

The Vanishing (Sporloos) (1988)

Major Credits:

director: George Sluizer
cinematography: Toni Kuhn
screenplay: Tim Krabbe and George Sluizer; from Krabbe's novel, **The Golden Egg**
cast: Gene Bervoets (Rex), Johanna Ter Steege (Saskia), Bernard Pierre Donnadiou (Raymond), Gwen Eckhaus (Lieneke)

Background:

This low-budget Franco-Dutch production received little attention at the time of its release, other than to acknowledge its competent re-tooling of the thriller genre made famous by Alfred Hitchcock, whose early success, **The Lady Vanishes** (1938), it skillfully evokes. The film became more widely accessible to American audiences after its video release, following Sluizer's 1991 re-make in English, also entitled **The Vanishing** (1991), starring Kiefer Sutherland and Jeff Daniels.

Cinematic Qualities:

Like its sociopathic protagonist, the film deliberately adopts an inconspicuous style, contenting itself, as it were, with the intricacy of its plot. The recurrent high angle shots seem significant, however, as an expression of both the unseen vision of a powerful voyeur and the theme of predestination. This device is but one way among many in which the film inscribes the motif of **looking**.

Topics for Discussion:

1. Consider the film's rather unusual narrative structure, which identifies **who** did it before exploring **why** and (the aspect that usually comes first) **how**. How does this structure--and the slow pace of its development--alter the spectator's interest and contribute to the film's ultimate effect?
2. For a movie that sustains such narrative tension building to absolute terror, **The Vanishing** surprisingly lacks the usual scenes of graphic violence. How, then, does it manage to assault our sensibilities so violently? Compare the film with more explicitly violent examples of the thriller/suspense genre.
3. Although its most basic appeal is as an emotional thriller, **The Vanishing** raises at least two serious themes, each applying to a different male protagonist. On Rex's level, it raises questions about the value and limits of **knowledge**; on Raymond's level, it explores the nature of **evil**. Both themes, of course, comment on our understanding of what it means to be human.
4. Another aspect of the film's disturbing--even haunting--effect is the way it forces spectators to recognize their own passivity. Photography, Susan Sontag has argued, always involves an act of non-intervention--as does looking at pictures. How does **The Vanishing** manage to implicate us in the bizarre behavior of both of its protagonists?