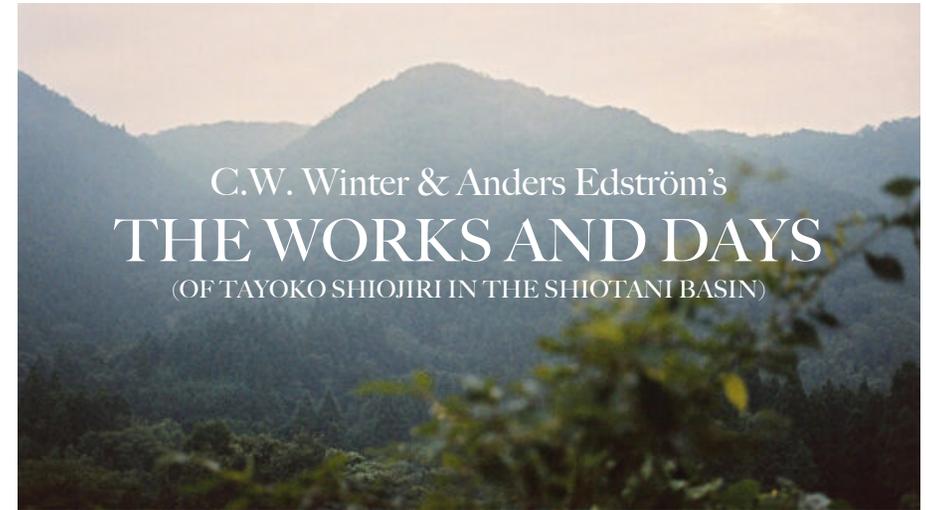


whose real diary entries are periodically read in voice-over — is seen minding the household, chatting with neighbors who bring food (a touching community bond), sharing stories with her granddaughter and visiting a shrine. Junji (Kaoru Iwahana), her husband, whom she dotes on, likes to shoot the breeze and watch matches of the board game Go on television.

A thread of nostalgia and even regret curls its way through the conversations. The filmmakers, C.W. Winter and Anders Edstrom (who is Tayoko's son-in-law), linger on objects so that they feel vividly present but also like memories, reminiscent of shots from a lost-and-found camera roll. This isn't durational cinema that's dead-set on making you feel the heft of labor (though it can). The directors' camera eye fosters more of a muscle memory for these places through sonic overtures and finely wrought images of lattices (brambles or wires), opaque screens and windows, and careworn pots. "The Works and Days" also plumbs the depths of night and twilight like few films do, harnessing a theater's darkness.

The movie reflects upon how people organize experience through our memories and our actions, but the filmmakers also have a self-awareness about their steadfast methods. One of the movie's five sections opens with the following observation: "By the fifth month, one has had his fill of seeing willows." Their penchant for decentered shots can feel a tad obdurate. But as someone in the film says, what one wishes of the people you love is that you could spend even more time with them — and the same could be said of the loveliest images in this film. ♦

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ABOUT THE FILM

The Works and Days (of *Tayoko Shiojiri in the Shiotani Basin*) is an extraordinary eight-hour fiction feature shot for a total of 27 weeks, over a period of 14 months, in a village of 47 inhabitants in the mountains of Kyoto Prefecture, Japan. It is a geographic description of the work and non-work of a farmer. A portrait, over five seasons, of a family, of a terrain, of a soundscape, and of duration itself. It is a film that takes the time to spend time and hear people out, with a performance by Tayoko Shiojiri that binds fiction and actual bereavement into a heartbreaking indeterminability.

480 min. | USA/Sweden/Japan/United Kingdom | 2020

The Land Demands Your Effort by Mark Peranson

The following article was originally published in Cinema Scope 83 (Summer 2020)

Set in the Shiotani Basin, a short train ride from Kyoto, the long-awaited return of C.W. Winter and Anders Edström, a decade following *The Anchorage*, patiently accompanies Shiojiri Tayoko over five seasons in her small village of 47 predominantly elderly people (most of whom, like Tayoko, play themselves). Though it's equally concerned with observations of nature and the simple way that life itself is lived, partway through the film a narrative gradually asserts itself, in the worsening sickness of Tayoko's husband, Junji—though the presence of death is never far from the surface, whether seen through periodic visits to gravesites, fatal snakebite, the hunting of animals for food, or a fantastical story (told via subtitles) of a soldier's return home from WWII to commune with the corpse of his recently deceased father. The film also illustrates the death of a place and its way of life, a factor of population displacement, and the environmental destruction that's irreversibly changing the relationship between the villagers and nature.

Time, indeed, is of the essence: at 480 minutes, five chapters, three parts, and two intermissions, *The Works and Days* clocks in as the seventh-longest feature film ever made—or the third-longest, if one doesn't count Lav Diaz. But, besides its length, it has little in common with other “long films” or “slow cinema,” mainly due to Winter's extremely precise editing. The immersive approach and attention to detail and the constant attention to commonplace beauty (and, very often, mystery) make the experience of viewing it far from a chore, unless one considers watching work (and non-work) to be a chore (I prefer to use the term “idyll”).

Given the real-life basis of much of what we see—further compounded by an accompanying 677-page monograph comprised of 23 years' worth of photographs taken

of the village, its surroundings, and Tayoko and her family by Edström (who is her son-in-law)—one might be excused for regarding *The Works and Days* as a documentary, if, like *The Anchorage* before it, it did not obliterate the boundaries between fiction and documentary. Winter and Edström do not concern themselves with such conventional cinematic designations, nor, in fact, with “cinema” as such. Even if one can glean the influences of such filmmakers as James Benning and Pedro Costa, the film predominantly draws upon a litany of artistic forebears and thinkers mainly from outside the cinema (a fair number of whom are touched upon in the detailed interview that follows).

Though the process of watching the onset of life's end yields gut-wrenching moments, some recorded, some reconstructed, it makes little sense to extract one scene from the whole picture, as the film's ultimate strength lies in its refusal to privilege, well, anything: an image of a tree means as much as a visit to an onsen, three people walking in the dark, a farmer hoeing her land, or a black screen with no image at all, only an intricately composed soundscape (as the quote introducing the film reads, “Until the moment you are dead you can still hear”). Make no mistake: though mortality is front and centre, this is a salute to the possibilities provided by cinema, a celebration of life. This brief introduction does no justice to the experience of watching *The Works and Days*, an utterly confident, magisterial effort that will stand the test of time. ♦

The Time of Our Lives by Nicolas Rapold

The following article was originally published in the New York Times, July 15, 2021

In “The Works and Days (of Tayoko Shiojiri in the Shiotani Basin),” a woman moves through life on her family's farm in a Japanese mountain village. As her husband falls ill, she spends more and more time on the chores, though visits from friends and relatives bring comfort and joy. Shot over 14 months, the film is a life event in and of itself, spanning eight hours.

You may flash back to a line from “Inside Llewyn Davis,” delivered by Bud (F. Murray Abraham) after hearing Llewyn's (Oscar Isaac) song: “I don't see a lot of money here.” But watching “The Works and Days,” I began to feel that it could perfectly suit someone breaking a pandemic moviegoing drought: Its homey environs and lushly photographed natural world induce a heightening of the senses and an attention to lovely subtleties of light, color and fellow feeling.

How the movie passes the time is how you or I would probably pass the time, or much of it — through the routines and conversations that bind together our moments and ourselves. The film opens with a hilarious drinking session, followed by a drive home that drops us into the domestic sphere at the film's heart. Tayoko (Tayoko Shiojiri) —