

SPATIAL ENVY
YVONNE RAINER'S
THE MAN WHO ENVIED WOMEN

Peggy Phelan

Near the end of Yvonne Rainer's recent film, *The Man Who Envied Women*, the frame is filled for the second time with Donald Judd's large grey concrete sculptures luxuriating in an open Texas field.¹ The camera walks across these sculptures like fingers over a piano: they seem to hold a kind of tune half hidden, half audible. The sculptures are concrete outlines of squares the color of tombstones. The heaviness of their frame accentuates the hollowness of the air they embrace. Like a Wittgensteinian word game, or better still, like Mark Strand's witty poem "Keeping Things Whole", Judd's sculptures suggest that "space" is that which negotiates between airy fields (infinite possibilities) and concrete architecture (finite facts), while not residing entirely in either the one or the other. As Strand puts it anthropomorphically: "When I walk/I part the air/ and always the air moves in/to fill the spaces/where my body's been/". Filling in the spaces created by departing persons, places, and things is the central concern of *The Man Who Envied Women*. Judd's sculptures, with their refusal to locate or define a spatial point of origin or termination, are the objective correlative for the difficult idea of space that Rainer's film alternatively vigilantly argues for, and whimsically hopes for. In this combination of argument and hope Rainer's film resembles some of the best work of Jean-Luc Godard.

More interesting than the visual absence of the image of Trisha the female protagonist, is Rainer's innovative expansion of the possibilities of the surface of the film. Using video transfers as kind of windows (frames-within-frames), grainy super-8 as an interruption of the smoother surface

of the film, the fragments from classic Hollywood and avant-garde films as Jack's interior mental landscapes, Rainer disallows the pleasureable illusion of a visually polished art piece and forces in its stead a reconfiguration of the traditional architecture of the frame. Rainer describes her attempt to break down the frame as a: "disruption of the glossy, unified surface of professional cinematography by means of optically degenerated shots within an otherwise seamlessly edited narrative sequence... I'm talking about films where in every scene you have to decide anew the priorities of looking and listening."² This refusal to maintain a "unified [visual] surface" mirrors the film's disdain for traditional narrative coherence and progression. In place of the spatial and temporal homogeneity we expect in narrative films, Rainer creates a much more difficult unity.

The Man Who Envied Women's subject is not so much "a week in the life of Trisha," although it is partially that; the film is mainly interested in chronicling the manifestations and consequences of the pervasive malaise of spatial envy. This subject makes issues as apparently diverse as the politics of Central America, the Manhattan real estate crunch, the vicissitudes of sexual and social relations, the virility and impotence of poststructuralism, and the medicalization of women's bodies, seem deeply intertwined. Imperialism in Central America and New York love affairs are similar, for example, in that they are each motivated, in part, by the desire to gain space. In Rainer's film the latter is wryly represented by the only half-funny one liner: "When are we getting married so I can have your apartment when we get divorced?" The Central American situation, as we shall see, is treated much more somberly. Using a collage of "moving pictures" as a kind of collective interpretive Rorschach, Rainer is able to swing a wide and fluid net over these seemingly unrelated topics. These moving pictures function as a kind of classical Chorus which punctuate the drama Rainer's film unfolds. Initially assembled by the visually absent but-very-present Trisha, they are recreated and rearranged no less than six times in the film; their spatial rearrangements parallel the shifting spaces and stories of spatial envy which animate *The Man Who Envied Women*.

Rather than beginning with a "feeling for form," Rainer's film begins by underlining the incoherence of form. Postulating that form always involves the possession (imaginative or actual) of space, Rainer begins her narrative proper with Trisha's double loss of space. After moving out of the apartment she shares with Jack, she is evicted from her studio. Trisha, the mysteriously elusive artist, begins between "spaces"; she is dis-possessed. She can create only in fragmented images, in cut-outs that she must — perforce — leave behind. This is the parable of loss, of always fragmented and interrupted formal concentration that the film slowly unfolds. Rainer's consistent disruption of the frame's space technically mirrors Trisha's cut up "home" and her cut-out art.

Trisha's opening monologue is just the first layer of Rainer's associative meditation on the implications of losing and gaining space:

SPATIAL ENVY

It was a hard week. I split up with my husband of four years and moved into my studio. The water heater broke and flooded the textile merchant downstairs. I bloodied up a pair of white linen pants. The Senate voted for nerve gas and my gynecologist went down in Korean Airlines flight #007. The worst of it was the gynecologist. He used to put booties on the stirrups and his speculum was always warm.

Although these events are linked in time, they are linked in other more subtle ways as well. To put it simply, albeit crudely: splitting up with Jack sets off a series of dismissals and departures. Trisha's flooding menstrual blood and her studio's flooding water heater are alike in their fits of unruliness against their spatial confines. This private and individual unruliness moreover, finds its public and political image in the dark drama of Korean Airlines flight #007. Overstepping, overflowing, or flying over the boundaries of space, no matter how visible or invisible such boundaries might appear, can have tragic consequences.

Trisha's overflowing menstrual blood is crucial; Rainer's title plays on the Freudian notion that women are beset with penis envy. Part of Rainer's aim is to turn the tables: she wants to suggest that men envy women in part because of their internal biological space. (Women, as it were, carry their "air space" inside them. To employ this metaphor psychoanalytically, and from the woman's point of view, violations of "air space" are acts of power: the physiological and social arrangements of heterosexuality combine to maintain women in a subordinate position to men. To suggest that male sexual desire is motivated at least partially by spatial envy, a country and western song might phrase it "hunger for a home", rape becomes not only a logical, but an inevitable consequence of the psychological-physiological architecture of heterosexuality.) Rainer uses the woman's body and the functions of its still mysterious spaces as a kind of lens through which contemporary "problems" can be evaluated. She tries to link the mind that thinks and the body that feels in a specifically womanly way. One might say she attempts to reinvestigate the traditional oppositions of Western metaphysics, in the wake of Derrida, from a feminist point of view.

Part of her correction to the story poststructuralism tells is stylistic. Metaphysics in Rainer's view cannot go too long without a joke; the film's most serious moments (with the exception of the last ten minutes or so) are continually undercut with a joke. In what J. Hoberman thinks is the best line in the film, Rainer, in a distorted off-center close-up reminiscent of Hitchcock, invites "all menstruating women [to] please leave the theatre."³ This invitation is symptomatic of Rainer's most congenial habit of mind. Her most consistent impulse, and her most comfortable perspective, is from a distance — almost over her shoulder. This is not a film that asks the spectator to like the characters, to enjoy the scenery, to laugh heartily, or to nod one's head knowingly at all the familiar conversation. The

effort at the heart of this film is as engaged in throwing you out as it is in settling you in.

I

Returning again to the enabling fiction of the analyst/analysand which she explored in *Journeys from Berlin/1971* (1980), Rainer's troubled and troubling male protagonist Jack Deller begins the film "on the couch." Deller's doctor is off-screen and voiceless (perhaps the ultimate representation of Rogerian client-centered therapy), and his confessions are actually the ponderously sounding words of Raymond Chandler's letters and diaries. Rainer's frequent tendency to have characters quote from other texts is part of her larger argument with narrative, and specifically with her sense that narrative constructs (inevitably) singular characters and singular points of view: by disallowing her characters singular linguistic habits she prohibits as well a singular habit of mind and a singular point of view. In a 1985 article in *Wide Angle*, Rainer comments that her indefatigably quoting characters help "foreground not only the production of narrative but its frustration and cancellation as well...Words are uttered but not possessed by my performers as they operate within the filmic frame but do not propel a filmic plot." Deller sees himself as a man more gifted and blessed than troubled and cursed. He is a university professor — he teaches film theory, sort of — with Leftist leanings who uses words to seduce everyone (especially himself) into a cocoon of babel more hypnotic than revelatory. During his "sessions" Jack sits in a chair facing the camera. He sits on the left side of the frame, and continually gazes beyond the left vertical end imposed by the frame. This invisible space is acutely present in his monologues, just as the visually absent Trisha is acutely present in the narrative texture of the film. Jack, more than any other character in the film, is desperately dependent upon an audience. That the audience for his intimate meanderings turns out to be "the spectator" who is forced into the position of "the doctor," is just one overt example of Rainer's obsessive tendency to suggest that film's effort to address is, absolutely, dependent upon an erasure. The first word of the film, "doctor," addresses someone who is not there. The standard critical claim that the spectator always identifies with the camera requires that the camera become a surrogate spectator. The camera, in so becoming, literally effaces the spectator. The power of the camera's eye (the potentially ideal I/eye) in addition to showing us objects and lending us its gaze, also shows us up. The space of the frame can be rented or leased but it can never be owned. The camera's vision is presented but not possessed in much the way Rainer's characters "utter but do not possess" their own language. The illusion of cinema's visual realism is radically denied by Rainer's meandering and deliberately disunified visual frames. Her most sustained investigation of the ontology of the filmic image occurs, suitably, in Jack's struggle to separate and make

SPATIAL ENVY

coherent his parcelled past: that is, in Jack's sessions with the invisible doctor.

At one point, Jack sits in his chair facing the doctor/spectator to the left, and the camera moves back to reveal an audience completely absorbed in watching the film clips playing next to his head. The scene is unsettling. The film clip is from *The Night of the Living Dead*, and the spectators begin to attack each other as the film images grow more chaotic and the sound track more discursive (in a three way phone conversation Trisha summarizes Chodorow's and Dinnerstein's arguments and ruminates on the associations between the name "Jack Deller" and fairy tales). Despite all the aural and visual ornamentation, this sequence forces the spectator to reexperience the acute psychic discomfort that comes from the recognition of the profound connection between voyeurism and cinema. There is nothing original about this connection of course, but what is original (and awful) is the disturbing connection this particular sequence demands. The mayhem produced by the images of *The Night of the Living Dead* literally incites the audience to perform its own aggressive mayhem. Given that these clips are in the same spatial frame as Jack's "confessions," the underlying connection implicitly suggests that psychoanalysis, like cinema, in relying on "projection" as its paradigmatic principle, is inherently voyeuristic. To discover that the only position one can take in this "long shot" is the role of the doctor is to discover as well that one's interest in Jack (cinematically and psychoanalytically) stems from a desire to "treat" him. More uncomfortably, it is to realize that one's interest in the similarities between the "cinematic apparatus" and the psychoanalytic paradigm stems from the spectator's own desire to be "treated".

Jack's central concern in these sessions is his relationship to women, a relationship that undergoes a radical change after the death of his first wife. Trisha, his second wife, has left him after four years, in part because of his inability to be faithful. His well-designed explanations for his lack of fidelity essentially consist of his belief that after his idealized first wife died, he became incapable of seeing women as anything other than sacred gifts. To turn down such a gift verges on the sacrilegious — and our Jack is no heretic. One gift he has inherited from Trisha, a gift he did not ask for, is her "art work." Jack asks Trisha to take it with her when she moves out. She says she'll return for it. Insofar as *The Man Who Envied Women* has a narrative "plot," it is this early promise of return that the film uses as its departing point. Like everything else, the meeting is interrupted, even superseded, by the promise of another meeting between Jack and Jack-ie (Raynal), who are also ex-lovers. This meeting actually does occur, and it is from the unsettling perspective of their relationship that almost all of the varied threads the film unwinds come together. But as we wait for the party, the "meaning" of the art that is left behind, the hieroglyphics of an unreachable — both visually and romantically — artist, consume more and more of Jack's attention.

PEGGY PHELAN

This art work is a collage of magazine clippings; three come from *The Sunday New York Times* and two come from *Mother Jones*. They include: an "About Men" column written by a priest, an ad for a Central American cigar which features a rich man and his dog as the Barthesian "sign" of success, and a gruesome photograph of decapitated bodies with a caption which seems to identify one of the victims as a six month old Guatemalan child. The spatial arrangement of these images is continually revised. Off-screen voices create narratives of coherence about them. The connection between the cigar ad and the mutilated bodies is described allegorically: the successful cigar-selling man profits, both directly and indirectly, from the mutilation and death of Salvadorean peasants. The United States' interest in Central America is read as an imperial lust for the control of geographic space.

The plea for the "emotional" space of men represented by the "About Men" column is seen both economically (guess who profits?) and socially. That the space for this column occupies the Sunday paper, while the "Hers" column is put in the "Home" section of Thursday's *Times* ("among the latest sofas") is seen as an ideological manifestation of the privilege of space. More subtly, as the woman's voice narrates her objection to the partitioning of column space in a slightly whining way, the column becomes another source of spatial envy as well.

The ad for the menopausal drug is seen as part of the larger treatment of "women's problems" historically. It is linked to the themes of sexual difference in poststructural discourse. The precise relationship of the (by now) axiomatic connection between the textual body and the sexual body is explored with a twist that would make Roland Barthes cringe. Rather than seeing this connection as the source of Barthes' *jouissance*, a kind of perpetual foreplay which teases one to contemplate a mental and spiritual communion so intense it holds the potential for infinite ecstasy, Rainer suggests that the link between the mind that thinks and the body that feels is one of loss — a kind of permanent grief. Early on, Trisha makes a provocative connection between the ovaries and the brain: "The ovaries of a seven month old fetus contain almost 1,000,000 egg cells. From then on, the ova constantly decrease in number without replenishment. The only other cells to do this are those of the brain." The mutual process of dropping eggs and losing brain cells, neither of which are regenerative, revises the traditional (masculine) "mind/body split" into a more radical affinity. The body that feels and the mind that thinks are unified in their similar physiological movement from abundance to loss. The brain and the ovary then are the physiological kernels which sow, or so it would seem, a metaphysics not to acquisition, but of inevitable depletion.

The horrific image of the decapitated bodies (the split between the body and the mind so complete as to make Western metaphysics a pathetic understatement), is the image that elicits the deepest meditation. In one of the only moments of unification between the sound track and the image

SPATIAL ENVY

track, the voice of one of the off-screen commentators (Martha Rosler's) breaks off as Deller's hand trails away from the wall after shifting the images around in an effort to bury the gruesome image (and the naked bodies) under all the other clippings. It is a moving sequence, not only because Deller at last seems "in sync" with the world of the film, but also because one of the questions of "owning space" hinges — apparently absolutely — on someone else losing it.

This relationship is explored with a poignant befuddlement as Rainer follows the sequence of public hearings called to consider Manhattan's recent proposal to allocate housing funds to artists moving into the Lower East Side. The idea behind this plan was to keep New York City as a congenial "space" for art and artists — a cynical observer might say that the idea exposes New York's own imperial lust for cultural supremacy — but no matter: contemplating "moving to Jersey" is viewed with equal horror by all members of the hearings. One of the unfortunate consequences of this proposal was that it pitted the artists against the ethnic working-class whose very presence in Rainer's overtly theoretical film, calls into question the efficacy of art and the aesthetic impulse to manipulate and re-order space for some artistic good. The immense space of Donald Judd's sculptural field and the huge canvases of Leon Golub suddenly seem absurd: do "images" and "representations" deserve/need to consume so much space? Do we participate in the construction and maintenance of a world in which "representation" literally dominates our lives, and robs some people of four walls? "Almost overnight we met the enemy," Trisha declares, "and it was us."

II

If the spatial arrangements and rearrangements of Trisha's abandoned art work (work that has fallen under the gaze of hyper-articulate eyes) constitute the melody of the film, part of its rhythmic structure comes from Jack's magic headphones. Like some fantastic state-of-a-future-art walkman, Jack's oversized mechanical ears make him privy to the conversations of Manhattan street-strollers. It is perhaps the triplicate repetition of these scenes that prompts Hoberman to dub Rainer "the Purple Rose of Soho," and to compare her films to Woody Allen's. Rainer's one-liners are dry and infectious. They are also obsessively concerned with sex. The space between Jack's ears, by implication, seems overloaded with sexual puns: his head selectively receives the world from a sexual point of view.

In the first issue of *Motion Picture*, Rainer writes that the purpose of these scenes is to convey the idea that the city, for Jack, is a "place full of sexual anxiety, obsession, and verbal assault, litanies of sexual distress...[It is] a barrage — a veritable eruption — of ordinarily repressed material." But the problem is that the conversations are all in one-key: if it is a jungle it specializes in one animal. More importantly, these jokes are all about sex-

PEGGY PHELAN

ual stereotypes: gay men as housewives, feminism as a badge of admittance for politically correct men to a wider set of women's bedrooms, and so on. If these clichés are supposed to frighten a man who spouts off the subtle seductions of Foucault and who speaks of the cinematic apparatus as an intimate echo of Lacanian subjectivity, then he is in really sorry shape. But I think Rainer's aim and its effect are quite different. We tend not, I think, to take these lines as symptomatic of Jack's fear: we tend to take them as welcome comic relief.

Jackie is not speaking *to* Jack: she addresses a different spectator altogether. She seems to be addressing on/off-screen Trisha. Or at least, it would seem that Trisha hears Jackie more clearly than Jack does. Jackie's voice, thick with a French accent, is passionate and sounds half sleepy. She wears a kind of shimmering gown that half reveals her breasts. The camera scrutinizes her with a pleasure it simply cannot find in Jack. She rolls her tongue around these amazingly large words with the strange wonder of a French woman speaking English as if for the first time; the sounds of the words resonant with the confidence of their own originality, they are sure they have never been spoken in quite this way before. As I watch this scene I feel as if the theatre will collapse under all these words; as if there should be a rating for films based solely on the number of words spoken into little rooms; as if seduction is made up of nothing but words.

This slow seduction underscores Jack's ironic insistence on repeating Foucault's axiom: "There is no opposition between what is said and what is done." As Jack and Jackie move intellectually further and further apart, their bodies move closer and closer together. As Jack continually repeats Foucault's arguments about the ubiquitous dispersion of power, Jackie categorizes and delimits differences in the power to discriminate power. Jack is content to ignore "what is said" for what might "be done." He seems not to hear a thing she says. Jackie is, in almost a literal sense, speaking a different language:

Only the naive humanist feminist thinks she can change something by changing her consciousness; the rigorous feminist plumbs the hidden depths of subjectivity, studies its construction in language...winds through the labyrinth to find not a monster but a new position of the subject...One awkward consequence of the freudomarxist marriage presided over by language, is to open up an inviting space for marxist and feminist laborers which can only be defined by the hystematic evacuation of certain questions — political, economic, and above all historical questions...Theory as a watchdog is a poor creature: not because it is nasty or destructive but because for attacking the analysis of confrontation it simply has no teeth.

As if this is the permission Rainer has been waiting for, the remainder of *The Man Who Envied Women* moves steadily away from the theoretical

SPATIAL ENVY

pronouncement (the world of Jack) to a more personal, and more tentative meditation. We move more comfortably and more completely into the world of the imagination. This world, entered only through the portal of the feminine, is formally invoked (evoked?) by Jackie, who again borrows Morris' words:

Passing from the realm of the theory of the subject to the shifty spaces of feminine writing is like emerging from a horror movie to a costume ball...Feminine writing lures with an invitation to licence, gaiety, laughter, desire and dissolution, a fluid exchange of partners of indefinite identity.

Underscoring this change in mental space Rainer cuts to Trisha's narration of a dream. She dreams her mother and Jack are lovers. Both mother and daughter are played by Rainer. Just as Trisha seems to accept that her mother is Jack's lover, the mother watches Jack and Trisha (disguised behind a paper mask) in bed together. Now Trisha is furious. But the dream is so obviously funny, so clearly a willful Oedipal reconfiguration that Trisha's refusal to laugh seems hilarious. Trisha's eyes are so completely disguised she is apparently unable to see herself. Fittingly, slinking through this "Oedipal extravaganza" — the phrase is Rainer's — is a one-eyed cat. Cut back to the hallway. Jack and Jackie are embracing all the rhetorical possibilities of physically embracing.

And then again Trisha's voice: "If a girl takes her eyes off Lacan and Derrida long enough to look she may discover she is the invisible man." That the film's invisible woman, Trisha, says this only heightens the irony; the film abandons the poetics of theory and individual masculinity for a more persuasive look at Trisha's moving pictures.

As it happens when theory is not the loudest voice in the room, what the eye sees when it looks again is a different image altogether. Trisha's concluding ruminations, unlike Jack's initial confessions, are tentative and groping:

Lately I've been thinking yet again I can't live without men but I can live without a man. I've had this thought before, but this time the idea is not colored by stigma or despair for finality. I know that there will sometimes be excruciating sadness but I also know something is different now, something in the direction of unwomanliness. Not a new woman, not non-woman, or misanthropist, or anti-woman, and not non-practicing lesbian. Maybe un-woman is also the wrong term. A-woman is closer. A-womanly. A-womanliness.

I must admit that I'm not sure what Trisha means by this. She seems willing and ready to bury Jack's hold on her. And ready to bury something larger as well. Among the more enigmatically haunting sequences in the film is an early one in which Trisha complains that her father chose this week to "pop out." In Trisha's various retellings of her stories of "life

with Jack” there is a feeling that she is telling the story of life with Pop as well. Trisha’s exasperation with the way the memory of her father intrudes upon her recollection of “life with Jack” speaks to the doubleness of the pain of mourning. The father, like Jack, intrudes on Trisha — both as a maddeningly inadequate presence and as a persistent and unwelcome absence. This is all in the realm of speculation — there is little direct reference to this in the film. But what is germane to Trisha’s announcement of “something different now” is the persistent hope that if a-womanliness means anything at all, it might have some impact on Trisha’s Oedipal dreams. With Pop and Jack tucked back in the suitcase, maybe Trisha, her mother, and the one-eyed cat can create a new dream. One that may well be filled with “excruciating sadness,” but one that might yet be allowed the representation of a dream-text, one that might raise the hiterto repressed.

We return again to the art work — for one last rearrangement. This time Rainer asks, “If this were an art work how would you critique it?” The answer brilliantly recasts the connections between the images and suggests that spatial arrangements, artistic and rationalistic, are inherently political. I quote just briefly from Rosler’s long argument:

I would feel I was being tricked into trying to deal with things that have become incommensurable as though they weren’t incommensurable. That I was being told that the myths of civility at home and the problems of daily life are only a veneer over the truth that the state destroys people. It is as though I were being told that when dealing with the ultimate, my worries about how I live my life in America are not important.

She then goes on to elucidate the ways in which the arrangements of the images tell political and visual stories. The uncaring emotional facade of men that the “About Men” column argues against, “determine[s] how we conduct our foreign policy. It isn’t only a matter of economic interest, but of how we choose to pursue that interest. If we’re willing to grind up other people because we can’t be bothered to feel about them then it does matter.” What she argues for then is a new notion of spatial privilege — an anti-privilege; or maybe that’s the wrong term — privilegelessness is closer. A world in which the space one occupies (publicly and privately) is not subject to or the object of envy; a world that Judd’s sculptural embraces create when their spatial beginnings and endings cannot be defined or located.

The fact that the sculptures themselves dominate a wide open field in Texas underlines the distance we need to traverse before such an ideal spatial arrangement might occur. Judd’s sculptures, in other words, demand a second look. Rainer’s film proposes a democracy of spatial equality so radical that its very proposal requires a continual rearrangement not only of the images in the frame but of the frame itself.

SPATIAL ENVY

III

I said earlier that the identification between the camera and the spectator inevitably effaces the power of the spectator and that implied within this effacement there was a failure of address. Jack's sessions which address an absent doctor and are augmented by films addressed to an audience alert to other texts, underscore the difficulty of filmic address. The spectator is the film's invisible hearer, its unseen doctor and deliverer of catharsis. At the "Narrative Poetics Conference" in April at Ohio State University, Teresa DeLauretis argued that Rainer's film encouraged her to feel addressed as a woman spectator and that the success of this fullsome address was one of the greatest achievements of *The Man Who Envied Women*. DeLauretis contended that the film saw as a woman sees and that it did not bow to the conventions of the male gaze (conventions that DeLauretis has long been skeptical about but are nonetheless recognized by most feminist film critics) and thus advanced both feminist film theory and film practice.⁴ Insofar as the distinction between gender specific points-of-view has any validity, it is certainly true that *The Man Who Envied Women* is animated from and for a woman's eye. My earlier point was more concerned with underlining the challenge of Rainer's film in terms of address itself. By upsetting the conventions of filmic point of view (e.g.: not showing Trisha at all and thus making it impossible to follow her gaze; the conflicting narrative angles of the plot(s) et al.), Rainer also challenges the conventions of filmic address. By "address" I mean not only the complicated and complicating processes of identification between "character" and spectator, but also the more simple feeling of belongingness — as if one is invited and encouraged to be engaged. More than simply saying post-Brecht that film, and avant-garde film in particular, makes the spectator feel alienated — makes the spectator recognize the gap between the technical camera eye and her own eye, I'm trying to say that what Rainer's film suggests is that film's deep dependency on point-of-view (gender specific or otherwise) as the primary means by which the spectator is given intimate access to a kind of knowledge, no matter how relative — as in the elegant equivocations of *Roshomon* — is what needs to be dismantled and understood as a seductive fiction. Insofar as Trisha's concluding remarks about "a-womanliness" can be seen as an abandonment of gender as a shorthand notion of identity, it would seem that Rainer is trying to abandon the ownership of (and perhaps film's conspiracy in the maintenance of) single identity itself.

The relationships between language, image, and character are individually and collectively rearranged in *The Man Who Envied Women*. Rainer's ambitious film underlines the ways in which narrative coherence demands and creates a spectator alert to a too simple coherence. The project of the film is not to delineate the reasons and motivations for Jack's envy of Trisha or Jack-ie; nor is it the story of Jack's transformation from bully to lover;

I don't even think it's about the way in which film theory informs film practice although that is sort of distractingly interesting. I think the film is actually about the appetite to rearrange and reconfigure the connections between image, language and character in film, the desire to rearrange and reconfigure sexual relationships in "Life" and economic-political-spatial relationships in "Art" and in "The World," and I think it is about Rainer's own appetite for a new aesthetic of filmic architecture. (I ought to stress that I believe there is a difference between delineating an appetite for something and delineating the thing itself. *The Man Who Envied Women* is much more of a proposal and speculative dream than it is a programmatic manifesto; this too is in keeping with Rainer's witty metaphysics and Trisha's wide ruminations).

"Filmic architecture" borders on the oxymoronic: architecture tends to connote stability and the fixing of and within space. It tends to connote sculptural fields like Judd's and towers like Trump's. Rainer's *filmic* architecture takes flexibility and flow as defining principles, and film's inevitable failure to meet the desire to fix or possess space itself as its philosophic spine. *The Man Who Envied Women* rejuvenates the political/aesthetic agenda of the avant-garde film in its method, and it challenges contemporary critical theory's thralldom with masculinist modes in its argument. *The Man Who Envied Women* challenges theory's own desire for possession and coherence. Theory's panting after discursive space is perhaps not only a logical but an inevitable consequence of the desperation and parcelling out of "space" in critical discourse itself. Film studies, feminist or otherwise, exists in a discursive space that encourages (even demands) "possession." The bitter irony, of course, is that film's most radical potential lies in its resistance to being possessed or owned.

Film's ability to move pictures continuously, to endlessly rearrange the cut-outs by which and through which we come to see and project identity and ownership, and through which we come to desire them both, demonstrates as well the importance of challenging our own comfort with the conventions of coherence. In film, the particularly comfortable conventions are sharply delineated points of view (owning stories) and the modes of address typical of narrative and documentary film. From the first ten minutes of super-8 film, through the video "documentary" of the housing hearings, Rainer constantly manipulates the surface of her film. We, like Jack, are left with cut-outs whose "meaning" lies in its potential to be endlessly rearranged. What makes this film more than a smart leftist manifesto, is the innovative way in which Rainer matches her political vision of privilegelessness with the aesthetic possibilities of interrupted and shared filmic space. Rainer degrades the values of the ownership of ideas, discourse, and Manhattan lofts, by continually rearranging what we expect film to own: the space of its frame.

Tisch School of Performing Arts
New York University

SPATIAL ENVY

Notes

1. *The Man Who Envied Women*. 16 mm, color, 125 min., 1985. Distributed by First Run Features, 153 Waverly Place, New York, New York, 10014, CFDC, 67A Portland St., Toronto, Ontario, M5V 2M9. All quotes unless otherwise noted are from the film. Art Simon discussed this paper with me with admirable patience and insight. I thank him and hereby absolve him of responsibility for what follows.
2. Rainer, "Some Ruminations around Cinematic Antidotes to the Oedipal Net (les) while Playing with DeLauraedipus Mulvey, or, He May Be Off Screen, but..." *The Independent*, April, 1986: 25.
3. J. Hoberman, "The Purple Rose of Soho," *The Village Voice*, April 8, 1986:64. Hoberman lucidly summarizes the feminist theoretical implications of Rainer's decision not to show Trisha's image.
4. See M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Holquist and Caryl Emerson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982). See especially, "Discourse in the Novel," the final essay. "Heteroglossia" is defined and discussed on p. 263 and following.
5. Most of the Foucault comes from *Discipline and Punish* translated by Alan Sheridan (Random House: Vintage Books, 1974).; the Morris quotes are taken from, "The Pirate's Fiancee," in *Michel Foucault: Power, Truth, Strategy* (Sydney: Feral Publications, 1979), edited by Meaghan Morris and Paul Patton.
6. DeLauretis' talk was delivered with humor and polemical zeal. The Conference was held between April 10-12, 1986. Rainer was present at the conference, and *The Man Who Envied Women* was shown the night before DeLauretis' talk. Rainer answered questions after the screening but did not comment publicly after DeLauretis' talk.