

## EXTREME PRIVATE EROS: LOVE SONG 1974

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Hara Kazuo; Japan 1974; Second Run; region-free Blu-ray; b&w; Japanese with English subtitles; Certificate TBC; 93 minutes; 1.33:1. Extras: interview with Hara; introduction by critic Chris Fujiwara; bonus footage; trailers; booklet.

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REVIEWED BY NICK BRADSHAW

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Long before 'Asia Extreme' became a marketing tag, this second film by Hara Kazuo – best known for his next, *The Emperor's Naked Army Marches On* (1987) – broke ground in its intimate depiction of sexual disquiet and defiance. Presenting not as fly-on-the-wall documentary but rather in a mode you might call crawling dog, it starts with the filmmaker following Takeda Miyuki, his ex and the mother of their young child, to Okinawa in 1972 – she seeking a fresh start, he hoping “to deal with the feelings I still had for her”, seeing the film as his ticket to keeping the connection. (The child goes unmentioned and unnamed, though is often in frame.)

The first live sequence pitches into the middle of a fight between Miyuki and her new partner Sugako, a fellow bar hostess who has taken up with a Black American GI; that Miyuki's ex is waving a camera between them may be a further cause of tension. A second trip finds Miyuki pregnant by a different GI, Paul, and exultant at her racial mixing; for the third, Hara brings along his producer and new partner Kobayashi Sachiko, who Miyuki tries to turn against the filmmaker, and who by the next visit is pregnant herself. There are also affronting scenes of Okinawa's sexual economy, from the one-note relations with the occupying American soldiers to encounters with the women and girls around Bar Ginza, all of which stokes Miyuki's incipient feminist rebellion – her attempts to dispense an anti-man pamphlet among the local sex workers get Hara beaten up by yakuza. Miyuki seizes the film as a stage for her independence, notably back in Tokyo in an extended birthing scene on newspapers in front of just the two filmmakers, the explicitness of which is only allayed by Hara's hazy focus. After midwifing Sachiko's baby in turn, Miyuki finds partial sanctuary in a mother-child commune.

Raw and ragged, shot on grungy 16mm black-and-white, with a soundtrack that rarely synchs, *Extreme Private Eros* has a stylistic scrappiness that perfectly mirrors Miyuki's ad-lib radicalism. Enthralled by her passion and intuitive liberation quest (Miyuki shares the scratchy defiance of some of Imamura Shōhei's heroines), the film is driven by the tensions and power ambiguities between forthright subject and reticent director – like a rejectionist comedy of remarriage. It makes for an incomparable document of sexual dialectics, perverse, fertile and unresolved.

**DISC:** Second Run's high-definition transfer presents a lovely reproduction of this warts-and-all one-off. A brief 2018 Q&A with Hara at the International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam and Chris Fujiwara's self-recorded video intro keep with the film's unvarnished aesthetic. The differences of reading between Fujiwara and booklet essays by Tony Rayns and Ela Bittencourt (not least over how much sex we see) attest to the film's richness of meaning.

