



C I N E - F I L E

CHICAGO GUIDE TO INDEPENDENT AND UNDERGROUND CINEMA

Adam Sekuler's **TOMORROW NEVER KNOWS** (New Documentary)

The Nightingale (1084 N. Milwaukee Ave.) — Saturday, 8pm

Adam Sekuler's *TOMORROW NEVER KNOWS* is one of the greatest films about death I've seen—it's a triumph of empathy, a tour de force of emotion, and, perhaps even more monumentally, a prime example of cinema as ontological examination. The film follows Shar, a transgender person with early-onset Alzheimer's, and her partner, Cynthia, as Shar endeavors to voluntarily stop eating and drinking (VSED) in order to leave this life on her own terms. Near the beginning of the film, as Shar and Cynthia review a contract verifying Shar's decision to undertake this process, the person helping them with these documents points out that filming such a declaration can suffice as proof that it was pursued willingly. Thus Sekuler's project becomes that proof, a document of resolve that exists as witness to parts of Shar's life and her death. Even though Sekuler's address in the film, his distance from the subjects is studied and respectful; it's clear he's become involved in their lives (as any filmmaker spending large amounts of time with their subjects is apt to do), but his camera is unobtrusive, neither gawking nor dispassionate. The framing and cinematography are particularly beautiful, infused with a glow that seems to emanate from those on screen. My favorite scenes are of Shar singing and of Shar and Cynthia sitting on a bench overlooking a beautiful view, discussing their relationship. One can feel the empathy behind the camera, the power of patient observation evident in each of these parts. Most striking, though, are the shots of Shar after she's passed on, interspersed randomly in the film's latter half. By cutting between scenes of Shar alive and dead, Sekuler reminds us not just of our own mortality, but of cinema's ability to manifest both conditions. Even more impressive is the multitude of topics with which Sekuler is working, including considerations of Buddhist spirituality and gender identity, Shar's personhood as brilliant and complex in death as it was in life. *Sekuler in person.* (2017, 93 min, Digital Projection) **KS**