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Journeys From Berlin 1971

(COLOR & B/W 16m)

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Cerebral material on Germany's terrorists phase of 1970s. Fairly well done for selective handling.

Directed and edited by Yvonne Rainer. Camera (color/black & white), Carl Teitelbaum, Michael Steinke, Wolfgang Senn, Jon Else, Shinichi Tajiri; sound, Larry Sider, Helene Kaplan, Dan Gillham, Christian Moldt. Financed by the British Film Institute, Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst, New York State Council on the Arts, Center for Advanced Visual Studies M.I.T., Christophe de Menil, Beard's Fund Inc., Rockefeller Foundation. Reviewed at Bleecker St. Cinema, New York, Jan. 25, 1980. Running Time: 125 Mins.

Cast: Annette Michelson, Ilona Halberstadt, Gabor Vernon, Chad Wollen, Amy Taubin, Vitto Acconci, Lena Hyun, Yvonne Rainer, Ruth Rainero, Leo Rainer, Cynthia Beatt, Antonio Skarmeta.

Though a bit too abstract to make complete sense, Yvonne Rainer's "Journey From Berlin-1971" represents an interesting attempt to correlate explicit public events with the more personal, everyday aspects of life. Fashioned as an at times fascinating, at times confusing melange of sequences, the picture manages to hold an audience, albeit a cerebrally inclined one, even though to many, the director's intent may not be that obvious.

The ideas and images that recur throughout concern the political terrorism that swept West Germany during the last decade along with its historical precedents in pre-Bolshevik Russia and early 20th Century America, posited against the stream of consciousness meanderings of a woman undergoing a psychoanalytic session. Annette Michelson provides an effective performance in this role, alternating between intimate introspection and comic gibberish quite well.

Michelson's material alludes to suicide, violence, and aspects of sexual and political power, and this is picked up in related and contrasted voice-overs in which a couple discusses specific political events, such as the exploits of the Baader-Meinhof terrorists, in relation to more philosophical questions regarding social justice as well as such mundane areas as food preparation and personal relationships.

Aerial views of Stonehenge, the Berlin wall, street scenes, a recurring but slowly changing tracking shot of various cultural artifacts on a mantelpiece, and short news items concerning Germany's response to political violence also figure in the mix, as does a sequence of jump shots in which a man and a woman walking seem almost choreographed in their disjunct steps.

Considering the rather sober metier of the subject matter, Rainer is not without humor, as much of Michelson's role contains comic revelations, as well as what might be considered the world's first Stalinist obscene phone call, as a woman answering her phone is greeted by a heavily breathed harangue of Leon Trotsky.

To Rainer's credit, however disparate her elements, she manages to convey a clear linear sense, and this helps to sustain a viewer's interest. This impression is however a misleading one as one is never quite sure where one is being led, because the correlations between public and private are never made concrete enough. —Roso.