

WINNER TEDDY AWARD
1997 BERLIN FILM FESTIVAL

MURDER
and murder

a film by yvonne rainer

a zeitgeist films release

MURDER and murder synopsis

Doris and Mildred are in love. Mildred, in her mid 50s, is a tenured professor from upper class origins who has been a lesbian all her life. Doris, in her early 60s, comes from a more modest background, was a single mother, has never held a steady job, and finds herself in love with a woman for the first time. Mildred shops at Barneys; Doris plunders catalogues and thrift shops. Their new co-habitation is further complicated by the fact that Doris is diagnosed with breast cancer and must undergo a mastectomy. **MURDER and murder** is an unflinching look at female aging, lesbian sexuality and breast cancer in an age and culture that glorifies youth and heterosexual romance. In her 7th feature film, director Yvonne Rainer delivers an emotionally courageous, intellectually challenging work which is at once soap opera, black comedy, love story and political meditation.

on **MURDER and murder**
by Joan Braderman

Is it Godard's *Two or Three Things I Know About Her*, Sirk's *Magnificent Obsession*, McLaughlin's *She Must Be Seeing Things*, or Snow's *Wavelength*? Posed, as ever, between the European New Wave, Hollywood melodrama and the New American Cinema, **MURDER and murder**, Yvonne Rainer's seventh feature film is a passionate wet dream of a lesbian love story, shot in gorgeous saturated reds, blues, whites and blacks which look like nothing more than early Hollywood Technicolor—*The Wizard of Oz* on mescaline and high modernism. From the exhilarating opening shot of old Jenny and young Mildred playing frisbee on the beach at Coney Island, with a dolly from the distance (in which they could be kids) to close-up where they vie for head space on camera like everyone on TV, the movie sails through the rough and high seas of our lives. The script is so damned tight, it snaps with wit. The actors are, without exception, beautiful to watch and beautifully directed. This includes Rainer, who, appearing as herself in classic tux dyke drag, half the time with her remarkably seductive flat, mastectomized chest revealed unflinchingly to the camera, acts as a kind of dead serious court jester, mediating the ongoing dances and conversations about relationships, love, sex, coming out at 55, breast cancer, death, mothers and daughters, lesbians and the gossip and work-lives of contemporary female artists and intellectuals. If you are 1) alive, 2) a woman or person who likes them, has a mother, a daughter or a cat, and 3) a filmlover, frustrated by the unbelievable level of boring swill Hollywood is serving up this year, see **MURDER and murder** before you even go to the couples' therapist, grocery store or the doctor. I haven't stopped giggling to myself since I did. God Bless Yvonne Rainer for her unflagging courage, her refusal to disappear us "women of a certain age," her hamminess and sheer brilliant filmmaking. Bravo.

Joan Braderman
Video Artist
Professor of Film, Video and Media Studies
Hampshire College

YVONNE RAINER

biography

Yvonne Rainer was born in San Francisco in 1934. She trained as a modern dancer in New York from 1957 and began to choreograph her own work in 1960. She was one of the founders of the Judson Dance Theater in 1962, the beginning of a movement that proved to be a vital force in modern dance in the following decades. Between 1962 and 1975 she presented her choreography throughout the United States and Europe, notably on Broadway in 1969, in Scandinavia, London, Germany, and Italy between 1964 and 1972, and at the Festival D'Automne in Paris in 1972. In 1968 she began to integrate short films into her live performances, and by 1975 she had made a complete transition to filmmaking.

In 1972 she completed a first feature-length film, LIVES OF PERFORMERS. In all she has completed seven features: FILM ABOUT A WOMAN WHO... (1974), KRISTINA TALKING PICTURES (1976), JOURNEY FROM BERLIN/1971 (1980, co-produced by the British Film Institute and winner of the Special Achievement Award from the Los Angeles Film Critics' Association), THE MAN WHO ENVIED WOMEN (1985), PRIVILEGE (1990, winner of the Filmmakers' Trophy at the Sundance Film Festival, Park City, Utah, 1991, and the Geyer Werke Prize at the International Documentary Film Festival in Munich, 1991), and MURDER AND MURDER (1996).

Rainer's films have been shown extensively in the U.S. and throughout the world, in alternative film exhibition showcases and revival houses (such as the Bleecker St Cinema, Roxy-S.F., NuArt-L.A, Film Forum-NYC, et al), in museums and in universities. Her films have also been screened at festivals in Los Angeles (Filmex), London, Montreux, Toronto, Edinburgh, Mannheim, Berlin, Locarno, Rotterdam, Creteil, Deauville, Toulon, Montreal, Hamburg, Salsa Majori, Figueira da Foz, Munich, Vienna, Athens (Ohio), Sundance, Hong Kong, Yamagata, and Sydney.

Four books dealing with her work have been published: YVONNE RAINER: WORK 1961-73 (Nova Scotia College of Art and Design and New York University Press, 1974); THE FILM OF YVONNE RAINER (Indiana University Press, 1974); TALKING PICTURES: FILME, FEMINISMUS, PSYCHOANALYSE, AVANTGARDE, (Passagen Verlag, Vienna, 1994); and Shelley Green's RADICAL JUXTAPOSITION: THE FILMS OF YVONNE RAINER (Scarecrow Press, London 1994). A half-hour video tape entitled "YVONNE RAINER: STORY OF A FILMMAKER WHO..." was aired on Film and Video Review, WNET-TV, on July 27, 1980. THE MAN WHO ENVIED WOMEN was aired on Independent Focus, WNET-TV, on August 13, 1989, and PRIVILEGE on the same program on Nov. 8, 1992 and during the summer of 1994. Rainer currently teaches at the Independent Study Program of the Whitney Museum in New York City.

YVONNE RAINER

filmography

- 1972 **LIVES OF PERFORMERS**
16mm, b/w, 90 mins.
- 1974 **FILM ABOUT A WOMAN WHO...**
16mm, b/w, 105 mins.
- 1976 **KRISTINA TALKING PICTURES**
16mm, color, 90 mins.
- 1980 **JOURNEYS FROM BERLIN/1971**
16mm, color, 125 mins.
- 1985 **THE MAN WHO ENVIED WOMEN**
16mm, color, 125 mins.
- 1990 **PRIVILEGE**
16mm, color & b/w, 103 mins.
- 1996 **MURDER and murder**
16mm, color, 113mins.

The complete Yvonne Rainer collection is available from Zeitgeist Films

about the actors

KATHLEEN CHALFANT

“MILDRED”

Winner of a 1996 Obie Award and a Calloway Award for her performance as Mistress Quickly in the Public Theatre’s production of **Henry V**, Kathleen Chalfant is a renowned theater actor who has appeared on Broadway in **Angels in America** (for which she won two Drama Desk nominations and one Tony nomination), **M.Butterfly**, and Richard Eyre’s **Racing Demon**. She has also acted extensively off-Broadway and in regional theatre. Her work on film includes Ivan Reitman’s **Junior**, Tim Robbins’ **Bob Roberts**, Tony Bill’s **Five Corners** and Sidney Lumet’s **Garbo Talks**, while on television she has had recurring roles in **Prince Street** and **One Life to Live**, and featured roles in **New York Undercover** and **L.A. Law**.

JOANNA MERLIN

“DORIS”

Joanna Merlin acts in film, TV and theatre and, among many other roles, has appeared as daughter to Zero Mostel and Viveca Lindfors; wife to Gene Hackman, Rod Steiger and Christopher Plummer; mother to Julia Roberts, Mary Elizabeth Mastroantonio, Valerie Bertinelli, Rosanna Arquette and Rob Morrow; sister to Sam Waterston and Yvonne DeCarlo; mother-in-law to Eric Roberts and Blythe Danner; sister-in-law to Charlton Heston; and mistress to Laurence Olivier and Al Pacino. Her films include: **The Ten Commandments**, **Fame**, **The Killing Fields**, **Mystic Pizza**, **Baby It’s You**, **Class Action**, **All That Jazz**, and **Mr. Wonderful**. TV credits include: recurring roles in **New York Undercover** and **Law and Order**, guest star appearances in **Northern Exposure** and **L.A. Law** and featured parts in a number of television films and miniseries including **Mafia Marriage** and **In A Child’s Name**. In the theatre, she has appeared in many notable productions on Broadway, off-Broadway and in regional theatre including the original Broadway production of **Fiddler on the Roof** in which she created the role of Tzeitl. Ms.Merlin is also an award winning casting director in theatre and film, a teacher of acting and auditioning and co-founder of the Non-Traditional Casting Project.

about the films of

YVONNE RAINER

Rainer is the avant-garde's most important woman filmmaker since Maya Deren...more likely, she's the most influential American avant-garde filmmaker of the past dozen years, with an impact as evident in London or Berlin as in New York...That Rainer's work engages that of Godard and Brakhage, arguably the two most powerfully original filmmakers of the past 30 years, is another measure of her centrality. But addicted as she is to the life of her times, it seems perverse to segregate Rainer in an avant-garde ghetto. The relationship of psychodrama to the films of actor-auteurs like Charlie Chaplin or Barbra Streisand is a fallow field for academics. Nevertheless, it's apparent that...Rainer has many points of contact with her fellow toiler in the vineyards of urban sophistication, Woody Allen.

J. Hoberman "The Purple Rose of Soho"
Village Voice, April 8, 1986

Let me offer a further explanation... of what Rainer is being brilliant about this time... Rainer is interested in politics not as slogans but as daily life. She is interested in ideas not as objects of study but as actions of the mind and heart. She is interested in social roles not as fixed identities but as loyalties that can conflict and sometimes shift. She is interested in filmmaking not as a tool but as a toy, which is most useful when most surprising...

Stuart Klawans
The Nation, January 28, 1991

***P*rivilege**, the latest and perhaps most brilliant offering to date from independent filmmaker Yvonne Rainer, is... a supremely witty, intelligent pastiche of "hot flashbacks,"... and characters who speak... about mainstream medicine, unfair justice, sexuality, race and class, and unprincipled behavior.. No matter how sharp the contradictions, the tone of Rainer's spirited, must-see melange is never bitter... While Rainer's delightfully digressive film doesn't have all the answers, it certainly poses a lot of damned good questions.

Barbara Day
Guardian, January 23, 1991

***P*rivilege** is a film of anger, humor and compassion. Rainer's stream of social consciousness is... fascinating and unpredictable.

Betsy Sherman
Boston Globe, April 20, 1991

Yvonne Rainer's films are as complex as thought, filled with unexpected images, snippets of sound and statements profound and silly—all competing for attention on the same plane of perception. It's an approach that lets her meld wildly divergent topics into one film, to experiment with the limitations of the medium.

Chiori Santiago

San Francisco Chronicle, September 9, 1990

P*rivilege* unfolds like a single multifaceted argument, uniformly illuminated by white-hot rage and wit—a cacophony of voices and discourses to be sure, but a purposeful and meaningful cacophony in which all the voices are speaking to us as well as to one another... But one never, not even for a moment, loses touch with what this move is about.

Jonathan Rosenbaum

Chicago Reader, March 8, 1991

In an age of debonair and often apolitical postmodern art, Rainer has remained that rarest of creatures—a tough, critical, ever sceptical political artist.

Adrian Martin

Melbourne Sunday Herald, August 5, 1990

Yvonne Rainer's work in the cinema can be seen as a milestone, marking a point of no return for women's cinema and daring the cinema more generally to look for new directions. Her movies are so infused with the immediacy of personal struggle with life and its representations, that they resist monumental categorization or historic institutionalization. With a rare mixture of passion and irony, Rainer creates and then questions, making intricate patterns of restless instability. She guides the audience through stories, situations, characters and crises of all kinds with the deft hand of someone who knows her own minefield.

Laura Mulvey, 1989

a conversation with

YVONNE RAINER

by Thyrza Nichols Goodeve

excerpted from ART IN AMERICA Spring 1997

Yvonne Rainer is one of a handful of contemporary artists whose work has come to represent more than just an exceptional artistic oeuvre. To recount the details of her biography is not just to summarize a life that began some time ago in San Francisco of the 1940s, but involves a kind of Grand Tour of the [New York/ East Coast] art world in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Arcing across minimalism in the 1960s and the sober physicality of the body in dance, into the '70s fascination with representation (where feminism and film theory met, got involved, and constituted a relationship that defined film studies for well over a decade), to the high rolling opulent, theory '80s and conscience-oriented identity politic '90s, Rainer has always worked in tandem with such histories. During these decades her outlay as an artist has challenged and transformed dance and film, creating ingenious works where autobiography, political outrage, intellectual and aesthetic rigor, and a superb but understated formal wizardry meet, or better, come into intricate correspondence with one another.

Yet, for all the bells and whistles this fiercely noncompromising artist has required her audience to jump to over the years, the commonplace vicissitudes and intra-personal politics of everyday life are equally, if not ultimately, the mainstays of her work. It's just been difficult for some to drop into the lives of her performers because, in her dance work, the body (or indeed any object, from vacuum cleaner to mattress to rubber ball), as with her later use of the building blocks of cinema—shots, mise en scene, characters, editing—has never been a mere pawn for telling a story. In the early films, *Lives of Performers* [1972], *Film About A Woman Who...* [1974], (both based on earlier performative work), and *Kristina Talking Pictures* [1976], Rainer slid from the staging of live dance into the controlled environs of film, learning to use the cinema's magic and muscle to layer space and time in a completely non-naturalistic way. Yet it was precisely her obsession, or better, commitment to everyday life and romantic relationships—subjects which seem to beg for linear development and simple point of view identification—that set her apart from structuralist avant-gardists of her generation. Never hesitant to dump, or tamper heartlessly with, the sacred cows of seamless illusion and popcorn-eating narrative flow, she has always been as committed to emotional volatility and psychological meat-packing (topped with large doses of analysis) as any character-driven filmmaker. But her mode is more athletic, pummeling the viewer with associative motion picture collages made of language, cinematic space, character (as analytic tool), and story (as accretion). In this sense, Rainer's narrative style owes as much to Gertrude Stein, Virginia Woolf, and Buster Keaton as it does to Maya Deren and Michael Snow.

...

So, it isn't as though this deeply modernist experimental-narrativist hasn't always been making films like *MURDER and murder* about characters in love, pain, confusion, and growth. But there is no doubt, since *The Man Who Envied Women* [1985] and *Privilege* [1992], she has been veering more and more toward full-blown characters and classical narrative techniques. *MURDER and murder* is clearly some apotheosis of this tendency: it *is* a simple love story (between two older women); it *is* a drama (about breast cancer); it *is* a hilarious send-up of near vaudevillian proportions of modern urban life in the 1990s. But this doesn't mean sitting through *MURDER and murder*, having seen any of her previous work, isn't a little like using "self," "soul," or "truth" after having read Derrida. The story and characters certainly hold, and are quite believable but—oi vey—what a difference! A venture into Rainer's special breed of feminist slapstick modernism, *MURDER and murder* is not only her most accessible film to date but her funniest.

FROM THE INTERVIEW...

Thyrza Nichols Goodeve: Let's reflect on what you are making now in terms of continuities and discontinuities with your past work.

Yvonne Rainer: I suppose we can list them in terms of subject matter. Heterosexuality has shifted to homosexuality. Domestic and sexual conflict is still a concern. Specific social issues keep overlapping from one film to the other: political violence, U.S. imperialism, social privilege, gender inequality, notions of disease, aging. Autobiography and quotidian activity are constants. Narrative is also a constant, though my use of narrative conventions has totally changed since 1972. Each film has worked out a lexicon of narrative strategies, moving from the disjunctive tableaux of *Lives of Performers* to the full-blown characterizations and enactments of *MURDER and murder*.

• • •

TNG: Which brings me back to your earlier work where you take the very intimate—the scandalously intimate—and combine it with critical analysis and politics. The result is the viewer is drawn back and forth between these two spaces and a complex accreted experience—part emotion, part critique—emerges. Both the highly personal and visceral, and the blunt, didactic analytical become easier to absorb because of the relation between them which you set up.

YR: The difference in *MURDER and murder* is that my main characters are not the mouthpieces of the political and social texts.

TNG: They're actually characters. When one looks at the script for *MURDER and murder* versus your earlier scripts—it's completely different on a visual/textual level—one sees dialogue. Whereas in *Journeys from Berlin* or *Kristina Talking Pictures*—your scripts before *Privilege*—are composed of lengthy performative speeches. What allowed you to feel comfortable with the characters being just characters?

YR: It came out of the writing. I found I was less involved in monologue than dialogue.

TNG: And why is that?

YR: Well, this film is about two women in an equilateral relationship—something I had never developed before. There was the Annette Michelson character in *Journeys from Berlin*. She has a relationship with the shrink but the shrink is very recessive, though played by three different performers in the spatial foreground—it's still pretty much a long monologue. In *The Man Who Envied Women* the main character is mostly alone. I chose to take the narrator—Trisha, his estranged lover—out of the picture. So he's doing these endless lectures, or talking to an off-screen shrink, or walking in the street overhearing things, while she carries on by herself on the sound track. There's no interaction. Relationship is indicated, but not enacted. Even the the encounter between Jack Deller and Jackie, the femme fatale, is short-circuited by the nature of their language, a theoretical "speaking past" each other. But in *MURDER and murder* the relationship between Mildred and Doris had to be played out.

• • •

I think I've made a situation where young and old, male and female, gay and heterosexual audiences can identify with this couple. I'm a little amazed but I'm quite sure there's that possibility here. Already someone has used that squishy word "universal." I'm afraid even otters are going to like it!

• • •

TNG: Talk about the title *MURDER and murder*—it's not completely clear to me. You have "murder" in caps versus "murder" in small letters ...

YR: "MURDER" in capital letters refers to actual death by homophobic assault, by industrial toxins. Lower case "murder" is domestic / familial fantasized murder. "When I was growing up I fantasized poisoning my older sister."

TNG: What's the point of the comparison? The fantasy of killing your sister versus being killed by industrial toxins?

YR: As I say in the film, "Fantasies don't kill. Thoughts can be murderous, but thoughts don't kill." These other things kill: DDT, PCBs, Dioxin, 177 organochlorines stored in our fat, breast milk, blood, semen, and breath, nuclear tests, electromagnetic fields—all of these things kill. Saving up apple seeds with which to kill my older sister doesn't kill. Or the Yvonne character never acted it out. I don't even have an older sister!

TNG: But the connections between homophobia and breast cancer are being made.

YR: Right, homophobia can kill.

TNG: But homophobia is a thought—a thought-toxin.

YR: Not when it's acted out.

TNG: Okay, I understand murders that really are murders but what are the little murders?

YR: Getting enraged at the person you are living with.

TNG: Although more traditionally shot, you do choose to collapse various narrative spaces in *MURDER and murder* into one another as in all your films. For instance the scene when you enter in your tux as a character.

YR: Well there are a lot of people stuffed on the bathtub at that point! The frame is packed with personalities and consequently—because of Jenny, Young Mildred, and myself—with diverse time zones: Jenny is Doris's deceased mother stuck in 1918, Young Mildred is Mildred's 18-year-old incarnation, just graduated from high school, and "I yam who I yam," to quote Popeye or somebody. You almost don't notice that young Mildred is now out of the tub and drying her hair. It was important to establish that the three of us are invisible to Doris and Mildred. So when Mildred puts down her bag of groceries—almost in Jenny's lap—Jenny has to skoot out and reposition herself. Scenes like this make one long for 35mm or Cinemascope!

TNG: It's back to the interweaving of a cinematic and a theatrical space simultaneously. You're still in the process of wrestling with narrative but not via linearity (seamless editing and identification) but more through volume and density—making the space a tableau of forms which mark different narrative trajectories.

• • •

YR: My own relation to narrative has become increasingly complicated. It is the most effective "gripping device," or means of engaging an audience and as such must be considered and mastered. This means that situations and characters must have varying degrees of credibility. The coefficients of time and space, however, can—and must—be played with. For comic relief, for disruption, for foregrounding "the apparatus," for allowing analysis and commentary. I'm echoing Brecht and Godard, perhaps, but with regard to Brecht, I want more details of everyday life, and regarding Godard, I want more psychological truth.

ZEITGEIST FILMS presents

MURDER

and murder
a film by yvonne rainer

Starring

JOANNA MERLIN
KATHLEEN CHALFANT
CATHERINE KELLNER
ISA THOMAS
and
YVONNE RAINER

with

ALICE PLAYTEN • KENDAL THOMAS • ROD McLACHLAN
JENNIE MOREAU • SASHA MARTIN • BARBARA HAAS • RAINN WILSON

Director of Photography STEPHEN KAZMIERSKI

Production Designer STEPHEN McCABE

Costume Designer LINDA GUI

Line Producer STEPHEN SCHMIDT

Music FRANK LONDON

Art Director CATHY COOK

Casting HEIDI GRIFFITHS

1st Assistant Director CHRISTINE LeGOFF

Sound Recordist DAVID POWERS

2nd Assistant Director MELINA JOCHUM

1st Assistant Camera MIA BARKER

2nd Assistant Camera EILEEN SCHRIEBER/DORAY DONNET

Propmaster CHRIS DES MARAIS

Script Supervisor C. LEIGH PURTILL

Editor YVONNE RAINER

Sound Editor LEO TROMBETTA

Written, Produced and Directed by YVONNE RAINER

USA • 1996 • 16mm • Color • 113 mins

ZEITGEIST FILMS LTD

247 Centre St, 2nd fl, New York, NY 10013

Tel (212) 274-1989 • Fax (212) 274-1644