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Auteurists alert: Passed over for theatrical release, *A Couch in New York*, Chantal Akerman's bid for Woody Allen's romantic comedy turf, has shown up unheralded on Showtime cable. The least successful of Akerman's films, it still has a couple of terrific scenes (not to mention that it outshines all of Allen's post-*Crimes and Misdemeanors* efforts). Juliette Binoche is charming (except when she tries too hard to be Audrey Hepburn in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*) as an impulsive ballet dancer who swaps her bohemian digs in Paris for the posh Upper East Side apartment of a stuffy psychoanalyst (played by William Hurt). When his patients presume that she's his replacement, she hasn't the heart to turn them away. Soon she's coaxing them on with the inquiring "Yes?" and the benign "Uh-huh" that mark a real pro.

According to people involved in the production, Akerman's attempt to contrast rainy Paris with sunny New York was foiled by the weather gods. (The film was shot during one of the wettest Junes in New York City history.) Perhaps that's why the film doesn't quite jell. More likely, it's that Akerman is too subversive a talent for such a flat-out commercial endeavor. Still, I found it pleasant enough except for the whimsical treatment of the dog. Far be it from me to quibble about logic in a film that's clearly a fairy tale, but I have trouble believing that a dog who's been cavalierly abandoned in the middle of Fifth Avenue traffic would turn up a few hours later at Kennedy Airport in one piece. ❖