart with a very philosophical way of viewing the world, removed from the more immediate emotions and realities of the contemporary contexts and more concerned with the frameworks and mindsets that define both the theoretical ideals as well as the more pragmatic acceptance of the way people actually operate in reality and how to channel that energy into productive political activity and thought.

After a rather storied run with his political trilogy, Yoshida largely tapered off as a filmmaker, as though he's exhausted most of his fuel that had precipitated his particular brand of rage, working largely in documentary

filmmaking and film essays, with subject matters as varied as art, baseball legend Sadaharu Oh, early film pioneer Gabriel Veyre, and perhaps most importantly the legacy of Yasujiro Ozu, a director whom many of his contemporaries and even Yoshida himself largely disparaged as the representative figure of a conservative studio system, yet removed from his own career later found a deep appreciation for the modernity and world view of a filmmaker that was quietly executing his own revolution, albeit subtly in how he approached traditional melodrama within the studio system, all of which is explored at even greater length in his book *Ozu's Anti-Cinema*, a defining career work that positions Ozu as a radical filmmaker in his own right.

Though the personal political leanings of Yoshida and subsequently the texts of his films were not particularly ideologically dogmatic, they still do an incredible job of interrogating the historical and contemporary politics that defined the dichotomy between a royalist and imperialist fascist regime and the revolutionary spirit that naturally emerged from the healthy

skepticism of an otherwise largely conformist, collectivist society, where the masses were controlled by manipulation, whether by more official, structural methods or the grassroots effect of the spread of culturally expedient, modern ideas, both of which were driven by charismatic cults of personality at either end of the spectrum. As a pure academic exercise, the political trilogy stands as the definitive political scripture of the Japanese New Wave, where, through sheer visual representation, thematic depth, and meditations on the form of the medium of film itself, Yoshida captures the energy of a society in transition, rapidly embracing the shifts in modernity yet remaining vulnerable to the very same pitfalls that had defined its prewar ethos.

It may seem as though Yoshida rejected the revolutions and social movements of his era, but his stance is very much rooted in a radical philosophical purity, in that he exposes revolutionaries as just as likely to become the new oppressors, the very forces they sought to defeat. He views opposition to the establishment as a given, something not even worth mentioning, and he shifts his target toward the progressive cultural zeitgeist, which may be seemingly well-intentioned on the surface yet is merely a politically expedient tool that is ultimately weaponized in the advancement of self-serving goals. The entire concept of revolution is that it truly never ends, and even the slightest falter may risk falling into the same cycle of oppression by another name. True resistance doesn't come about when you overcome the establishment to proclaim some sort of nominal victory. What it truly means to fight the power is to commit to continuing to challenge authority, regardless of who it may be, ensuring accountability so that real progress is made. To earnestly embrace a radical way of life is to keep on questioning.

DAISIES

Is Hedonistic Femininity Liberation?

by Haley Harmicar



Vera Chytilová's *Daisies* (1966) is commonly referenced as a feminist film, and it is not difficult to see why-- a portrait of two unapologetically hedonistic women is inherently radical in a world that teaches women to bury their desires. Watching Marie I and II seduce men for free meals, gorge themselves with stolen food, and dedicate their lives to achieving ultimate "spoiled-ness" may provide a cursory sense of catharsis, but the film's feminist themes are subsidiary to what is at its core an anti-consumerist satire of political apathy.



The Marie's' state their intentions clearly in the beginning of the film: The world has gone bad, so they are going to go bad with it. They begin causing a ruckus in night clubs, over-indulging, manipulating men, littering, and stealing. After destroying a dining hall via a food fight, the two women decide that they no longer wish to be bad and begin to clean up their mess while repeating the phrase "We will be happy because we are hard-working."

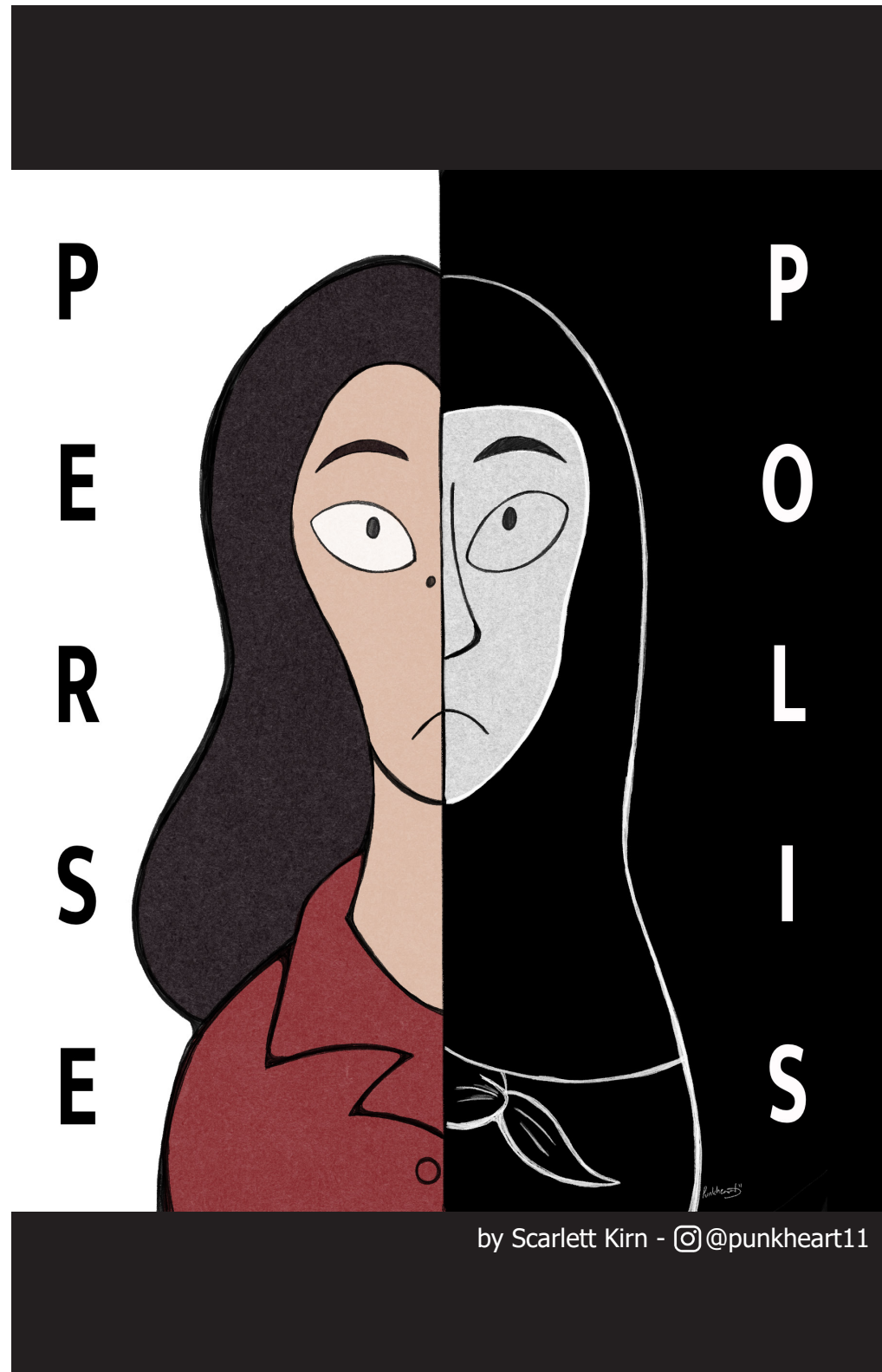
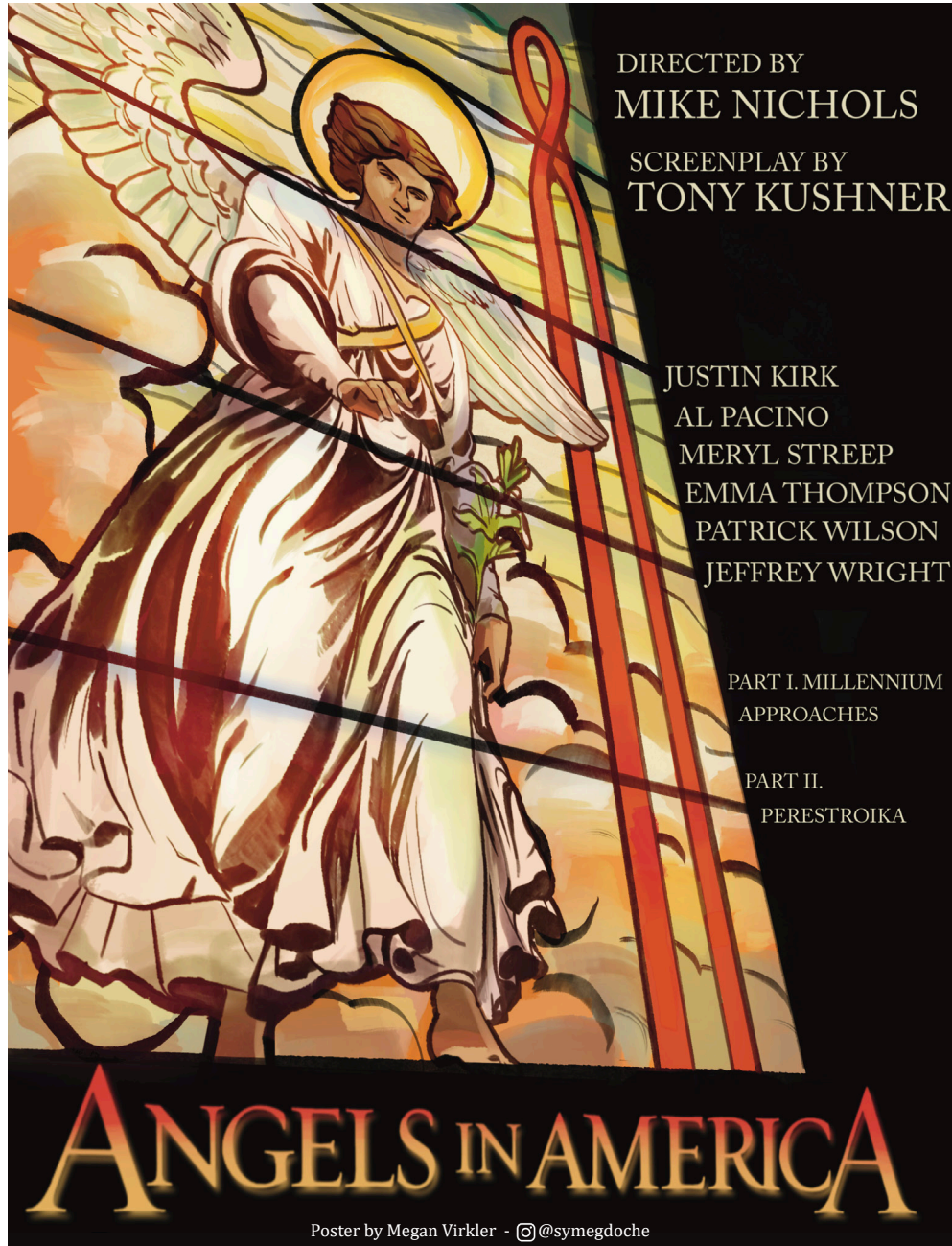


The film passes moral judgement on the Marie's for their gluttony, and they serve to reflect the parasitic nature of their totalitarian government. Their games can be interpreted as women's liberation, though they never truly liberate themselves, and their games

are certainly not a sustainable method of such liberation. Their feminism is sloppy, spiteful and individualistic, uncommitted to any direction or purpose. However, *because* the Marie's are presented in a purposefully ditzy, obnoxious way, the film poses a question toward the viewer as it opens with war footage: Why are you more bothered by the relatively harmless actions of the two protagonists than you are by the much more destructive ones committed by the government?

In true dadaist fashion, *Daisies* is open to many different interpretations. Chytilová herself has claimed that she had no intention for the film to contain feminist rhetoric, but when so much societal emphasis is placed on women being docile and quiet, rebelling against that notion through film becomes radical. Overall, the avant-garde and timelessly subversive nature of *Daisies* cements its place in revolutionary cinema as perhaps not an upfront feminist film, but certainly an anti-establishment one that fights for the same cause.





A HIDDEN LIFE

is a Historical Film
About Unhistoric Acts

by Sammy Trujillo



When retelling historical movements, it is in human nature to cast one person as a central figure behind that movement. The movement to end Apartheid is intrinsically linked to the image of Nelson Mandela. The campaign for Indian independence is often portrayed as a series of successful protests led by Mahatma Gandhi. The United States itself is credited as being birthed by a collection of "founding fathers." The Great Man narrative is even more prominent in Biopics. Central figures provide convenient narrative devices for filmmakers and aspiring protagonists for audiences who believe they can create change through hard work and determination. But what if history is not the result of one person's hard work? What if change happens in the trillions of unseen interactions humans make with each other every single day? Terrence Malick's *A Hidden Life* is a beautiful biopic that follows an individual who did not influence the outcome of a war, accomplish any change, and whose sacrifices made no direct benefit to anyone. Yet, Malick believes his story to be essential.

Based on a biography by Erna Putz, *A Hidden Life* follows conscientious objector Franz Jaegerstaetter, who refused to serve in the military or sign an oath of loyalty to Adolf Hitler. Franz and his wife Fani's letters are heard through voiceover as the audience sees their early life in Austria, the annexation of Austria by Nazi Germany, and the conscription of Franz and his subsequent crisis of faith. He tells his bishop that the Nazis are invading countries and killing innocent people, and that he no longer feels he can serve in the army. He subsequently refuses a group of German soldiers collecting for the war effort, and when a neighbor salutes Hitler, Franz responds with "Pfui Hitler." The pushback is immediate. "You will surely be shot," his bishop tells him, "Your sacrifice will benefit no one." A different bishop is more direct: "...You have a duty to the homeland. Let every man be subject to the powers above him." Despite the pushback, Franz stays firm in his conviction. When he is called to serve, he shows up but refuses to salute the soldiers and is imprisoned, beaten, starved, tortured, and eventually executed.

Throughout the film, Franz is told repeatedly that his actions help no one. "Do you imagine anything you do will change the course of this war?" He is asked. "What good do you think your defiance does anyone?" Franz even reckons with the possibility that his actions might have the opposite effect of his intentions. Does the labor he performs in prison serve the Nazis more than if he

had signed the oath? If he avoids conscription, will the person who takes his place do more damage? Franz is not portrayed as an intellectual or philosopher who calculates the maximum utility of his actions. He is simply devoted to his convictions and stays true to them even if his actions do not immediately benefit anybody. When the film ends, we do not see the fall of the Nazi regime or the end of World War II. Malick understood that doing so would imply a connection between Franz's actions and the outcome of the war. But Franz never got to know if his actions had any benefit, and neither do we. Franz did not make history; he simply lived faithfully in his time in it.





compromise to avoid conflict, punishment, and further persecution. It is this reason that Franz's unwillingness to compromise provokes such hostility from the Nazis. Their regime required compromise from their subjects, and an act of uncompromising defiance must be dealt with the harshest force possible.

The film ends with a quote imposed on a black screen.

“The growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.”

- George Eliot



Compromise is a prevalent theme in *A Hidden Life*. Throughout the film, Franz is given opportunities to compromise on his anti-war stance. “You could work at a hospital,” Fani suggests. It is human to compromise our beliefs. We do it every day. Our desire to be virtuous is often at odds with our pragmatic decision-making. This is likely the reason much of the pushback Franz faces comes from his side. He is called stubborn and prideful. Franz's court-appointed lawyer offers him a solution: sign an oath pledging loyalty to Hitler, and the charges will go away, but Franz refuses. “I am sticking my neck out here. This could jeopardize my career--if not my personal safety!” His lawyer says in frustration. An elderly judge asks Franz, “Do you judge me?” because he is uncertain of the compromises he has made in his life, and Franz's unshakeable commitment to his values comes as an act of judgment against him. Authoritarians rely on the human willingness to compromise to impose injustice on others. Oppressive governments hope that by rewarding loyalty or offering lenient punishments to surrendering enemies, they can ensure obedience. They hope that others will

I think about this quote often in the context of modern injustices. I think about how future historians will discuss the movements to end police brutality, solve climate change, or end the occupation of Palestine. Will they center it around the activists who made the most noise? Or the politicians who passed the most important legislation? One thing is for certain: our history books will not remember the thousands who voluntarily lived in poverty to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions humans produce. They will not remember the individual lawyers who filed low-profile complaints against police misconduct. They will not remember the individuals donating their life savings to providing aid to Palestinians. Like Franz Jaegerstaetter, these individuals lived a hidden life and engaged in unhistoric acts and are buried in unvisited tombs. Their sacrifices might not immediately stop the injustices, but the fact that we have a chance at solving them at all is thanks to them.



NO

Chile, la alegría ya viene.



Poster by Gabriela Toro

My father was imprisoned under a dictatorship. Pinochet's CIA-backed coup d'état overthrew Salvador Allende's democratically elected Socialist government on September 11, 1973. Amnesty International deemed my father's imprisonment a human rights violation. His release was granted on the condition that he be exiled from Chile. My father made a new life for himself in England, spent time in Canada, and eventually settled in Orange County where I get to do fun projects every month with The Frida Cinema's Downtown Santa Ana Art Walk.



Pablo Larraín's 2012 film, *No*, starring Gael García Bernal tells the story of a television commercial, a marketing campaign, that was just one of many efforts in late 1980s Chile that would be revolutionary for my family. The unexpected victory of the "No" campaign on October 5th, 1988 preceded my birth by just a month. I was born into a world that saw the promise of my father returning to his homeland. In December 1989 my father took us to Chile for an entire month. His first time back. That was the only trip to Chile my father and I took together.



The Frida Cinema is a gathering place for movie lovers of all kinds. The lobby is a place of film discussion and friendly gathering, a venue of its own where perspectives from all backgrounds are welcomed and engaged with. We have started the Frida Zinema to replicate this experience in printed form. We welcome all who love film to submit their artwork, writings, and thoughts, and to connect to other artists in a space of creativity and understanding. We love films, and we love people who love films. Please, share your thoughts and artwork, and enjoy the ones within.

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