

***Daisies* (1966): A Radical Exploration of Feminist Rebellion through Absurdity**

***Küçük Papatyalar* (1966): Absürdite Üzerinden Feminist İsyanın Radikal Bir Keşfi**

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Abstract

This study employs feminist film critique to explore Věra Chytilová's *Daisies* (1966) as a radical feminist intervention within cinema. Drawing on thematic film analysis, it situates the film within the broader discourse of feminist theory, highlighting how Chytilová challenges patriarchal representations of femininity through a distinctive and subversive cinematic language. Utilizing absurdist techniques such as discontinuity editing, abrupt jump cuts, shifts in color saturation, and rapid non-diegetic inserts, the film deliberately disrupts conventional narrative coherence and visual norms, thereby destabilizing dominant systems of meaning shaped by phallogocentric logic. *Daisies* follows two young women whose anarchic behavior and playful defiance expose the artificiality and performative nature of socially constructed gender roles. Through the use of carnivalesque and grotesque elements, the film constructs a space where women resist conformity not through assimilation but by dismantling, mocking, and reconstructing the symbolic order on their own terms. The study analyzes key scenes and symbolic moments to demonstrate how the film uses absurdity as a tool to critique the restrictive frameworks imposed on women. Ultimately, this article positions *Daisies* as a timeless masterpiece of feminist cinema—one that not only captures the cyclical, often nihilistic struggles of women under patriarchy but also continues to provoke critical reflection and inspire new generations of feminist thought and artistic expression.

Keywords: *Absurdism, Daisies, écriture féminine, feminist cinema, patriarchal critique.*

Özet

Bu çalışma, Věra Chytilová'nın *Daisies* (Küçük Papatyalar, 1966) filmini feminist film eleştirisi ve tematik film analizi yöntemiyle inceleyerek, sinema alanında radikal bir feminist müdahale olarak değerlendirmektedir. Chytilová, süreksiz kurgu, ani kesmeler, dış-diegetik eklemeler, renk doygunluğu değişimleri ve absürt anlatım teknikleriyle geleneksel anlatı yapısını ve görsel normları altüst ederek, ataerkil kadınlık temsillerine karşı güçlü bir itiraz ortaya koyar. Film, iki genç kadının anarşik davranışları aracılığıyla toplumsal cinsiyet rollerinin yapaylığını ve kırılganlığını görünür kılar. Karnavalesk ve grotesk anlatım stratejileriyle inşa edilen bu sinemasal başkaldırı, kadınların düzeni yeniden bozma ve kurma süreçlerini hicivsel ve eleştirel biçimde temsil eder. *Daisies*, kadınlara dayatılan sınırlamaları

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absürtlük aracılığıyla sorgularken, kadın özgürleşmesinin ataerkil sistem içinde döngüsel, çatışmalı ve çoğu zaman nihilist doğasını ortaya koyar. Film, estetik düzeyde izleyiciyi sarsarken, ideolojik düzeyde anlam üretim süreçlerine müdahale eder. Çalışma, *Daisies*'i feminist sinemanın zamansız ve çarpıcı bir örneği olarak konumlandırmakta; filmin, hâlâ eleştirel düşüncüyü kışkırtan ve ilham vermeye devam eden bir sanat eseri olduğunu ileri sürmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Absürdizm. Daisies, écriture feminine, feminist sinema, ataerkil eleştiri.*

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Introduction

Věra Chytilová (1929-2014) was a pioneering Czech film director, often hailed as a leading figure of the Czech New Wave.¹ Born in 1929 in Ostrava, Czechoslovakia, she initially studied philosophy and architecture before pursuing film direction at the Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (FAMU), graduating in 1962. Chytilová gained international acclaim for her innovative and avant-garde filmmaking style, characterized by a bold blend of surrealism and dark humor.

Her most famous work, *Daisies* [*Sedmikrásky*], released in 1966, is a subversive and visually inventive film that mocks and critiques conventional norms in both content and form, establishing her as a revolutionary voice in cinema. Despite facing censorship and a temporary ban on her work during the Communist regime, Chytilová continued to create films that challenged political and social conventions. Throughout her career, she remained a staunch advocate for creative freedom and artistic integrity, producing notable avant-garde works like *Fruit of Paradise* (1970), which entered into the 1970 Cannes Film Festival, and *The Apple Game* (1976), which won the Silver Hugo award at the Chicago International Film Festival.²

Her later films were screened at various international film festivals, including *Wolf's Hole* (1987) at the 37th Berlin International Film Festival, *A Hoof Here, a Hoof There* (1989) at the 16th Moscow International Film Festival, and *The Inheritance or Fuckoffguysgoodday* (1992) at the 18th Moscow International Film Festival. Chytilová's contributions to cinema were recognized with numerous awards and honors, including a special award from the Czech Lion Awards in 1999 for her lifelong contribution to Czech cinema, the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, and the Medal of Merit.

Chytilová's films, often emerging as highly-entertaining powerful critiques of societal norms, continue to inspire filmmakers worldwide. To mark the 10th anniversary of Věra Chytilová's passing in 2014, the present study seeks to honor her influential legacy by revisiting one of her most groundbreaking works—*Daisies* (1966). The aim of the paper is to contribute to the ongoing appreciation of Chytilová's contributions to film, and although through most of her life Věra Chytilová avoided being labeled as a feminist filmmaker, her *Daisies* emerges as an unambiguous expression of female rebellion and anti-patriarchal outrage, marking the film as a ripe feminist commentary on gender politics—which emerges as a contemporary theme even almost sixty years later after the release of the film. The article posits Chytilová's work within

¹ The Czech New Wave describes the rise of a group of talented young filmmakers during the political thaw of de-Stalinization in the 1960s. This period ended in August 1968 when the liberal vision, promoted by President Alexander Dubček, was crushed by direct Soviet military intervention. While some directors from this movement, like Miloš Forman and Jan Němec emigrated to the West, others, including Věra Chytilová, stayed in Czechoslovakia despite being banned from filmmaking for several years. Additionally, many New Wave films were permanently banned by government decree. For more on the Czech New Wave and the nationalized film industry in Czechoslovakia, see Peter Hames (1985), *The Czechoslovak New Wave*; and Bjorn Ingvaldstad (n.d.), *After the Velvet Revolution: An Industrial Survey of the Czech and Slovak Film Industries in the Cold War Era*. These works detail the impact of the 1945 nationalization of the Czech film industry.

² Some other films directed by Věra Chytilová are: *The Ceiling* (1961), *A Bagful of Fleas* (1962), *Something Different* (1963), "At the World Cafeteria" in *Pearls of the Deep* (1966), *Inexorable Time* (1978), *Prefab Story* (1979), *Calamity* (1981), *Chytilová Versus Forman—Consciousness of Continuity* (1981), *The Very Late Afternoon of a Faun* (1983), *Prague: The Restless Heart of Europe* (1984), *The Jester and the Queen* (1987), *Tomáš Garrigue Massaryk* (1990), *My Citizen of Prague Understand Me* (1991), *Trap, Trap, Little Trap* (1998), *Flights and Falls* (2000), *Exile from Paradise* (2001), *Searching for Ester* (2005), *Pleasant Moments* (2006). (1979), *Calamity* (1981), *Chytilová Versus Forman—Consciousness of Continuity* (1981), *The Very Late Afternoon of a Faun* (1983), *Prague: The Restless Heart of Europe* (1984), *The Jester and the Queen* (1987), *Tomáš Garrigue Massaryk* (1990), *My Citizen of Prague Understand Me* (1991), *Trap, Trap, Little Trap* (1998), *Flights and Falls* (2000), *Exile from Paradise* (2001), *Searching for Ester* (2005), *Pleasant Moments* (2006).

feminist discourse, employing feminist film critique in order to explore Chytilová's *Daisies* as a radical feminist intervention within cinema that keeps shaping feminist cinema.

Daisies, Chytilová's masterpiece, became a cornerstone of the Czech New Wave—a movement characterized by its creative avant-garde techniques and by being radically critical, often offering satirical commentaries on society. At first glance, *Daisies* appears as a bizarre, chaotic, and nonsensical film that breaks many established cinematic rules, unfolding in a wild and out-of-control narrative, stitched together in a disturbed flow. However, beneath its chaotic visuals and erratic editing, which uses absurd imagery that both confuse and entertain the viewer, the film conveys a profound critique of societal norms, particularly those related to gender roles and norms as this paper suggests. Utilizing *Dadaist techniques*³ in such a way that seems to aim to simply entertain, the film is rich in thought-provoking symbolism, emerging as an allegory for the desire for freedom—both artistic and ideological—as a woman. Even almost sixty years after its release, *Daisies* continues to entertain and awaken its audience.

While *Daisies* unfolds within feminist rhetoric, as this paper suggests, both in content and form, the context in which the film was made reflects the conservative feminism endorsed by Soviet Marxism, promoting the ideal of a hard-working, hopeful, and courageous woman. In this sense, Chytilová's film undermines not only the structures set up by institutionalized patriarchy but it also subverts the structured feminism of the communist patriarchy from within. Thus, the liberated, almost wild, feminism depicted in *Daisies* is far from that form of feminism that the Czechoslovakian government supported at the time. This is also depicted through the narrative mode of a female director, earning the film censorship due to its transgressive mode of representation that did not comply with the system nor respected the established structures and the conventional order set by authoritative forces. In other words, Chytilová's film embodies a feminist anarchic refusal to play the assigned roles established by ongoing systems, challenging and subverting norms both within its narrative and simultaneously, by its very form. Therefore, the film can be read as an allegory for female desire for freedom—both ideologically, as a woman, and artistically, as a female director. The personal and artistic gratification, even if counterproductive at the time, is thus viewed as a powerful act of rebellion against the male-dominated and male-centric order, socially and artistically. Hence, the protagonists' actions in *Daisies* align with the representation of the director's perspective, representing a radical alternative to conformity and obedience.

1. Theoretical Framework

To ground the analysis, the article briefly explores two key elements: Czech cinema within the context of absurdism, and feminist film theory. By zooming in on these components, this proposed framework provides the necessary context to interpret *Daisies* as a radical feminist intervention within cinema, highlighting its significance in challenging socio-political and gender norms.

1.1. Czech Cinema and Absurdism

Czech cinema, particularly during the 1960s, is renowned for its bold experimental approach that frequently challenged social, political, and artistic conventions. This period, known as the Czech New Wave, marked a cultural renaissance in Czechoslovakia, where filmmakers

³*Dadaism* is an avant-garde art movement originating in the early 20th century as a reaction to the horrors of World War I. Characterized by absurdity, irrationality, and the rejection of established artistic conventions, Dadaist techniques often utilize collage, fragmentation, and playful disorder to critique societal norms and values. In *Daisies*, Věra Chytilová incorporates these techniques to destabilize cinematic conventions and challenge patriarchal and ideological structures, reflecting the spirit of rebellion central to both Dadaism and feminist art.

embraced innovative techniques to critique authoritarian regimes and oppressive societal norms. The Czech New Wave thus often employed satire, surrealism, and absurdist storytelling, creating films that blurred the boundaries between reality, fantasy, and chaos.

Věra Chytilová, as one of the most prominent figures of this movement and the first female filmmaker in this tradition, pushed these boundaries even further. Her work subverted traditional cinematic language, utilizing formal experimentation such as discontinuous editing, fragmented narratives, and visual dissonance to deliver biting social critiques operating on multiple levels. Recognizing this background is crucial to interpreting *Daisies* as part of a lineage of Czech cinematic tradition that valued and embraced visual innovation and aesthetic experimentation and prioritized ideological resistance. Situating *Daisies* within the context of the Czech New Wave allows for a deeper understanding of how Chytilová's work both reflects and transcends the movement's conventions, offering a unique feminist critique within a historically male-dominated and male-centric cinematic landscape by strategically utilizing absurdism.

Rooted in existential philosophy and the works of thinkers such as Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre, absurdism articulates the chaos and inherent meaninglessness of human existence. In film, absurdism manifests through chaotic narratives, disjointed storytelling, and the portrayal of nonsensical behavior, often challenging the audience's expectations and disrupting the viewers's sense of coherence and logic. Thriving on the act of undermining traditional structures, absurdism destabilizes reality and exposes the futility of rational systems. In *Daisies*, absurdism becomes central to both form and content. The protagonists, Marie I and Marie II, embody anarchic rebellion as they reject societal norms through subversive and often nonsensical acts. Their purposeless actions, depicted in ongoing fragmentations—from indulging in excess to destroying conventional symbols of femininity—exemplify the absurdity of their existence within a patriarchal bureaucratic system. Chytilová's formal techniques, such as jump cuts, rapid visual juxtapositions, and surreal imagery, further amplify this absurdity, destabilizing conventional expectations regarding the plot, character development, and cinematic continuity.

By embracing absurdism, Chytilová's approach aims to critique not only the rigid societal expectations imposed on women by male-centric structures but also the broader social structures that maintain and perpetuate these restrictions. In this way, *Daisies* utilizes absurdity as a technique to expose the hypocrisy when it comes to gender roles, paradoxically revealing the futility of seeking meaning or even liberation within such male-serving, patriarchal frameworks. Thus, absurdism becomes both a stylistic choice and a powerful feminist statement that seeks to underscore the cyclical struggles of female resistance.

1.2. Feminist Theory

Feminist film theory provides a critical framework for analyzing how cinema constructs, reinforces, or subverts established notions of gender and traditional gender roles. Emerging in the 1970s alongside second-wave feminism, this theoretical approach examines the ways in which films both reflect and shape societal attitudes toward gender. One of the foundational contributions to feminist film critique is Laura Mulvey's 1975 seminal essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", which introduced the fundamental concept of the *male gaze*. Mulvey argues that mainstream cinema often objectifies women by positioning them as passive objects of visual and narrative pleasure for the heterosexual male viewer. In other words, a female form of screen serves to address male desire through practices of fabricating and imposing the *male gaze* on the viewer. This dynamic, according to Mulvey, is perpetuated through cinematic

techniques such as camera angles, framing, and narrative structures that prioritize the perspective of male characters and implied male spectators (Mulvey, 1975). Feminist film theory critiques this dynamic by interrogating the representation of women in film, focusing on how they are often reduced to stereotypes and symbolic figures that either serve the development of male characters or uphold and perpetuate patriarchal norms by performances of established gender roles. Female characters are frequently depicted as either idealized figures of desire (the Madonna) or dangerous and destructive forces (the Femme Fatale or the Monstrous-Feminine⁴), reinforcing a binary that limits the complexity of women's identities and experiences.⁵ Additionally, feminist film criticism not only explores how such portrayals are designed to align with patriarchal expectations but also how many of female directors strive to challenge these entrenched norms precisely through innovative storytelling.⁶

Beyond Mulvey's concept of the objectifying *male gaze*, feminist film theorists have further expanded the conversation to include issues such as intersectionality, the impact of race and class on gender representation, and the ways in which many female filmmakers aim to challenge traditional cinematic codes. For example, in *Black Looks*, bell hooks expands Mulvey's theory to consider how race intersects with gender in cinematic representation, coining the term *oppositional gaze* to describe how women of color engage critically with films that marginalize or ignore their presence (1992). Feminist theorists also examine how women's agency is portrayed on screen, analyzing whether female characters possess autonomy, complexity, and depth beyond their relationships to male characters. Filmmakers like Agnès Varda, Chantal Akerman, and Jane Campion have been celebrated for disrupting traditional cinematic norms by presenting nuanced and multifaceted portrayals of women, often centering female subjectivity and experiences. Within this context, the work of Kaja Silverman, particularly her psychoanalytic approach, sheds light on the ways female voices are constructed in film, foregrounding the importance of reclaiming female subjectivity within visual arts.⁷ Similarly, Linda Williams's studies explores the ways in which visual and narrative techniques are used to frame female sexuality and power, particularly in genres that challenge or reinforce patriarchal ideologies.⁸

Besides the practices of representation, feminist film theory also explores how cinematic forms and aesthetics may be deployed to subvert entrenched patriarchal norms. For instance, in *And the Mirror Cracked*, Anneke Smelik discusses how experimental feminist filmmakers often reject linear narratives and traditional forms of storytelling, employing instead fragmented structures, nonlinear editing, and direct address, precisely in order to disrupt the viewer's passive reception and instead, encourage critical engagement with the film (1998).⁹ Another notable study is Patricia White's *Feminism and Film*, in which the author covers various ways

⁴ For more on the Monstrous-Feminine, see Barbara Creed (1993), *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, investigating various types of monsters that women are portrayed as in horror films, such as vampires, archaic mothers, witches, mythical creatures (Medusa), possessed monsters, and so on.

⁵ For more on feminist approaches to film theory and criticism, especially focusing on the representation of a woman and female spectatorship, see Annette Kuhn (1982), *Women's Pictures: Feminism and Cinema*.

⁶ For more on the relationship between women as spectators, filmmakers, and subjects in film, including insights on practices of female filmmakers in challenging patriarchal norms in cinematic representation, see E. Ann Kaplan (1983), *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera*.

⁷ For more on feminist criticism that particularly explores the representation of women's agency and autonomy on screen, see Kaja Silverman (1988), *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema*.

⁸ For more on the representation of gender and sexuality in film, especially focusing on the visual and narrative dynamics and on how certain genres, such as melodrama and pornography, frame women in terms of power and visibility, see Williams, Linda (1989), *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible"*.

⁹ For an overview of feminist film theory and its application to various cinematic works, see Anneke Smelik (1998), *And the Mirror Cracked: Feminist Cinema and Film Theory*.

of feminist approaches to subverting patriarchal cinematic codes, provides a broader historical overview, and analyzes how feminist approaches to filmmaking evolved alongside queer theory and postcolonialism, further enriching the field (2015).

Within the context of contemporary cinema, feminist film theory continues to evolve, further addressing intersectional feminist topics such as queer theory, postcolonialism and neocolonialism, racialisation and class, ecocriticism, issues regarding (dis)ability, and the role of digital media in reshaping gender narratives, to name just a few. For instance, within feminist intersectionality, Sue Thornham's work highlights how feminist film theory intersects with other critical frameworks, emphasizing its relevance in understanding modern cinematic representations of gender (1999).¹⁰ Feminist film theory thus remains an essential tool for understanding how films influence and reflect societal attitudes toward gender, serving both as a critique of patriarchal structures and a celebration of subversive, often empowering representations of women both on screen and behind the camera.

Going back to *Daisies*, Chytilová's film subverts the patriarchal cinematic constructs by refusing to conform to traditional depictions of femininity. Her protagonists are not portrayed as passive objects of the *male gaze*; instead, they actively resist, and even mock, gender expectations that the system aims to impose upon them. Through their playful, anarchic behavior and the refusal to adhere to everyday societal norms, Marie I and Marie II reclaim agency over their female bodies and identities. Chytilová's formal disruptions—including fragmented editing, *grotesque* imagery, and visual excess—aims to further dismantle precisely those conventions that are typically deployed to objectify the representation of women in film. Moreover, *Daisies* also aligns with the feminist critique of consumer culture and the patriarchal oppression that is linked to consumerism, precisely in its practices of regulating the female body. The protagonists' hedonistic indulgence in food, fashion, and destruction can be therefore interpreted as a satirical commentary on commodification of women's bodies and on regulation of their roles. By embracing chaos and absurdity, the film challenges viewers to question the very structures that confine and even define femininity and womanhood, exposing their inherent limitations. In this sense, Chytilová's work not only critiques patriarchal norms but also foreground the radical potential of absurdism to serve as a feminist tool for resistance and liberation. By combining Czech cinema's subversive traditions, absurdist philosophy, and feminist film theory, the present framework positions *Daisies* as a pioneering feminist artifact, designed to disrupt societal (content) and cinematic (form) conventions in order to draw attention on those issues that indeed impact everyday life. Thus, Chytilová's innovative techniques and her entertaining feminist critique continue to inspire contemporary discussions about gender, power, and the role of cinema in challenging oppressive systems.

2. Film Analysis

2.1. Synopsis: The Story of Marie and Marie

The film centers on two teenage girls, both named Marie, played by Jitka Cerhová and Ivana Karbanová. Neither actress had prior acting experience, which contributes to the raw, unpolished energy they bring to their roles. The Maries are best friends and partners in crime who decide that since the world is spoiled and corrupt, they will be too. The film follows their journey, marked by hilarious, destructive pranks, silliness, and rowdiness, as they rebel against the materialistic and the patriarchal society in which they live.

¹⁰ For more on various aspects of feminist film theory, including its intersections with queer theory and psychoanalysis, see Sue Thornham (1999), *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*.

The plot unfolds depicting their *carnavalesque* overindulgence, performed purely for the sake of doing it: manipulating men, stealing money from a woman, lying, and pretending by role playing—all these actions the Maries dismiss as common behavior. Additionally, the film continually depicts the Maries as willingly *abjectifying* themselves for instance, by littering the space around them and by constantly eating and wasting food in indulgence. This rebellion is portrayed as a female celebration of meaningful chaos on multiple levels as the Maries find immense joy in toying with men, overindulging in food, and causing chaos wherever they go for no apparent reason.

2.2. The Opening Scene

The opening shot of *Daisies* is in black-and-white, introducing the audience to the main characters, Marie I and Marie II, sitting side by side and looking bored (Figure 1). Suddenly, one of the Maries refers to them as “Panna,” which translates to “doll” and/or “virgin” in Czech, and the other agrees. Taking this definition of themselves literally, the girls start to move like dolls, with the scene formally depicting their stiffness and lifelessness, portraying their arms and legs creaking as they move.



Figure 1: Opening Scene: Marie and Marie Bored

Even after their rebellious action in the following scene, where the Maries eat the symbolic apples of knowledge, Marie I and Marie II are both portrayed as superficial, almost two-dimensional, cardboard cut-out stereotypical images of women rather than developed into complex, well-rounded characters. The director, Věra Chytilová, herself stated: “We made the girls look like dolls or puppets from the beginning because it was our intention to make it clear that this was not a psychological portrayal. This was not actually realistic.”¹¹ Thus, the film addresses feminism precisely by not depicting the Maries as conscious feminists who try to challenge the patriarchal order but rather as mere images of the representation of a woman, signifying the emptiness of such representations constructed by the patriarchal system that reduce the meaning of being a woman and womanhood itself to a ridiculous, even absurd, image.

This portrayal of the Maries becomes symbolic of how women like them might feel in a male-dominated society before realizing that they can use the patriarchal view of them to their own

¹¹ See Panel discussion with Věra Chytilová, Milena Jelinek, Amos Vogel, and Jerry Carlson, translated by Caterina Pavlitová; Brooklyn Academy of Music, New York, 19 November 2000.

advantage. *Daisies* thus becomes a narrative that depicts living dolls who realize the limits of their subject position within patriarchal structures and thus, set out to over-perform their constructed-ness to the point that their compliance subverts from within the patriarchal establishment that is designed not only to limit but also define female subjectivity. In other words, Marie I and Marie II are stereotypes who are aware of their stereotypical roles, and they overplay their constructed femininity, taking advantage precisely of their stereotyped femininity. The Maries therefore decide to become hyper-feminine caricatures playing innocence, ridiculing the men who pursue them, and exposing the absurdity of societal norms that contract gender roles.

The director's approach addresses and aligns with the concept later developed by feminist theorists like Laura Mulvey, whose work discussed the mechanism of the *male gaze* in cinema (Mulvey, 1975). By portraying the Maries as hyper-feminine dolls, Chytilová critiques the way women are often reduced to mere objects of visual pleasure, serving the *male gaze* in film and by extension, in society.¹² This method of over-performing their roles can be therefore seen as a form of *strategic essentialism*—a term coined by postcolonial theorist Gayatri Spivak—where the Maries exaggerate their performance of femininity precisely to undermine the stereotype-ness imposed on them (Spivak, 1987).¹³ In summary, the opening scene of *Daisies* sets the tone for the film's critique of patriarchal society by introducing its protagonists as stereotypical dolls who eventually use their constructed identities to subvert the very system that confines their female identities. The film's strategy of aligning with over-performance and utilizing caricature serves as a powerful feminist statement, challenging the audience to question the gender norms and imposed stereotypes that shape women's lives.

2.3. A Satirical Take on Female Stereotypes

Chytilová uses the Maries' childlike and immature behavior as a satirical tool aiming to undermine the common practice when women are being treated as childlike and dependent by the system of patriarchy. By embracing and exaggerating stereotypical representations of femininity and portraying the Maries as perpetually child-like and beautiful—figures who, despite their adult age, are never treated as adults—the film subverts the traditional *Madonna-like* ideal from within, using the very conventions of the stereotype to undermine it. Moreover, by depicting the Maries' exuberant enjoyment in manipulating male affections—tricking older men into lavish spending only to mock them for their age—the film destabilizes the opposing stereotype of the *fallen woman* and challenges patriarchal structure through acts of playful disobedience and defiance

By portraying Marie and Marie as constantly overindulging in food in a distinctly *carnavalesque* manner—willingly *abjectifying* themselves—and instigating disorder wherever they go, the film presents a transgressive vision of female behavior that defies normative boundaries of decency. Their exaggerated actions disrupt the socially constructed divide between private and public identities, particularly as they pertain to women. This deliberate transgression offers a critical commentary on the restrictive expectations imposed on female conduct, suggesting the need for

¹² *Hyper-femininity* refers to the exaggerated performance of conventional feminine traits, such as physical appearance, mannerisms, and behaviors and emphasizes the mechanism of societal gender norms. While the performance of hyper-femininity might be seen as reinforcing stereotypes, hyper-feminine performances can also serve as subversive tools when used deliberately to expose gender politics and critique patriarchal expectations of established gender roles.

¹³ In *In Other Worlds*, Gayatri Spivak introduced the concept of *strategic essentialism* to describe the temporary and conscious adoption of essentialist identities by marginalized groups as a means of political resistance (1987). In this context, the Maries' exaggerated femininity acts as a strategic tool to highlight and destabilize gender stereotypes, illustrating how compliance with constructed identities can be turned against the system itself.

more expansive and pluralistic conceptions of femininity and womanhood that move beyond stereotypical representations. This subversive approach is deeply informed by Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the *carnavalesque*¹⁴ and the *grotesque*¹⁵, which describe aesthetic modes of expression that undermine dominant social norms through humor, excess, and chaos (Bakhtin, 1968). In *Daisies*, the Maries' anarchic and irreverent behavior mirrors these concepts, transforming the film's world into a *grotesque* carnival that challenges conventional authority and hierarchies.

Chytilová's approach in *Daisies* can be also understood as an amplification of Judith Butler's theory of *gender performativity*¹⁶, which conceptualizes gender not as an innate identity but rather as a series of repeated acts and behaviors sanctioned by societal norms (Butler, 1990). By deliberately over-performing femininity, the Maries expose the constructed and imitative nature of gender roles, revealing them as performances rather than essential truths.

Additionally, the film aligns with Julia Kristeva's theory of the *abject*¹⁷, which defines the *abject* as that which is cast out or repressed—as the *other* or the *unclean*—in order to maintain the illusion of a coherent identity and social order (Kristeva, 1982). Kristeva views the *abject* as a site of both horror and fascination, precisely because it challenges identity and order. The Maries' acts of *abjection*—manifested through *grotesque* excess, unrestrained consumption, and willful disorder and chaotic behavior—challenge the very boundaries that delineate the proper and the improper, the clean and the unclean, thus rebelling against the norms designed to discipline and contain female subjectivity.

Therefore, the interpretation of *Daisies* calls for a view acknowledging its staging a rebellion against the *Lacanian Symbolic* order¹⁸—the network of law and structure (social, linguistic, and so on) that mediates subject formation (Lacan, 1977). For Lacan, a human subject operates within the Symbolic by having internalized, been enacting, and perpetuating rules and conventions of the (male-centric) order. By defying the logic, rules, and hierarchies of this symbolic system through their erratic, chaotic actions, the Maries resist integration into the normative structures of meaning and identity that would otherwise confine them.

¹⁴ The *carnavalesque* is a term introduced by Bakhtin to describe a literary and cultural mode that uses humor, chaos, and inversion to challenge dominant norms and hierarchies. In *carnavalesque* spaces, the ordinary rules of society are temporarily suspended, allowing for subversion and liberation through play, satire, and excess. For more on the concept of *carnavalesque* as a liberating force that subverts dominant ideologies, see Mikhail Bakhtin (1968), *Rabelais and His World*.

¹⁵ The *grotesque*, also discussed by Bakhtin, refers to a form of representation that distorts, exaggerates, or deforms the human body and societal norms to create a sense of the bizarre or absurd. It often highlights the material, physical aspects of existence, contrasting the refined ideals of dominant culture. In *Daisies*, grotesque imagery amplifies the Maries' rebellion against patriarchal and social constraints. For more on the concept of *grotesque* as a subversive force, see Mikhail Bakhtin (1968), *Rabelais and His World*.

¹⁶ *Gender performativity*, as theorized by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1990), refers to the idea that gender is not an innate quality but rather a social construct performed through repetitive acts and behaviors. These acts, regulated by societal norms, give the illusion of a stable gender identity. Butler's theory challenges the essentialist view of gender, highlighting how it is continuously reproduced and reinforced through performance.

¹⁷ The *abject* is a concept introduced by Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982). It refers to what is cast off, excluded, or considered impure within society to maintain a sense of identity and order. Kristeva describes the *abject* as that which provokes both disgust and fascination, as it disrupts boundaries between self and other, subject and object.

¹⁸ The *Symbolic* is a key concept in Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory, referring to the social world of language, laws, and cultural norms that individuals enter after the so-called *Mirror Stage*. The Symbolic is the domain where subjectivity is constructed, but it also imposes limits and rules that define an individual's place within society. Lacan argues that to become a subject, individuals must accept the Symbolic's structures, which inherently involve repression and alienation. For more on the concept of *Symbolic* order, see Jacques Lacan (1977), *Écrits: A Selection*.

Through the lens of these critical frameworks, Chytilová's satirical take on female stereotypes emerges as a radical feminist intervention. Rather than simply rejecting patriarchal norms, the film deconstructs these norms from within—mocking and exaggerating tropes such as the virginal maiden or the femme fatale. In doing so, *Daisies* not only critiques the absurdity of gendered expectations but also reclaims space for female agency, pleasure, and disobedience outside the confines of traditional roles.

2.4. Key Scenes and Symbolism

Several scenes in *Daisies* are laden with symbolism and latent meaning. After the black-and-white opening scene, the following sequence is suddenly vivid in color, dropping the characters into a field resembling the Garden of Eden, with an apple tree placed centrally in the frame (Figure 2). This scene invokes the iconography of Eve and the apple—a traditional representation of female temptation and rebellion. This use of Biblical imagery not only critiques the image of a woman within a binary structure of representation (as one or the other), imposed by patriarchal discourse on women, but also reclaims the Biblical Eve as a figure of feminist subversion. This cinematographic choice on the part of the female director serves to further emphasize the concept of female rebellion, precisely by challenging the established modes of representation and signifying practices.



Figure 2: *The Apple Tree Scene: Marie and Marie Dancing*

The space in this scene is depicted as a single field with a centered tree, transporting the viewer from the real world into a mythical space almost magically through a cut scene. This technique uses classical Hollywood continuity editing but notably it subverts its intended purpose. The film employs match on action not to maintain but to violate spatial continuity, creating a radically discontinuous transition from one space to another. Additionally, the shot composition of the Garden of Eden has a flat, almost two-dimensional quality, reminiscent of medieval paintings lacking the Renaissance perspective. This intentional violation of conventional spatial depiction further disorients the audience's sense of three-dimensional space.

When the Maries begin to dance around the tree and eat its apples, the scene serves as a visual metaphor for the Tree of Knowledge, initiating their rebellious actions. The sequence is disrupted by a series of abrupt cuts and jump cuts, depicting the Maries's dancing interspersed with rapid, non-diegetic inserts, each frame presenting a different image. This technique, which is a form of avant-garde anti-animation, exposes the cinematic apparatus, revealing the individual frames that compose a film played at 24 frames per second. Chytilová's use of this

technique highlights the constructed nature of cinema, thematically and formally rejecting conventional filmmaking norms.

The film's flow is further continuously interrupted with fast-edited clips of symbolic visuals, reinforcing the thematic representation of chaos. Suddenly, without any establishment, the characters are transported from the mythical space to their flat, lying on a bed surrounded by apples (Figure 3). This abrupt change in location, using the apples as a graphic link, does not disrupt the narrative flow, however paradoxically; it rather enhances the film's sense of chaos. The seamless yet sudden shift from mythical to real space further adds to the overall sense of disorder, aligning the film's form with its content.



Figure 3: At Home Scene: Marie Lying on the Bed

In this way, Chytilová masterfully employs a blend of surreal imagery, avant-garde techniques, and symbolic storytelling to critique and even subvert traditional representations of women by traditional means and signifying practices. By juxtaposing mythological and real spaces, and using disruptive editing techniques, the film challenges the audience's perceptions and expectations, creating a narrative that is as chaotic and rebellious as its protagonists. This innovative approach not only reinforces the film's feminist themes but also solidifies Chytilová's filmmaking position as a trailblazer in avant-garde cinema, whose work continues to inspire and elicit meaningful dialogues.

2.5. The Subversive *Grotesque* as Feminist Liberation

In *Daisies*, the portrayal of the protagonists as dolls is taken to a *grotesque* extreme in a scene towards the film's conclusion, where the Maries engage in the literal dismemberment of their limbs. This act, depicted with a surreal and absurd quality, literally transforms the Maries into two-dimensional figures, further reinforcing their representation as mere objects rather than human subjects. The *grotesque* exaggeration of their two-dimensionality, with their body parts joyfully floating and spinning around the screen, also aims to subvert traditional notions of women as passive, pretty, and static objects, shifting the subject position of Maries into a subversive *grotesque* depiction (Figure 4).



Figure 4: *The Scissoring Scene: Marie and Marie Cutting off their Body Parts*

This scene, while ostensibly absurd, serves as a profound commentary on the construction of female identity within a patriarchal framework. The Maries's playful and joyful scissoring of each other's limbs introduces a subversive twist to the *grotesque*, transforming what might be a disturbing act into a form of liberating rebellion.¹⁹ The humor and excitement the Maries exhibit in the process provide comic relief, but also invite further exposure, especially through the lens of *Queer theory*.²⁰ The act of cutting off limbs can be thus interpreted as a metaphor for the *deconstruction*²¹ of normative gender roles as well as an act of dismantling of societal expectations imposed on women.

The scene's vibrant and playful aesthetic contrasts sharply with the literal dismemberment depicted on screen, infusing the *grotesque* with a *carnavalesque* quality that underscores the film's subversive tone. This juxtaposition intensifies *Daisies'* critique of patriarchal discourse, which reduces women to flat, stereotypical images devoid of complexity or agency. By presenting such disturbing *grotesque* imagery in a colorful and seemingly joyful manner, Chytilová not only destabilizes traditional representations of femininity but also disrupts the viewer's sense of comfort. The result is a powerful confrontation with the mechanisms of female objectification and the arbitrary, performative boundaries that shape gender identity.

This subversion is emblematic of Chytilová's broader cinematic project, which employs the *grotesque* to critique and deconstruct entrenched gender norms. Through this exaggerated portrayal, the film liberates itself from traditional constraints, offering a radical reimagining of femininity and womanhood that is both provocatively entertaining and deeply unsettling. By pushing the boundaries of conventional narrative and visual representation, *Daisies* engages with feminist and *Queer theories* to challenge and transform the discourse around female identity and agency.

¹⁹The *grotesque*, as theorized by Bakhtin, challenges established norms by blending the comic with the disturbing, often through bodily exaggeration or disruption.

²⁰*Queer theory* interrogates and deconstructs normative gender and sexual identities, advocating for fluidity and resistance to binaries. By challenging fixed gender roles, the Maries' actions can be read as aligning with Judith Butler's exploration of performativity in *Gender Trouble* (1990) and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's articulation of queer disruptions in *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990).

²¹*Deconstruction* is a concept, rooted in Jacques Derrida's philosophy, which involves exposing and dismantling hierarchical binaries and assumptions in cultural texts. In this context, the protagonists' playful dismemberment symbolizes the destabilization of socially constructed gender norms. For more on deconstruction, see Jacques Derrida (1976), *Of Grammatology*.

2.6. The *Abject* as Feminist Subversion

In *Daisies*, the concept of the *abject* is strategically employed to challenge and destabilize traditional constructions of femininity. The film repeatedly portrays the Maries engaging in acts of *self-abjection*, most notably through scenes of excessive and uncontrolled consumption (Figure 5). These moments depict the female body in states of disorder and excess, deliberately transgressing societal norms of acceptable feminine behavior. Through its *carnavalesque* and *abject* imagery, the film reframes the female body not as an object of male desire but as an active site of resistance and liberation. By highlighting the Maries' indulgence in food—often portrayed in chaotic, messy, and exaggerated ways—Chytilová offers a pointed critique of patriarchal and phallogocentric frameworks that seek to regulate and discipline female bodies within narrowly defined standards of decorum and restraint.

One particularly striking scene features one of Marie's suitors professing his love over the phone with obsessive persistence. The Maries, entirely indifferent to his romantic declarations, instead turn their attention to and engage in playful and exaggerated consumption of phallic-shaped foods such as bananas, cucumbers, and sausages. Their act of cutting these foods with scissors serves as a symbolic performance of Freudian *castration anxiety*²², ridiculing and undermining the male fear of losing phallic potency and control. Through this scene of irrelevant display, the Maries subvert traditional gender roles and defy the patriarchal gaze, asserting their autonomy through ironic detachment and *carnavalesque* humor.



Figure 5: The *Abjectifying* Scene: Marie and Marie Eating Symbolic Food

The culmination of the film's *abject* aesthetics occurs in the final scene, where the Maries break into an opulent dining hall and immerse themselves in a *carnavalesque* spectacle of *hedonistic*²³ excess. Here they voraciously devour lavishly arranged food and drink, engage in

²²*Castration anxiety* is a concept from Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, referring to a male's unconscious fear of losing power, particularly symbolized by the phallus. It arises from the perceived threat of emasculation and is central to Freud's discussion of psychosexual development and the Oedipus complex. For more on castration anxiety, see Sigmund Freud (1900), *The Interpretation of Dreams*; Sigmund Freud (1905), *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*; and Sigmund Freud (1924), "The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex".

²³The term *hedonism* is a philosophical concept that refers to the ethical theory that pleasure (in the sense of the satisfaction of desires) is the highest good and proper aim of human life. While often associated with indulgence and excess, hedonism can also serve as a form of resistance against societal constraints, especially in contexts where pleasure—particularly women's pleasure—is stigmatized or controlled. In the context of feminist and poststructuralist film theory, hedonistic excess can thus function as a political act, especially when it subverts norms of bodily control and feminine decorum. In *Daisies*, the Maries' hedonistic actions challenge patriarchal norms by

chaotic play by hurling food, undress, and dance atop the table (Figure 6). This scene's uninhibited abandon functions not only as a defiance of socially accepted norms but also as an affirmation and a celebration of excess, bodily autonomy, and a rejection of conventional decorum. Through this ecstatic disruption, the Maries embody the liberatory potential of the *abject*, challenging normative constructions of *docile* femininity and the disciplined female body.²⁴



Figure 6: The Dining Hall Scene: Marie and Marie in Food Fight

Prior to the final sequence, the film presents a striking scene where the Maries play in a trash yard, adorning themselves with discarded metal scraps as if they were fashion accessories (Figure 7). This playful performance is interspersed with rapidly flashing non-diegetic images of women clipped from magazine. Symbolically, this juxtaposition of the *grotesque* and the idealized underscores the superficiality and objectification of women perpetuated by mass media.²⁵ By embracing and playfully exaggerating these *abject* and commodified images, the Maries parody, humorously subvert, and critique the media's reduction of women to mere passive, decorative objects. Overall, Chytilová's strategic use of the *abject* in *Daisies* operates as a radically potent feminist intervention, one that both confronts and dismantles conventional representations of femininity, women, and womanhood. Through *grotesque* aesthetics and excessive, transgressive (*abject*) consumption, the film challenges the patriarchal regulation of the female body, offering instead a radical, subversive reimagining of female identity and agency.

reclaiming bodily autonomy and celebrating uninhibited enjoyment. For more on hedonism within feminist context, see Elizabeth Grosz (1994), *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*.

²⁴Foucault's concept of the *docile body* has been widely adopted by feminist scholars to describe how social institutions and cultural norms regulate and produce compliant, disciplined female bodies. Sandra Lee Bartky, in particular, expands on this in her essay "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power" (1988), arguing that femininity itself becomes a disciplinary regime through practices such as dieting, makeup, and posture training, all of which aim to produce a body that is small, controlled, and aesthetically pleasing. For more on the outline of *docile body*, see Michel Foucault (1977), *Discipline and Punish*;

²⁵ For a discussion on how media constructs and perpetuates the objectification of women, see Laura Mulvey's foundational essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), in which the author explores explicitly how women are often positioned as passive objects of the male gaze in visual culture. Mulvey's theory has been extended in feminist film and media criticism to analyze how female bodies are commodified and fragmented in advertising and popular culture.



Figure 7: *The Trash Yard Scene: Marie and Marie Playing with Trash*

2.7. Visual and Auditory Chaos

Daisies is renowned for its use of innovative, avant-garde cinematic techniques, including discontinuity editing, jump cuts, and rapid non-diegetic inserts. These formal choices however not only reflect experimental innovation but also function as a visual feminist subversion, foregrounding female creativity and celebrating the anarchic joy embodied by liberated female performance (of the protagonists and well as the filmmaker). Under the direction of pioneering female filmmaker Věra Chytilová, the film thematically and formally rebels against and resists institutionalized patriarchal structures; one way of which is disrupting and subverting the *male gaze* and undermining phallogocentric modes of signifying practices. This is achieved through chaotic, vibrantly constructed visual scenes, often punctuated (and symbolically penetrated) with non-diegetic photographic frames rich in symbolic meaning, while all is accompanied by graphically intense and auditorily graphic, disruptive sound design.

Transitions between scenes and spaces often rely on purely graphic associations without causal or narrative logical, enhancing the sense of disorder and contributing to chaos that mirrors the Maries's own anarchic conduct. This non-linear approach celebrates a non-phallogocentric form of signifying, conveying meaning through graphic (visual) and auditory associations rather than through traditional plot development. For instance, in the club scene where the Maries steal drinks and disrupt a live performance, the film abruptly shifts between monochrome, full color, and tinted monochrome, visually echoing the Maries's unruly, disruptive, boundary-defying behavior (Figure 8).



Figure 8: *A Celebration of Discontinuity Technique: Graphic Associations-Colors*

Although *Daisies* maintains a persistent visual chaos that contributes to its manic atmosphere (just for the sake of it), this disarray unfolds within an internally fluid cinematic logic.

Scene transitions frequently occur mid-shot, not through abrupt cuts but via smooth zooms in on objects that guide the viewer from one space to another through graphic associations rather than narrative causality. For instance, the camera zooms in on a clock in the Maries's flat, synchronized with the rhythmic clicking of its mechanism. This sound motif triggers a sequence of rapidly changing non-diegetic inserts that follow the beat, transporting the viewer into a surreal, non-space sun-tanning scene. There, the clicking rhythm corresponds with shifting color filters. The sequence continues uninterrupted as one Marie removes the other's flower cap; the scene shifts back to realistic coloration, and as the cap is thrown, the camera zooms in on it floating in water. Unexpectedly, apples begin to bubble to the surface, seamlessly leading into a restaurant scene where apples are being served (Figure 9). This fluid but non-causal progression privileges visual and sonic association over narrative coherence, celebrating discontinuity and symbolic excess as aesthetic values in their own right.



Figure 9: A Celebration of Discontinuity Technique: Graphic Associations-Objects

The film presents a distinctly female perspective on artistic expression, deliberately departing from conventional phallogocentric cinematic modes of representations and signifying practices. Even in its portrayal of the protagonists, *Daisies* resists traditional storytelling conventions by casting the Maries simultaneously as heroines and anti-heroines (villains)—mischievous figures who cheat, steal, lie, and manipulate others, thereby unsettling societal order. Chytilová's narrative method rejects the male gaze and the phallogocentric, cause-effect linearity typical of dominant cinematic discourse. Instead, she adopts a feminine- oriented mode of storytelling that emphasizes female agency and exposes the philosophical and ethical complexities of choice—on both thematic and formal levels.

Through disorienting camera angles, unconventional editing techniques, and surreal, fever-dream-like music, the film crafts a sense of chaos that mirrors the Maries's anarchic pursuit of liberation. The vibrant colors and playful sound used to frame their transgressions (pranks and foolery) provide viewers with constant aesthetic pleasure while simultaneously offering a form of cathartic escape from entrenched forms, norms, and constraints. In this way, the film is subversive not only in content but also in form. What appears at first to be a purely absurdist narrative subtly destabilizes the very premise of absurdism by imbuing it with political purpose: the celebration of formal freedom and the rejection of normative gender roles. This dual-layered approach invites viewers to reconsider not only the cinematic representation of women but also the broader societal structures that govern gender and expression.

2.8. The Final Act and its Irony

The film offers two ironic and richly layered endings, both of which serve as sharp feminist critiques. The original ending culminates in a *carnavalesque* performance of the *abject* taken to its extreme. The Maries engage in an excessive, chaotic food fight—undressed, dancing on a banquet table, and stomping through the opulent remnants of their feast (Figure 10). The scene

reaches an absurd climax as they swing from a chandelier, only for a sudden cut to drop them into a lake where they appear to drown (Figure 11). This surreal and disorienting conclusion delivers a stark, ironic commentary: without male attention or validation, the Maries's existence seemingly dissipates. In doing so, Chytilová underscores the societal construction of female identity as contingent upon the male gaze, while simultaneously ridiculing that very notion through *grotesque* parody.



Figure 10: *The Food Waste Scene: Marie and Marie Dancing on the Table*



Figure 11: *The Chandelier Scene: Marie and Marie Swinging*

This absurd ending echoes an earlier scene in which the Maries, having realized that men are no longer paying attention to them, begin spitting out bites of stolen corn, littering the streets, and marching while chanting “WE EXIST!”—an attempt to leave both a visual and auditory trace of their presence (Figure 12). This moment reveals their fear of invisibility and suggests that their sense of existence is tethered to male recognition. By portraying their desperate performance for validation, the film foreshadows the Maries’s surreal demise and offers a biting feminist critique: the idea that a woman’s existence is contingent upon being seen—even objectified—through the *male gaze*. Chytilová amplifies the absurdity of this condition, mocking the patriarchal logic that renders women invisible or non-existent when unobserved by men. This nihilistic view is punctuated by the final inter-title, “EVEN IF THEY HAD A CHANCE THEY

WOULD HAVE ENDED UP THIS WAY,” implying a fatalistic conclusion: that within a patriarchal structure, all women are doomed regardless of their choices.



Figure 11: *The Street Scene: Marie and Marie Marching and Chanting*

Departing from a conventional plot resolution, *Daisies* presents an alternative, metaphorical epilogue in which the Maries return to the chaotic dining hall and attempt to clean up their earlier mess. Dressed in makeshift outfits crafted from newspaper, their clothing becomes a literal and symbolic representation of how women are discursively constructed by dominant narratives.²⁶ These newspapers—texts that shape and circulate social truths—function as a metaphor for the internalization of external discourses that define and constrain femininity. Performing obedience, the Maries whisper to themselves that being good, hardworking girls will make them happy. Yet their efforts are hollow; there is no male gaze to observe or reward their submission. Trapped within yet another restrictive stereotype, they gain no satisfaction or liberation from conforming to this ideal.

The film concludes with the Maries lying side by side on the table. One insists, seemingly to herself as much as to the other, that she is happy. The other smiles and responds, “It doesn’t matter”—a moment of eerie resignation that is immediately undercut by the *grotesque* collapse of the chandelier, crushing them (Figure 12). This final, violent image functions as a powerful symbol of their ultimate failure and the cyclical entrapment of female rebellion. Whether they transgress or conform, perform chaos or obedience, the end is the same: silencing, invisibility, and erasure. In this absurd and nihilistic conclusion, Chytilová critiques the futility of women’s efforts to find agency within a patriarchal framework that renders all paths—rebellion or submission—equally doomed.

²⁶ Virginia Woolf critiqued the ways in which literary and historical discourse have shaped and constrained women’s identities, highlighting that male-authored texts often define womanhood from an external, patriarchal perspective (Woolf, 1929). The notion that woman is discursively constructed by dominant (male) narratives became a foundational concept in feminist theory. Simone de Beauvoir famously argued, “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman,” emphasizing that femininity is not innate but culturally and ideologically imposed (de Beauvoir, 1949). This idea was later theorized within poststructuralist frameworks by Michel Foucault, who emphasized the role of discourse in producing subject positions (Foucault, 1972), and further developed by Judith Butler, who argued that gender itself is performatively constituted through repeated discursive acts (Butler, 1990). In this context, the Maries’s newspaper outfits in *Daisies* serve as a literal and ironic manifestation of women being *written into* identity by dominant narratives.



Figure 12: The Alternative Ending Scene: The Second End of Marie and Marie

The never-ending cycle conveyed through the film's dual endings renders the Maries's rebellion ultimately hollow and futile. The freedom the Maries pursue proves illusory and non-existent—not only because they appear to seek validation through male attention, but also because the film suggests that escaping the patriarchal system is virtually impossible.²⁷

Within this framework, the only form of liberation available is aesthetic freedom—an act of subversive artistic autonomy that challenges dominant structures from within rather than seeking to escape them. This notion of aesthetic resistance resonates with Hélène Cixous's concept of *écriture féminine*,²⁸ which advocates for a distinctly feminine mode of expression through experimental, disruptive aesthetics, language, and signifying practices as a challenge to phallogocentric discourse and patriarchal norms (Cixous, 1976). Interpreting *Daisies* through this lens positions the film as a formal feminist rebellion—where aesthetic innovation becomes a feminist praxis in itself.

Conclusion

Daisies stands as a radical cinematic intervention into the gendered norms and expectations imposed on women. Through its chaotic visual language, experimental editing, and satirical narrative structure, the film destabilizes dominant discourses and invites viewers to reconsider socially constructed notions of femininity. The Maries's anarchic rebellion—though ultimately rendered futile—serves as a sharp critique of the oppressive systems that seek to discipline and contain female identity. By deploying *carnavalesque* absurdity, *grotesque* imagery, and liberating *abject* excess, Chytilová creates a feminist aesthetic that is both subversive and

²⁷ Simone de Beauvoir's argument in *The Second Sex* that "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman," highlighting how womanhood is a discursive construction that positions women as the *Other* within a male-defined system, indicates that femininity is constructed through patriarchal discourse—a system from which there is no external position (de Beauvoir, 1949). Luce Irigaray further contends that women cannot find a space outside of patriarchal symbolic structures—thereby are always situated *within* a system of masculine discourse and representation—because these very systems constitute the terms of their subjectivity and resistance (even attempts at rebellion are already inscribed within patriarchal logic) (Irigaray, 1985). For more on the idea that women, as constructed by male-dominated symbolic systems, cannot access a position outside of patriarchy, see Luce Irigaray (1985), *This Sex which Is Not One*.

²⁸ The term *écriture féminine* was introduced by Hélène Cixous in her seminal essay *Le Rire de la Méduse* (*The Laugh of the Medusa*, 1976), where she calls upon women to write themselves into history through forms that defy patriarchal language structures. Cixous argues that traditional language is inherently phallogocentric, and that women must forge a new form of writing—fluid, nonlinear, embodied—that reflects female experience and resists male-dominated discourse.

liberatory. The visual and auditory dissonance does not merely entertain—it disturbs, disrupts, defies, and re-signifies normative forms of representation.

Nearly sixty years after its release, *Daisies* remains a groundbreaking and enduring contribution to feminist cinema. It boldly challenges the absurdities of gender roles and reveals the repetitive cycles of rebellion and containment that shape women’s experiences. In portraying the impossibility of absolute liberation within patriarchal structures, the film asserts the importance of aesthetic resistance. Through its formal innovation and ideological critique, *Daisies* claims a space for feminist expression that resists containment and insists on the power of *écriture féminine*, making it a landmark in the history of feminist filmmaking.

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