

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
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## **Kamikaze** 1989 Wolf Gremm (1942-2015)

### STORY

**Futurism.** Kamikaze—the term refers to the practice among Japanese military pilots, especially late in WW II, of directing their aircraft, on suicide missions, against American military ships and other hardware. In the present film, which concerns a slightly futuristic (the present is 1989) detective thriller. In the world of this thriller forces of evil are quite ready to sacrifice human lives in order to protect and conceal the culture-undermining secret powers they confect on the thirty first floor of a large urban office building.

**Evil** The forces of evil refer to a shadowy aggregate of Comic Book Creators, dissident intellectuals, and glitz covered top executives who seem employed chiefly to harass and scorn the little man, thirty floors of whose working space are subjected, in their central downtown skyscraper, to a purposeless bomb threat. The forces of good have one outstanding, but himself questionable, Hero of Valor and Value, the Police Inspector Jansen, whose spotless record of solved crimes is on the line in the present quest for the bad guys or guys responsible for the office building bomb threat. When finally the true guilty-scare creator identifies himself, the last individual Jansen turns to, we realize that he, Weiss, was simply fed up with the dull witted and value empty futurism of the Combine, and in issuing his bomb threat he was simply avenging himself on his own old employers. As no real moral transaction occurs, in the process by which Jansen determines the guilty ones, it is fitting that Jansen himself in the end achieves no greater reward than the frozen emptiness of the moon on whose surface Neil Armstrong once found himself astride.

**Urban.** The city itself figures as part of the story, for the zapped up, compelling, and meaningless pace of the city, its congestion, pollution, never resting dangers, all this empty buzz backgrounds and in grounds the futuristic evil which the near future promises to bestow on the unlucky mortals who survive there. The predictive powers of this futurism need stretch only a little farther than Gremm takes them, to reach another actuality of the Fall of a Tower, the demise of the World Trade Center on 9/11. By that time the anomie that swamps the urban world of *Kamikaze* has yielded to a kind of urban order, the crushing geometry of a new kamikaze, planes performing as their own missiles. Where thought seems banned, from the world Jansen attempts to straighten out, thought in the form of destructive ideology has replaced it in 2001.

### CHARACTERS

**Inspector Jansen** Inspector Jansen is the police inspector charged with tracking down the bomb threat which is leading to the evacuation of the Combine building, a dominant multi story structure in the center of the city, and a hub of many intersecting business enterprises. The role of Jansen is played by the German director, Werner Fassbinder, a multiply gifted stage, film, and theater figure, who knew acting before he knew directing.

**Nephew.** The Combine Director's own nephew takes on himself the task of misleading Inspector Jansen, about the source of the bomb threat which has forced the evacuation of the Combine Building. The mislead is simple; nephew simply confesses to having committed the misinformation crime, and by so confessing intends to throw the Inspector off the track. When this dodge fails, the nephew simply tries to drive Jansen off the road. But even such blatant evil cannot wipe away the detective.

**Secretary.** The Combine's secretary, a mid-life long term employee, is both an insider to the Company, knowing its tricks and its disinformation powers, and a surprisingly confidential tell-all, who confides to Inspector Jansen that the Combine may well have set up the bomb scare itself, in order to collect insurance, and build a new and better headquarters.

## CHARACTER ANALYSIS

### JANSEN

**Character.** The main character is Inspector Jansen, who has a perfect record of crime solving, and who is, if not the personification of good, at least the personification of professionalism, never to be thrown off track, never to close down his analytic inner mind. His foe, in the present attack on the bad guys, is a shadowy Combine, housed in a lofty edifice in the city center, from where the 'company' manages a vast Comics Industry—itsself a stand in for an all-façade image behind which nefarious behaviors can be carried on without exposure. We do not fall in love with this guardian of justice, the Inspector, but we admire his tenacity.

### Illustrative moments

*Challenged.* The Inspector, like a latter day Oedipus, is at once confronted with the challenge of determining who created the bomb threat which is forcing the evacuation of the crowds of employees who fill the Combine's skyscraper. The Inspector never wavers in his pursuit of these urban bad guys, although he acquires no particular moral sheen from his tenacity.

*Tracking.* The iconic images of the Inspector show him searching like a bloodhound, through the sites where he suspects he might find evidence of the initial bomb threat. Jansen tracks through the corridors, and the inner turns and twists of the being-evacuated Combine Building, in his effort to find clues to the crime. But this tracking, which will eventually branch out into back alleys, pool halls, heroin joints--which will introduce us to the whole culturally imploding city--will turn up only one clue, a handwritten note that leads to the last and actually guilty suspect, an intellectual dissident, bitterly at odds with the Combine for its practices of disinformation.

*Lonely.* In the end, the Inspector is as lonely as Neil Armstrong on the moon. He has courageously unfolded the inner secrets of the malicious Combine disinformation machine, and yet he has nothing to console him except the maintenance of a perfect record of crime-solvings. The Inspector—like everybody else in this hard surfaced film—has no love in his life, lives alone and takes pleasure only in solving those crimes which highlight the social corruptness of the new world of evil. If any figures exceed him in the intensity of their social critique, it must be the dissident intellectuals, settled in a side closet off floor thirty one, who fret that their society-changing ideas cannot be heard. The Inspector does not share their ideals, for his deep analysis, of his own society, has convinced him that power has coagulated inseparably around the flashy up floor CEO's, who have blown us away with information that makes a mockery of itself.

### THEMES

**Anomie.** Like Oedipus, thrashing this way and that in Sophocles' play, in an effort to collect leads, Detective Jansen, in *Kamikaze*, must sort through the disorder which is his city, in his effort to figure out who wrote the bomb threat that is tearing apart his urban center. He makes his way punchingly along the corridors of the threatened building, or up and down the elevators which prove a crucial life line to the threatened thirty first floor of the building. The steely back corridors of the building's floors plunge us into the intertangle of wiring, utility closets, elevator cables, which are the inhuman guts of the urban buildings of our world.

**Cruelty** As we track the camera eye along the city streets surrounding the bomb threatened building, we catch random eyeballs of civil violence and police brutality. On one side riot police confront protestors, while on another the occupants of a paddy wagon are being forced into the streets by truncheon wielding security forces. One has the sense, as in the Hong Kong protests of our moment—7/19—that on all sides order is being enforced only by the slimmest of margins; a social universe like that envisaged by Thomas Hobbes in the *Leviathan*.

**Metallic.** From beginning to end—except in the caption shots of Neil Armstrong at the end, on the moon—we are immersed in the world of the city, which seems to be the only existent environment. There is little vegetation to be seen, much anxiety and metal, for the hard surfaces of the harried individuals cohere with the omnipresence of life inside the unyielding chrome, steel, and wiring that constitute the living interior of a large city.

**Politics.** While this film seems to settle for a film noir detective thriller, with all the apparatus of semi apocalyptic futurism—the film was released in 1982, and envisages a future seven years ahead of it-- it is at the same time a critique of the fast changing social landscape of post WW II Europe. The Ur text underlying *Kamikaze* is *Murder on the Thirty First Floor* by the Swedish novelist, Per Wahloo, written in 1964. That thriller performed over a sharp sense of the morally bankrupt welfare state, which was at the time the environment of Sweden's temporary economic boom.

**Welfare.** The hollowness of that same welfare state prosperity surge is perfectly captured in the portraits we see, of the dark leading figures of the Combine, an amorphous conglomerate, at its heart primarily based on the Comics industry, let's say the cardboard world of self-conscious one-dimensionality. Throughout this political social critique we remember *Blade Runner* (1982), with its nasty dystopian visions of a micro managed urban future some forty years in its future.