

THE MAN WHO ENVIED WOMEN (1985) - Written and directed by Yvonne Rainer; edited by Yvonne Rainer and Christine Le Goff; photography directed by Mark Daniels; with William Raymond, Larry Looin, Trisha Brown, Jackie Raynaf. 125 minutes

"Typically, Yvonne Rainer's work in a new medium stakes out its own new territory. It is neither the conventional cinema familiar to most movie-goers nor reductive, severely formal cinema. It represents, rather, a reinvigoration of the structure and content of narrative, accomplished in part by strategies of distancing which recur throughout her work.

"During the 1960s, Yvonne Rainer's work in dance/performance charted a course more or less parallel to that of advanced sculpture -- from the minimalist aspects of a work like Trio A ('neutral performance, task-like activity, repetition of events, energy quality,' etc.) to an interest in process and the incorporation of 'teaching rehearsal, surprises,' etc. in works like Continuous Project-Altered Daily. Like the more radical art and film of the period, Rainer's work addressed itself to itself, i.e., to examining its constitutive elements, extending its parameters, exposing its means.

"Rainer's movement into film in a substantial way (five features since 1972) was not abrupt. Her serious consideration of narrative had been underway for several years and had been expressed in performances which incorporated increasingly complicated layerings and juxtapositions of narrative elements -- slides of images and of typewritten texts, spoken or read texts (as opposed to dialogue), music, stills from films, performance of earlier works, recollections of previous performances, etc. Her first film LIVES OF PERFORMERS (1972) followed performances at Hofstra University and the Whitney Museum and FILM ABOUT A WOMAN WHO... (1974) is closely related to a live performance titled This is the Story of a Woman Who..., presented in 1973.

"The catalytic occasion for Rainer's increased interest in narrative was a trip to India during the winter of 1970. Myth and narrative form were basic constituents of the dance to which she was exposed there. However, as Annette Michelson has pointed out, neither the vocabulary of Kathakali dance nor the myths and rituals of Rainer's own culture were useful to her: 'Looking for the materials of that narrative, the space of its structure, she is thrown back upon the secular, iron consciousness and on the realization that it's as though [her] own life contains possibilities for a mythology. In short, she turned to material which was both autobiographical and emotionally loaded.' -- from Mark Segal, "Cineprobe: an Evening with Yvonne Rainer," The Museum of Modern Art Department of Film, 1975.

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"On one level, Rainer uses autobiography as an intense form of critical self-scrutiny and exploration. On another, she deliberately omits most of the direct traces of this from her films, ostensibly asking us to respond to her narratives as if they were impersonal. The logic of this method is, in a way, impeccable. It implies that we are all our own autobiographers -- unwittingly or not. By removing some of the specific personal links that she has with her own material, Rainer obliges us, as individual spectators, to forge some personal links of our own in their place. What emerges from this method is a kind of elusive candor or honest uncertainty -- the same sort of dual aspect that one finds in the American-European, performing-choreographing sides of Rainer's temperament. For spectators of her films, it can ideally lead to an analysis of emotions that is as rigorous as her own." -- from Jonathan Rosenbaum, "The Ambiguities of Yvonne Rainer," American Film.

"Rainer's films are not linear-circumulative; a viewer doesn't have to remember an order of events to feel the impact of the work; she layers THE MAN WHO ENVIED WOMEN. Sometimes the effect is painterly, depicted in scenes coming one after the other, fictionally dramatic or documentary, taken from the street life around her. Sometimes her background in choreography asserts itself, and she deals in movement -- of actors, of camera -- as a phenomenon in and of itself. Most typically, she interweaves an intense combination of effects.

"And as Rainer's filmmaking skills increase, her work is becoming more accessible -- though that's not to say, easy. Her reputation may read difficult, but once that's past, the viewer only has to strap in, relax, and enjoy the ride." -- from Calvin Ahlgren, "There's No Narrative to this Woman's Tales," San Francisco Chronicle.

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