FILM QUARTERLY

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FILM QUARTERLY

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

(Vol. XVI, No. 1—Fall 1962)

Ian Cameron's monograph, to which this issue is devoted, attempts to survey Antonioni's films in enough detail to show in a visual, textural sense—as well as a thematic sense—what Antonioni has been about. It also provides a means of understanding the earlier pictures, which may not be shown in the United States for a long time, if at all.

Antonioni worked in relative obscurity for years, his films being neither exported nor great successes in Italy. Then *L'Avventura*, after being hissed at the 1960 Cannes festival, went on to a great triumph in Paris; the critics of the world blinked, and admitted that here was a masterpiece —an austere, demanding, relentless film, unprepossessing in its characters and meager in its "action," yet strangely gripping. It had a way of making most current movies look like kindergarten exercises. *L'Avventura* sprang immediately to the number-two spot in *Sight & Sound's* poll on the Ten Best Films—taking a place among pictures which, for one reason or another, had stood the test of decades.

Like Bergman before him, Antonioni has become the idol of a cult; more, his films command high prices and do good business. By the grudges we harbor toward success, these facts already lead some people to resent Antonioni, as if to blame the cult on him personally. In time, if his work becomes too arid or too colorful or too personal in some way, the cultists will turn on him as they turned on Bergman and Resnais, and he will become another casualty of the wars of marginal product differentiation. Doubtless, also, he will go on making remarkably interesting films, as he did before his notoriety.

However, Antonioni's role in the cinema seems to me a fundamental one whose importance transcends his current vogue. In *L'Avventura* he presented us with what, without clearly knowing it, we had been waiting for: a classic example of a new style of film-making. This style, for which no term yet exists, is recognizably modern: post-Freud, post-Marx, post-Sartre. It has broken entirely with the dramatic assumptions of nineteenth-century melodrama, which have dominated the cinema's ideas about plot and character since Griffith. It is as resolute and sophisticated as a modern novel in its point of view; it has the strength to avoid easy judgments and neat resolutions. Antonioni's people are not tidy, artificial, comfortably definite bundles of motives; they are always somewhat opaque, capable of surprises. As we are made to stare at them, and at the intervals of space and time which surround them, we must assess them as we assess people in our own lives. This is unaccustomed work in the cinema, where the answers are usually spelled out for us in big black letters. But it is the demand made by a genuine work of art, and it is for making such demands that we bear Antonioni the gratitude and respect which occasion a special issue such as this one.

This is no longer a cinema with heroes, villains, and "problems" that can be "resolved" one way or another. The problems are many, but they are not resolved. How could they be? —Only by re-making the characters and their world according to the precepts of some imaginary morality—that of Hollywood, say, or of "socialist realism." This is a cinema about a particular, personally viewed world, specific in place, time, and class. Yet in Antonioni's characters, freed of the daily routines that keep most of us from thinking too much, we see a modern man who is surely not a stranger to us: alienated from work, family, love, society, history. Antonioni is the finest screen poet of this lostness which is also our own. His films warrant the closest scrutiny we can bring to bear.

—ERNEST CALLENBACH

[For previous comment on Antonioni in *FQ*, see the Summer 1961 issue.]

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MICHAELANGELO ANTONIONI

BY IAN CAMERON

"So much writing nowadays suffers from lack of an attitude and from sheer lack of any material, save what is accumulated in a purely social life. The world, as a rule, does not live on beaches and in country clubs."

—F. SCOTT FITZGERALD, in a letter to his daughter, Frances Scott Fitzgerald

I

Cannes, 1962. The most eagerly awaited film of the Festival is Antonioni's *L'Eclisse*. Although it is the middle of a sunny May morning, the huge Palais des Festivals is half full for it. The evening show has long since been sold out. Antonioni himself is in hiding somewhere on the edge of town, and has only come to Cannes to give a press conference with Pietro Germi on their reasons for not coming to the Festival itself.

Before *L'Eclisse*, the audience has to sit through yet another short on folk-dancing which leaves it nothing to do but work up an even keener anticipation of the master's latest offering. The curtains part to the sound of a Twist played *fortissimo* as the titles flash on a blank screen. The audience is wholeheartedly on Antonioni's side.

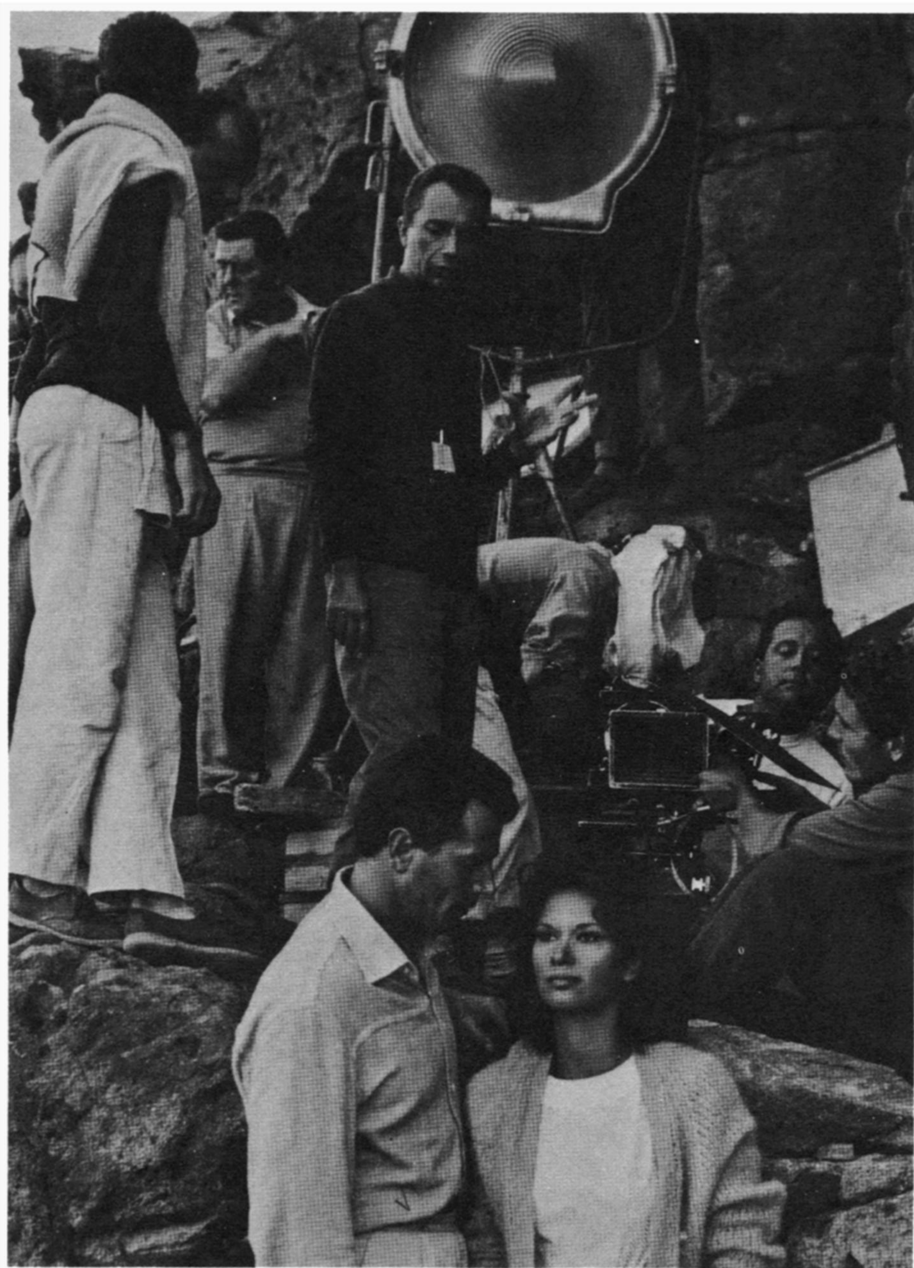
Two hours later there is hissing from the balcony, and the critics file out silently, desperately trying to think up something snappy to surprise their colleagues and later their readers. A few have decided that the Eclipse of the title is Antonioni's. The rest concede, with qualifications, that he has done it again. There is a certain unwillingness to hazard any opinions on what he has done, but anyone will tell you how well, or badly, he has done it.

Two years before, *L'Avventura* had suffered a similar fate (less anticipation, more hissing), and set Antonioni on the way to becoming Bergman's successor as number-one cult director. I, for one, had expected that 1962 would be the year that Cannes capitulated to Antonioni. Granted that the Cannes audience is among the most perverse in the world (about its most rapturous welcome went to *Mondo Cane*, Gualtiero Jacopetti's two-hour hymn to mutilation); even so, two years of repetitively consistent praise in almost every serious film magazine and newspaper should have had some effect, at least on the critics. But no. Antonioni is little better understood now in English-speaking countries than he was when *L'Avventura* appeared.

It was easy then to see the reasons for the trouble: Antonioni's films had been shown very little outside Italy and France. Only *Le Amiche* and *Il Grido* had appeared, and passed unnoticed, in Britain and the United States respectively.

Antonioni is not so much difficult as different. General knowledge of the cinema is likely to be of less use to the spectator coming for the first time to Antonioni than to almost any other director. Without being consciously obscure or using techniques which are new in themselves, he is very different in spirit from most of his contemporaries—particularly from other Italians. He sets out to make a film about emotions, and refuses to let his cast emote according to the extrovert traditions of Italian screen acting. That would be "rhetoric," one of his dislikes. This opens one line of attack against him: "He looks at life as if he were Swedish or Norwegian," says Jean-Pierre Mel-

Photo by Jack O'Connell



ville. "He is nearer to Bergman than Rossellini. He is a north man, very cold."

He set *L'Avventura* in a society that most people would consider decadent, and alienated more of them by concentrating relentlessly on individuals rather than social problems. Worse still, he abandoned "the lower and middle classes where lives are constricted by necessity, to concentrate on the idle rich who have the time to torture each other."

And even the critics not infected by social realism were sorely tried. Here was a long film with so little story that on paper it looked inconsequential. A film whose technique was so closely moulded to its author's intentions that it required the closest concentration for every second of its length. *Sight and Sound* remarked that it would "probably tax any audience in the world." Helped by an inaccurate synopsis, some British critics even got the plot wrong. The column-filling way out from their incomprehension was to say how difficult/experimental/revolutionary it was.

But any film by any decent director, whether Welles or Vigo, Hitchcock or Mizoguchi, is an experiment in expressing whatever is important to its author through the subject he chooses or is given. If *L'Avventura* is revolutionary, it follows a line of similar if smaller revolutions.

Certainly it is not revolutionary in its technical resources. All the devices which Antonioni uses have been used before, although rarely in such a rigorously meaningful way. He has removed a large proportion of the linking shots whose only value is to make the spectator comfortable, to carry him gently from one time or place to another. The film is pared down to what Antonioni considers necessary. Answering an interviewer who suggested that certain sequences in *La Notte* were the most important, he said: "If I'm sure that one sequence is less important than another I cut it out."

His aim is, in the first instance, the most precise possible description of behavior and, through behavior, of emotions, the "interior drama." Bresson, who is also concerned with "interior drama," seeks to reach it by suppressing all the externals. Antonioni on the other hand has realized that it is impossible to communicate the "interior drama" directly without the intervention of exterior drama—action or behavior or dialogue—the evidence through which we recognize emotion in others. Everything irrelevant to his aim has been whittled down to a minimum. In an interview he explained: "I always try to manage so that each element of the image serves the narrative, serves to specify a particular psychological moment. An image is only essential if each square centimeter of that image is essential."

The difficulty people have over Antonioni occurs, I think, right at the start with the images themselves. Therefore I am concentrating in this monograph on the interpretation of the action and images. The first section is devoted to *L'Avventura* because it is the most familiar of Antonioni's films, and so provides the best source of examples to use in explaining his methods. It is also the film in which these methods were perfected, and in a way explains the preceding films as well as the later ones. He has himself suggested that he was not precisely aware of what he was trying to say in *Il Grido*, and that it only became clear to him after he had made *L'Avventura* and *La Notte*. The greater clarity of *L'Avventura* suggests that he had finally rationalized the methods that he had used intuitively in the previous films. It seems at any rate that the changes in Antonioni's style since *L'Avventura* have been more consciously thought out than those before it. I should add that intellect is in no way superior to intuition in a director: indeed I suspect that most of the better directors are primarily intuitive workers.

II

The story of *L'Avventura* is extraordinarily simple—I'm going to assume that everyone knows it by now. Structurally the film is remarkable for its almost complete lack of resolution—particularly in the case of Anna, who is, after all, one of the two leading characters in the first part of the film. Little explanation

is given for her disappearance, and none at all of what she has done. A few hints are planted that she might have gone away (sounds from unseen motor boats) or committed suicide (a dissolve from Claudia calling her name to waves crashing between two rocks, and a cut from Claudia holding Anna's blouse to a stormy sea), but nothing more. When Antonioni was in London in 1960, he was asked what happened to Anna. He replied, "I don't know. Someone told me that she committed suicide, but I don't believe it." That sums up Antonioni's whole attitude to plots and construction in films. As he is concerned with exploring situations rather than with tailoring neat plots, Anna is of no further interest to him after she has broken with Sandro—whatever the means she has used—and so she does not reappear. Any other writer or director would, I think, have brought her back at the end to give a "neat" construction and a "dramatic" resolution.

Antonioni has called the story "a detective story back to front." Like the two protagonists we lose interest in the search for Anna as our attention is diverted to Sandro's affair with Claudia. Our experience of the events parallels the characters' experience in the film. We are never put in the position of knowing more facts than Claudia and Sandro. Because they never find out what happened to Anna, the director does not tell the audience.

We receive information as it is presented to the characters, in the wrong, or rather "illogical," order. Example: we are not actually told until near the end of the film, when she mentions it to Patrizia, that Claudia comes from a poor family. In retrospect one can find sufficient evidence of her social position earlier in the film, but one only realizes its significance after one has been told—Antonioni relies heavily on the audience's power of recollection. The jumbled order in which we receive facts and the elimination of what Antonioni calls "unnecessary technical baggage, . . . logical narrative transitions" are motivated by his belief that "cinema today should be tied to the truth rather than to logic." In life one does not get to know people in a logical way, and he does not see any reason for making things easy for his audience by changing this in his films.

Similarly, the length of each scene is dictated by the time it would take to happen. Antonioni avoids the sort of unreal screen time where crafty cutting is used to speed up the "slow" bits of the action. If it takes a character ten seconds to walk across a courtyard, he will take ten seconds on the screen in *L'Avventura,* even though there is a cut from one camera position to another in the middle. Others might remove a second or two at the cut to prevent the film from dragging. But to Antonioni these seconds are just as important as the ones on either side. He subjects his audiences to real time as his characters would experience it: he would not sacrifice that to maintain a "good" (i.e., brisk or at least steady) pace.

Although our experience may parallel that of the protagonists, we are not invited to identify with them. The method of acting and filming is designed positively to discourage it. Thus in place of subjective camerawork Antonioni favors deep not-quite-subjective shots with the camera close behind one of the characters who is visible in the frame. We observe more or less from his viewpoint without being sold the idea that we are looking through his eyes. In the earlier films, intimate scenes were normally shown in straight two-shot, which automati-

". . . the most precise possible description of behavior . . ."

cally places the camera even further outside the action as an observer. The method of *L'Avventura* still does not allow identification, but involves the camera more closely with the action.

We are shown what the characters see and learn what they learn, but without identifying with them, so that our appreciation of their feelings must be primarily intellectual. We are therefore more conscious than the characters of the meaning of their behavior (as we would not be if we started identifying with them). This places us in a position to correlate our observations of all the characters and reach the general conclusions which Antonioni expects us to draw.

III

Antonioni's concern with behavior rather than story telling shows in the treatment of the minor characters. Apart from Claudia, Anna, and Sandro, only Ettore, the architect for whom Sandro works, and Gloria Perkins, the starlet, are essential in advancing the plot—and Ettore need never have appeared on screen (indeed his part was heavily cut in filming). The others, Corrado and Giulia, Raimondo and Patrizia, the chemist and his wife, Anna's father, the old fisherman and the princeling painter, are given much more weight than their contribution to the "action" demands. They mostly serve an altogether different purpose: to provide an environment within which the situations can develop, and which heightens the effect of the main action by making us aware of its implications or by contrasting with it.

"... background characters as environment ..."

In the opening part of the film, Claudia's stability serves to emphasize Anna's irrational, neurotic character. When Anna suddenly stops wanting to see Sandro as she arrives outside his apartment, reasonable Claudia is there saying, "If I had a man who'd waited since midday, and I hadn't seen him for a month . . ." And during the scenes between Sandro and Anna, we see Claudia outside (first in deep focus through the bedroom window and then in intercut shots of her going towards the apartment). She wanders around, at first bored and then amused by people's reactions to an art exhibition. The normality of her behavior contrasts with the strange silent love scene in which Anna, having at first taken the initiative, remains completely aloof while she allows Sandro to make love to her. Throughout the first part of the film, Claudia is a foil to Anna who, having nothing to occupy her but her own emotions, is completely and selfishly absorbed by them.

The use of background characters as environment is taken very much further in the scenes on the island. Giulia and Corrado, Patrizia and Raimondo are used to sketch in the milieu of boredom in which Anna's affair with Sandro can come to be so important to her. Boredom in Antonioni's movies is always the main component of a life devoid of any purpose except enjoyment, and reduced to a search for ways of passing the time. Patrizia has her jigsaw puzzles and her dog. Raimondo goes skin diving although he says he hates it. Corrado asks Patrizia for the flag of her yacht so that he can plant it on the island. The boredom is underlined by the presence of Claudia who is actually enjoying herself whether she is paddling among the rocks or just sitting on the yacht.

The boredom of Giulia and Corrado has another aspect with a more immediate relevance to the Sandro/Anna situation. Giulia and Cor-

rado are bored with each other. Their relationship has degenerated into mutual torture—the end of the road along which Sandro and Anna are moving. In their very first dialogue exchanges we are made aware of the parallel —Corrado and Giulia had come to this area twelve years before—and just look at them now:

GIULIA: The sea is as smooth as a mirror.
CORRADO: That's right, start coining cliches . . .
GIULIA: Once these islands were all volcanoes.
CORRADO: When you and I came here twelve years ago, you were already giving geography lessons.

". . . all the affection . . ."

IV

The first part of the film and particularly the island sequences, then, are used to fill in the necessary background to the action (here again there is rigorous exclusion of the unnecessary —for example, we never learn much about Claudia's antecedents). In the foreground, Antonioni relies on our minute observation of what the characters are doing or saying. Every gesture has a precise significance and every technical device Antonioni can muster is used to help us see it. We have to observe for ourselves the build-up of the relationship between Claudia and Sandro; it is not explained to us. Socially, Claudia is an intruder from a lower class. She is given a lift to the yacht in Anna's car, and elsewhere Anna treats her in a slightly patronizing way—having her wait outside while she makes love with Sandro or offering to give her a blouse which she likes. Claudia is embarrassed by Raimondo's grotesquely half-hearted attempts to seduce Patrizia, and offers to leave them alone. She is the only one to derive any spontaneous enjoyment from the cruise: a particular gesture makes this clear—her delight when one of the yacht crew comes ashore with a bowl of fruit.

Before Anna's disappearance, there is virtually no contact between Claudia and Sandro. Claudia is the first to wonder where Anna is. As she says "Anna dov'è?" she looks at Sandro. She is the only one of the group who feels much responsibility for Anna's disappearance. Sandro's first reaction is irritation—"Anna is full of ideas." Giulia at first enjoys the search as a new diversion, but soon she is absorbed in her own problems—"Did you see how Corrado treats me? He does everything to humiliate me." Such selfishness shocks Claudia. Already isolated from the rest by her position —her only link with them was Anna—Claudia soon comes into conflict with them when she insists on remaining on the island. Antonioni brings out the conflict by having her walk away from the camera and from the rest of the group before she says "I'm staying." Then he cuts to a full-face shot of her showing determination with the others behind her while Sandro urges her to leave. As he is staying because he feels that he should, Sandro is disturbed by Claudia's genuine feeling of responsibility. He tells her that she will be in the way—the lamest of excuses for getting rid of her. Corrado is staying to get away from Giulia—

CORRADO: I'm staying too.
GIULIA: Why? What if it rains?
CORRADO: If it rains, I'll buy an umbrella.

Throughout the subsequent scene in the fisherman's hut, the tension between Claudia and the men, particularly Sandro, is conveyed

through a favorite Antonioni device—she avoids looking at them. Even the least perceptive critics noticed that on the whole, people didn't look at each other in *L'Avventura.* What they failed to see was the expressive use that Antonioni makes of the direction in which his characters are looking. If they look each other straight in the eye, there is an emotional reason for it; if they don't, there's a reason for that too.

The conflict between Sandro and Claudia eventually becomes explicit when the old man asks what has happened:

SANDRO: Nothing . . . nothing.
Claudia turns, amazed, to look at him.
CLAUDIA: Why not tell him?
Then, to the old man—
CLAUDIA: A girl who was with us has disappeared.
The old man seems frankly surprised at this.
OLD MAN: How do you mean disappeared? . . . Drowned?
CLAUDIA: Not drowned . . . Disappeared, we don't know where she is.
SANDRO: And it's my fault. Say that as well. You're thinking it.
CLAUDIA: Rather than minding so much about my thoughts, you would have done better to try to understand what Anna was thinking.

Claudia looks at Sandro only when she is outraged enough to clash with him. When she runs out into the rain, calling for Anna, her action is an expression of her feelings of responsibility for Anna. Sandro's part in the whole scene reflects his inability to appreciate spontaneously the feelings of other people.

Sandro is much less aware than Claudia or Anna of the relevance of other people to his own life—he did not realize, as Anna did, the implications for them in Corrado's relationship with Giulia. He did not notice her problems and made unwittingly crude and hurtful remarks. In his last conversation with Anna we can find the final motivation for her disappearance:

ANNA: The thought of losing you makes me want to die, but I don't feel you any more.
SANDRO: Didn't you feel me yesterday?
Corrado and Giulia pass in the background.
ANNA: Why must you ruin everything?

As he does not respond to the feelings of other people he does not feel any responsibility for what happens to them. His emotional superficiality seems in Antonioni's eyes to be a corollary to lack of purpose in life—it is shared by everyone except Claudia, who comes from outside their social class, and Anna, because of her neurotic concentration on her own feelings.

The morning after the scene in the hut, Claudia apologizes to Sandro for her actions the previous evening (something which none of the others would do), and he asks her whether Anna ever mentioned him (a typically egocentric question). He is now wondering why Anna disappeared, but the conversation also provides his first contact with Claudia which is free from hostility. It is slight and uncertain—they avoid looking at each other except for an exchanged glance when they hear a boat passing. Their feelings about Anna remain significantly different:

SANDRO: She acted as if all the affection—mine, yours, her father's—meant nothing to her.
CLAUDIA: I wonder what I could have done to have avoided all this.

V

Sandro on the make for his fiancée's best friend is a spectacle which would, by Hayes Code morality, mark him down for summary retribution—particularly as he's doing this when his fiancée might have committed suicide. But Antonioni does not condemn Sandro or invite us to do so. He has even gone so far as to say that Anna's disappearance creates a gap that is immediately filled by other factors.

Why should we condemn Sandro for his actions? The expected answer is that standard woman's-pic gambit: "If you don't just *know,*

I can't tell you." With Antonioni, it's not moral unawareness that prevents him from judging Sandro: his output could be summed up as a critique of society by way of its moral precepts. The complex of reasons underlying the refusal to condemn Sandro is central to the whole of Antonioni's work.

In the first place, judgment implies the acceptance of standards. But what standards? "We make do with obsolete moral standards, out-of-date myths, old conventions," said Antonioni at his press conference to introduce *L'Avventura* at Cannes, and elsewhere in the same statement he referred to "emotional traits which . . . condition man without offering him any help, . . . tie him down without showing him a way out. And yet it seems that he has not yet managed to rid himself of this heritage."

Antonioni frequently compares the scientific and moral progress of mankind: "Man is prepared to rid himself of technological and scientific concepts when they turn out to be false. Never has science been so humble or ready to retract. But in the field of emotions there is total conformism. In recent years we have studied feelings to the point of exhaustion. We have been able to do that, but not to find new answers or even to get a clue to a solution of the problem."

The rejection of "obsolete" moral standards could mean, as it does for Vadim, the substitution of a personal code according to which actions are judged. But Antonioni does not propose a replacement and therefore refrains from judgments. "I'm not a moralist," he insists (and one can only agree on the most superficial level). "My film is neither a denunciation nor a sermon."

He would not, I'm sure, allow that he had the right to condemn Sandro's actions, for the implication would be that he was in some way superior to Sandro, an ideal which would hardly appeal to Antonioni who has in his film totally abandoned the "superannuated casuistry of positives and negatives," as Tommaso Chiaretti remarks in his introduction to the published script of *L'Avventura.* Thus "there are no heroes in Antonioni's films, only protagonists." Being himself a product of the milieu which he depicts in his films, Antonioni does not believe that he is qualified to judge his characters. "The middle class doesn't give me the means with which to resolve any middle class problems. That's why I confine myself to pointing out existing problems without proposing any solutions."

Because we are not expected to identify with any of the characters or to judge them as individuals (the latter tends to be a consequence of the former), we are left free to draw more general conclusions. We are expected, for example, to see Sandro as a representative of his class and even of his society and time. It is hardly surprising that Scott Fitzgerald is Antonioni's favorite author.

VI

Sandro in pursuit of Claudia does not present at all the appearance which might be expected from a man on the make. One never feels that he is taking the initiative at all, but that he is dragged along by an impulse which he cannot control.

On the morning after Anna's disappearance, Claudia has just washed her face in a pool of rain water when Sandro comes down towards her. She glances at him, then looks away and begins to walk off up the slope. Sandro grasps her hand and she turns towards him before breaking away without a word. His look could hardly be further from aggressive male supremacy: it seems rather to say "Please help me." He behaves here and later more as a suppliant than as a seducer. To Sandro, insecure and fearful of what might have happened, Claudia seems to provide the possibility of support or escape. It is almost as if he needs a mother as much as a mistress: a bosom to bury his face in as an escape from the unpleasantness of the world.

In this he fits Antonioni's picture of modern man which he laid out in his 1960 Cannes statement (of which a free translation with

Vitti and Antonioni during the shooting at Noto. [Photo: Jack O'Connell]

added pomposity appeared in *Film Culture* for Spring, 1962). There he contrasted Renaissance man, filled with the joy of living and doing in an apparently Ptolemaic, earth-centered universe, and his modern counterpart, whose world is Copernican, a tiny fragment of an infinite universe. Result: man has lost his feeling of dominance and is filled with fear and uncertainty. Now this fills me with suspicion by glibly explaining too much too simply. It is the sort of statement on which pint-sized intellectuals cut their eye-teeth. And sure enough it turned up again, scrambled, in a *Sight and Sound* article on eroticism. However, the historical explanation is not particularly important: what matters is the picture of man trapped between his own fears and moral restraints from which he cannot escape.

Back to Sandro, chasing after Claudia. He continues as pathetically as he started. The confined space of the yacht cabin brings them so close together when he comes below deck to look for his suitcase that he manages to make up his mind to take her in his arms and kiss her. For a moment her response is definitely coöperative before she breaks away and rushes out on deck, leaving Sandro looking stunned. When they reach the Sicilian mainland, he follows her to the railway station and on to the train, almost begging her all the time to let him stay. His approach is enough to make even Claudia tell him to stop looking so tragic. There is never any suggestion that his miserable behavior is the standard lovelornness gambit —it seems perfectly genuine.

Sandro's yen for Claudia derives partly from his insecurity: he needs comforting as well as the boost to his ego that would come from her seduction. He finds refuge from his troubles in his over-riding impulse—desire is only part of it—for Claudia. Now Antonioni sees this as a general condition: the world is sexually awry because men have found in a compulsive eroticism some diversion from their problems. "Why do you think that eroticism has flooded into literature and entertainment? It is a symptom (perhaps the easiest one to perceive) of the emotional sickness of our time . . .

man is uneasy . . . so he reacts, but he reacts badly, and is unhappy."

Antonioni sets out to show us that the sexual urge that has taken hold of Sandro is not something particular and therefore significant only on a personal level. Throughout the film we are presented with sexual behavior that is silly, lewd, or grotesque. On the yacht there is Raimondo greedily caressing various items of a resigned Patrizia's anatomy. There are the young men of Messina, induced to riot as a publicity gimmick for a well-stacked starlet. She appears in a dress that is distended slightly past bursting point so that a torn seam on her thigh proffered the repressed locals a calculatedly arousing peep at her undies. Equally grotesque are the comic efforts of the little gardener in the train to get into conversation with a servant girl. And when Claudia finally goes to Sandro there is the chemist at Troina whose surliness is suddenly dropped as she appears: he becomes friendly so that he can have more time to admire her legs, to the fury of his young wife. The peasants in the market place at Noto who gather round to gape at Claudia are possessed by the same sad compulsion as Sandro: sex in Antonioni's eyes has degenerated from a joyful expression of emotion into a gloomy means of escape.

VII

When Sandro grasps Claudia's hand for the first time, her look as she gazes down at him (he is a little downhill from her) is sufficient to indicate her determination to resist and not to be distracted from the search. At their next encounter, her resolution falters. In this scene, as often with Antonioni, the leading part is taken not by either of the characters but by the setting. The embrace is provoked by their sudden proximity to each other, which in turn is a direct result of the confined space in the yacht cabin. In a larger room, the absence of this proximity would have removed the possibility of the kiss.

If it is the product of an environmental accident, the responsibility of the characters is diminished. In Antonioni's world, actions are often determined as much by the surroundings as by the people themselves—either in an immediate and physical way by the setting or by conditioning from the environment which tends to limit their choice. At times Claudia and particularly Sandro seem to be activated more by social and environmental forces than by their own decisions. Thus placed outside the area of individual moral judgments, their actions take on a wider significance. Claudia's action in kissing Sandro goes against everything she has previously felt (remember her horror at Giulia's concern with her own situation during the search). Unlike some other directors who attempt to analyze behavior, Antonioni makes his characters retain a human unpredictability. They do not perform actions worked out to be consistent with a thesis. In fact this sort of unreasoned but not gratuitous action is of the greatest importance to Antonioni. "I wanted to show that sentiments which convention and rhetoric have encouraged us to regard as having a kind of definite weight and absolute duration, can in fact be fragile, vulnerable, subject to change. Man deceives himself when he hasn't courage enough to allow for new dimensions in emotional matters—his loves, regrets, states of mind—just as he allows for them in the field of technology." In this light Claudia's action in the cabin scene is not at all a matter for condemnation. She is beginning

Gloria Perkins and Sandro's normal milieu.

to face up to the new emotional situation of her desire for Sandro. But her spontaneous action lasts only until she has had time to realize what she is doing. Then she breaks away from Sandro and goes ashore.

A struggle is going on in Claudia between her want for Sandro and her feelings of responsibility for Anna. In the scenes at the railway station where Sandro comes to find her, responsibility is winning, but only just. She can look directly and confidently at Sandro for "I know it's difficult, but don't make things more complicated. Above all don't look so tragic." But the confidence is stretched thinly over uncertainty and fear: "And don't wait for the train to leave," (looking straight and imploringly at him) "I beg you." This is hardly the line to succeed with self-centered Sandro, and sure enough, after only a moment's hesitation he is chasing after her train. For the first shots of Claudia in her compartment, she is looking straight at the camera in quite a close shot, indicating determination, but as the conversation proceeds, the camera retreats. The sequence is made up of intercut shots of Sandro and Claudia emphasizing the lack of communication between them. She is saying "remember only three days ago. . . . Does it take so little to make you forget? . . . I never felt so awful in my life. Sandro, please help me." While she is speaking, it starts to rain. Through the carriage window, we see waves crashing on the shore by the railway line. In addition to their emotional feeling, both the rain and the sea link back to the scenes on the island.

The scene of the little gardener and the servant girl in the next compartment gives a break in the emotional tension, and the reactions of Sandro and Claudia tell us more about them. Claudia laughs freely and openly, while Sandro's amusement is a little forced, almost calculated. The incident furnishes him an opportunity to catch hold of Claudia's hand again. Her smile disappears immediately as she looks round at him. She breaks away. Again we are presented with the contrast between their approaches to life—Claudia's is basically spontaneous, although conditioned by her feelings of responsibility; Sandro's is intellectual—each step is thought out before it is taken, and his spontaneous actions are usually very clumsy.

Two sequences later, after the Gloria Perkins episode and Claudia's arrival at the villa where the rest of the yacht party are staying, we see Claudia sitting in her room waiting with excited anticipation for the arrival of Sandro. She has made her decision.

Nowhere in *L'Avventura* (except perhaps at the end) or in any of Antonioni's other films do we watch characters coming to decisions on how they will act, for this process is almost impossible to show without crude verbalization —it is essentially solitary and internal. In itself it is of little interest—the action which follows the decision and the conditions in which it was made will tell us more about the character.

Claudia's excitement is seen in the self-consciously elegant way she selects a ring from her jewel box and puts it on. This is echoed in the elegance of the decor and the sensuous qualities of the photography—the images have suddenly gained a sort of luster. In this first shot of the sequence, Claudia is sitting on a chair on which is draped a frilly white slip. It forms a contrasting fringe around her black dress and gives the whole image extra impact. The excitement is also carried in the music—a bubbling little tune for flute and piano. The expectant feeling continues through into the extraordinary sequence in which the blonde Claudia puts on a black wig and Patrizia wears a blonde one. One notices that Patrizia assumes a new personality with her wig, whereas Claudia, who has a personality of her own, does not. Claudia's new feelings are even sufficient to carry her through the scenes between Giulia and the young prince, which would normally have embarrassed her (like the spectacle of Raimondo on the make for Patrizia). The image of unfaithfulness might also have troubled her because of its relevance to Sandro. This sequence also helps fill in a background of sexual availability which make it easy for

Sandro to be tempted by Gloria Perkins at the end of the film. In this milieu, too, the examples with which Claudia is constantly presented help undermine her resolve and pave the way for her affair with Sandro.

VIII

In *L'Avventura* there are two main elements which provide the environment for the action: the sexual looseness of the secondary characters, and the barrenness and/or solitude of the locations—the island, the deserted village, the train without passengers, and the hotel on the morning after the party.

"In this film," said Antonioni, "the landscape is a component of primary importance. I felt the need to break up the action by inserting, in a good many sequences, shots which could seem banal or of a documentary nature (a whirlwind, the sea, dolphins, etc.). But in fact these shots are essential because they help the idea of the film: the observation of a state of affairs. We live today in a period of extreme instability, as much political, moral, and social as physical. I have made a film on the instability of the emotions, on their mysteries." So the instability of the elements provides a visual parallel.

Throughout the film, the locations and even the climatic conditions play a crucial part in its development. Anna's home, which is glimpsed in the opening sequence, and Sandro's rather precious flat help to characterize them. In addition to its function as a symbol of barrenness, the island location allows us to see the characters separated from the milieu in which they are accustomed to operate. In this setting we are able to see them deprived of their normal time-occupying routine. The storm which gathers as the search progresses contributes to the increasing seriousness of the situation. In one shot—Claudia on a rocky promontory with waves crashing around it—the location is used to show us the desperateness of Claudia's isolation, another factor which drives her towards Sandro.

None of the effects which Antonioni obtains would be as powerful in studio sets. "It's true that on the set you can construct interior and exterior as you please. But for me something is missing, an occasional quality of reality, perhaps even a particular light. In a sense, I can say that to direct in a natural setting is to continue writing the film." He is always ready to take advantage of any opportunity which he discovers on location, and when he allows himself a *jeu d'esprit,* it usually stems directly from the location, whose reality it helps to establish. The script was modified in shooting to accommodate the old fisherman from Aus-

Claudia surrounded by the men in Noto.

tralia, because he really lived on the island, and Antonioni found him interesting. The idea for the Gloria Perkins riot (which as I've mentioned is more than light relief) came from a newspaper story. (Its setting, Messina, and the girl, Dorothy de Poliolo, are those of the original incident.) Antonioni has said that working on location puts him in a similar position to a painter who has to fill a certain wall with frescoes. As the painter exploits the irregularities of a wall for decorative effect, so the director takes advantage of the unexpected circumstances which occur on location to enliven his film.

Most of the time, though, the setting is used as a part of the main action. The barrenness of the countryside where Claudia and Sandro make love for the first time echoes the scenery of the island, while the railway train which passes (apart from its slightly too obvious sexual symbolism) takes us back to the train scene when Claudia's feeling of responsibility was last strong enough to make her reject Sandro.

These feelings are now rapidly turning to shame. Claudia, waiting outside the hotel in Noto while Sandro goes in to look for Anna, becomes aware that all the men hanging around the main square are staring at her. She rushes into a hardware shop to hide. Outside again with Sandro, she says, "If you said, 'Claudia, I love you,' I'd believe you. . . . I'd make you swear to all kinds of things. . . . It wouldn't be fair. . . . When I think you said it all before to Anna. . . ." In her shame, she is still worried about whether she is being fair to Sandro. Her problem is very different from Anna's—she is worried about whether Sandro loves her, not about her feeling for him, of which she is certain.

The relevance of the background to the foreground becomes crucial in the Noto sequences. We learn from Sandro's monologue on the bell tower that he is an architect who has given up his creative ambitions for the easy money he could make by the purely mechanical job of estimating. The reawakening of these ambitions is connected with his feelings for Claudia. The first time we were aware that architecture had any particular significance for Sandro was in the first scene back on the mainland—in the police station at Milazzo. The building chosen for the sequence was a very remarkable baroque villa. The script was modified at this point to show Sandro's interest in architecture. He is staring at part of the building with such obvious interest that someone comes up to him and points out a bust of the man for whom it was built. "I bet he's turning in his grave"—at the use to which it has been put—a fine building turned into a police station—is a token of what's happened to Sandro—architect turned into calculating machine.

IX

In the scene on the bell tower in Noto, Sandro's feelings for Claudia come to be linked more closely to his architectural ambitions. We see Sandro against a background of buildings talking to Claudia with mounting enthusiasm:

SANDRO: Look at this imagination, this exuberance, this preoccupation with setting. What extraordinary freedom. . . .

A pause during which he continues to look in front of him. Then reflectively:

SANDRO: I really must make up my mind to leave Ettore. . . . I'd like to start working again on my own projects. You know, I've plenty of ideas. . . .

Claudia has calmed down (this comes after the guilt scene in the square outside the hotel) and is watching him with interest.

CLAUDIA: And why have you given them up?

SANDRO: One day I was asked to make an estimate for a school. I realized that I had made four million lire in 36 hours. Since then, I've gone on making estimates for other people's jobs.

Claudia looks at him as if judging him, and Sandro notices it.

SANDRO: Why are you looking at me like that?

CLAUDIA: On the contrary, I'm sure that you

could produce many beautiful things.
SANDRO: I don't know. What use are beautiful things now? How long do they last?
He says this with a touch of sadness, and avoids looking at Claudia. Then he smiles to himself and is silent. He looks again for a little at the outlines of the buildings. A moment later he turns to Claudia.
SANDRO: Claudia, are we going to get married?

With the feelings which Claudia has reawakened in Sandro has come rediscovery of his vocation as an architect. It is quite natural, therefore, for him to go on from describing his ambitions and doubts as an architect to proposing to Claudia, for both are manifestations of the same emotional state. In a way, Claudia has become the personification of Sandro's vocation.

She is amazed and disturbed by Sandro's proposal, and for the time being rejects it. Her hair blows across her face just as it did in the morning scenes on the island as she says "What can I answer? . . . No. Not yet, at least. . . . I don't know. . . . I'm not even thinking about us. How can you ask at a time like this." Although she rejects his proposal, she is overjoyed by this evidence that he has some feeling for her. Her accidental ringing of one of the bells gives her a way of showing her joy (this too was improvised in shooting). The reflection of the sound of the bells back from the buildings which Sandro has been talking about is a symbolic comment on the whole sequence.

An even more striking expression of Claudia's joy follows. A loudspeaker van draws up in the square of Noto, scattering leaflets. From it comes "una musichetta volgare e molto ritmata." We cut to the room where Claudia is rummaging behind the bed for her stockings. Putting them on becomes the beginning of an impromptu dance around Sandro who doesn't have her natural high spirits. The sordidness of the room makes the radiance of the dance even more stunning. As Sandro goes out having managed no more in the way of response than a slight quizzical smile, Claudia playfully blocks the doorway and says in a mock dramatic tone, "You can't leave me alone in a hotel room." She adds "And tell me . . . that you love me," but her last words have become genuinely serious as she has noticed Sandro's lack of response. This seriousness is strengthened by the contrast with her previous high spirits.

But Antonioni very soon makes it even plainer that nothing much has changed in Sandro. He goes to the local museum to absorb more inspiration. It is closed and there's no one who can tell him how to get in, or when it opens. This setback, in contrast to the aspirations he has rediscovered, opens the way for his fit of jealousy when he sees the young architect drawing. Here is a young man actually producing something. He knocks over the

"You can't leave me alone in a hotel room."

ink bottle and blots out the picture simply because he is jealous of the young man, who still has the idealism and creativeness that Sandro has lost. That's why he asks the man's age and says, "When I was 23 I used to look harder for fights, and find them. . . ."

When he returns peevishly to the hotel, he seems to the sensitive Claudia quite a different person from her new lover. Because of this, she refuses to let him make love to her.

SANDRO: What's wrong—
CLAUDIA: Sandro . . . wait a moment, just a moment. I feel as if I don't know you.
SANDRO: You should be delighted. It's a new adventure.
CLAUDIA: What did you say?
SANDRO: I was only joking, of course. Can't I make jokes? Now tell me why you don't want to.
CLAUDIA: Oh, Sandro . . . I want everything you do, but . . .

But she is unable to communicate with him. Sandro has treated Claudia in this sequence in almost the same way as he did Anna before she disappeared.

X

The last part of the film puts Sandro for the first time with Claudia on what is more or less home ground for him. She has now recovered herself—there are happy gestures and embraces behind the hotel porter. Claudia is tired and prepares for bed while Sandro dresses for the evening. He talks about his ambitions to her. "I used to dream of being a diplomat. I never saw myself as very rich. I saw myself as a genius working in a garret. Now I've got two flats and I've neglected to become a genius."

Downstairs Sandro is without Claudia, the image of his new aspirations. Furthermore, he is in his normal milieu. In the circumstances it is easy for him to be defeated. Claudia and vocation are betrayed at almost the same time. His capitulation to Ettore is a form of unfaithfulness to Claudia. He makes a half-hearted attempt to talk to Ettore. ("Let's take a walk first") but has no reply to his "Can I count on you tomorrow. . . . Without your figures I'm sunk. . . ." Already Sandro has exchanged a meaningful glance with Gloria Perkins, whom we know from the comments of the journalist in Messina to be strictly a cash proposition. There is an extraordinary image through which Antonioni expresses his disgust for the situation, personal and social. Sandro passes behind an elegantly dressed girl looking at a painting. It shows a young girl breast-feeding an old man. The girl looks round and smiles provocatively at Sandro, revealing her ugliness. After the conversation with Ettore, we see Gloria again. So does Sandro. He goes to watch television, but is soon bored with it. Cut to Claudia waiting happily. She wanders into Sandro's room, does a little dance with his shirt and makes faces in a mirror before going back to bed.

Claudia still waiting at dawn is not at all happy. The camera looks out of her window towards the sea. The coldness of the view is taken up by the plaintive flute music. We hear train noises in the distance. Both the sea and the train noises are reminders of earlier sequences. So is the black sweater which Claudia is wearing—she wore it in both the scenes where she rejected Sandro because of Anna. But Anna now seems a threat to the new position Claudia has just managed to accept. She says to Patrizia, "I'm afraid that Anna has come back . . . that they're together. . . . At first the idea of Anna's death almost killed me. Now I don't cry any more. I'm afraid she's alive." Claudia is very worried indeed as she runs down corridors looking for Sandro. She finds him with Gloria Perkins on a couch in among the debris of the previous night's party. She rushes out. Gloria says "Caro" to Sandro and gets slapped. She asks for a "souvenir" and Sandro throws a couple of notes down. She picks them up with her bare feet.

The final scene in the hotel car park relies on montage to show the isolation of Sandro and

Claudia. Elsewhere Antonioni often used the structure of a single shot for this—many of his compositions are very dislocated. We see Claudia walking across the car park with a church tower in the background. A close shot of the back of her head with the rest of the screen filled by a weeping willow tree. Sandro coming out of the hotel. A close shot of Claudia crying, and then a long shot from behind her as Sandro comes and sits in the foreground. Then there is a series of intercut close-ups of them weeping. Claudia has come to stand behind Sandro with her hand on the back of the seat. She raises it to touch his head, hesitates and lowers it. Then she finally manages to make a gesture of forgiveness by stroking his hair. All this is shown in a series of close-ups of faces and hands. Sandro and Claudia are united again in the final long shot.

It is hardly a happy ending—the fade-out music is discordant and behind them in the last shot are an expanse of blank wall and mountains covered in snow. But it is easier to find some optimism in it than in any of his other films except perhaps *La Notte*.

Claudia has lost a certain purity of purpose which made the love scenes lyrically exuberant. (In the published script there is a dialogue exchange with Patrizia on the yacht, suggesting that Claudia is a virgin.) At the end she is thrown for the first time into the sort of emotional turmoil which is a commonplace for the others. But having vastly more personality than they, she will recover. She will—as Antonioni has said—not leave Sandro. "She will stay with him and forgive him. For she realizes that she too, in a certain sense, is somewhat like him. Because—if for no other reason—from the moment she suspects Anna may have returned, she becomes so apprehensive, so afraid she may be back and alive that she begins to lose the feeling of friendship she once had for Anna, just as he had lost his affection for Anna and perhaps is also beginning to lose it for her. But what else can she do but stay with him?" They will stay together out of "a mutual sense of pity"—and of shame which Claudia shares as she has contributed to his downfall by abandoning him to his friends. And perhaps with the help of Claudia, Sandro will somehow find the strength to give up his comfortably lucrative job and resume his vocation.

Sandro may not be any less weak than he was previously but at least he has found some feeling of responsibility for the way his actions affect others or, at any rate, Claudia. This has come out of his contact with her. Sandro's irresponsibility, his lapsed vocation and his unsatisfactory love affair at the beginning of the film are all bound up together and related to the weakness of his social environment. I agree with Chiaretti when he says in his introduction to the script, "*L'Avventura* could not have taken place except in an anaemic milieu like that of the Italian bourgeoisie."

This, I think, is the core of the film: on a general level, the connection between the condition of a society and its morality; individually the integration of sexual behavior with the rest of the personality—for instance, the relevance of Sandro's emotional life to his work. Sartre has expressed a similar view, talking in a newspaper interview about the necessity of building a bridge between Marx and Freud:

> "I am not convinced that the basis of human activity is sexual. Whether it is or not, I don't believe that this substructure of sexual need reappears intact in the superstructure of the personality. It may reappear, but on a completely new level and in a completely different form; as any believer in the dialectical process must agree. It can no longer be reduced to itself. . . . Freud was the first to say something that seems to me of capital importance: that everything which makes a man has meaning. . . . What matters is his demonstration that sexual desire is not simply sexual desire, but something that will encroach on a man's whole personality, even affecting the way he plays the piano or the violin."

XI

L'Avventura was Antonioni's sixth feature. In his first five long films and the seven shorts

which preceded them, he worked out the methods which he finally used with complete success in *L'Avventura*. The details of his early career—which included journalism and script-writing as well as the job of assistant on Carné's *Les Visiteurs du Soir*—can be found in the filmography which appeared in *Cahiers du Cinéma* 112 and the *New York Film Bulletin* for June 12, 1961.

The rather spare visual quality of Antonioni's films is already evident in his second short, *N.U.* (1948), which was about street-cleaning in Rome. Its last shots are unmistakably Antonioni's. It is dusk and the street-cleaners are returning home. A train is heard offscreen. The last shot of the film shows the train which carries the street-cleaners (or perhaps it is their day's sweepings; I forget). It moves across the frame to reveal a wide, bare, and very clean road. In *N.U.* Antonioni rejects all the formal trappings of documentary—or at least Italian documentary—aiming as always for "truth rather than logic" and building his film not from planned sequences but from lots of small fragments. The technique is continued in *Superstizione* (1949), a series of very short scenes making up a sort of catalogue of superstitious practices.

In *L'Amorosa Menzogna* (also 1949) the dream of the title is provided by the *fumetti*, picture magazines which tell stories in strip-cartoon form, but with photographs instead of drawings. The film opens with photographs being taken for a story, and goes on to show the lives of the "stars" of the *fumetti*. Far from being the romantic figures of their audience's dreams, they are ordinary working people—the hero, for instance, is a garage mechanic. Already Antonioni is interested in people first as individuals, rather than as symbolic figures, or representatives of a social condition. This marks him off from the neorealists, although his first film, *Gente del Po* (shot in 1943, but not edited and shown until 1947) apparently had much in common with neorealist movies made much later. Because of his concern with individuals, Antonioni is able to reach his audience on a much more personal level than de Sica, say, in *Bicycle Thieves*, where the approach (personalization of a social situation) and the rather rudimentary level of characterization kept the audience aware that it was looking in from outside on someone else's problems. Antonioni said: "The events and situations of the day were extraordinarily unusual, and perhaps the most interesting thing to examine at that time was the relationship between the individual and society. It really wasn't necessary to know the protagonist's inner thoughts. . . . However, when I started making films, things were somewhat different and my approach therefore was also different." The limitation of aims inherent in the strict neorealist approach made it inadequate for Antonioni. The examination of social evils in a limited area has never been his primary aim. He works on two levels: a critique of the structure of modern society, and an investigation of individual behavior. In showing the interconnection of each with the other, he needs to make the audience feel that the lives of the characters are relevant to their own. Perhaps it's this more sophisticated expression of a Marxist viewpoint that has floored some critics. The overtly left-wing cinema has been restricted for so long to facile and often patronizing statements of sympathy for the victimized proletariat that appreciation of the all-embracing Marxism of Antonioni (and Losey) requires some effort on the part of the audience.

XII

The overt social content of Antonioni's early films is greater than in *L'Avventura* or *Il Grido*. His first feature, *Cronaca di un amore* (1950) centers on the social barriers between a girl of working-class background who has married money, and her lover who has remained poor. It does not have the structure of a traditional social-comment movie, but is mainly concerned with presenting an ironical picture of the results of human actions.

A rich Milanese engineer, afraid that his young wife Paola is being unfaithful, calls in

a private detective. The investigator starts work in Paola's home town, and soon learns that a friend of Paola's was killed in an elevator accident some years previously. News of the inevstigation reaches Guido, Paola's former lover, from whom she parted because of their feelings of guilt at the accident, which they could have prevented. As a result, Guido moves to Milan, starts seeing Paola again, and once more becomes her lover. Paola's infidelity is a direct result of the investigation.

When Enrico tells her about the investigations (which have not yet revealed anything) she has to reassure him by letting him make love to her. Next day she tells Guido, who naturally but unreasonably goes off in a rage. Still she cannot stay away from him for long. The situation is now intolerable for them: she needs Guido, but cannot do without the luxury to which she is accustomed. A playful suggestion from her that they might murder Enrico hardens into a serious plan. One evening Guido waits with a revolver at a bridge on Enrico's route home, where he will have to slow down. However, Enrico has read the detective's report of Paola's infidelity. Before he reaches the bridge, his car crashes into a ditch—perhaps through recklessness, but perhaps it is suicide. Either way, the responsibility lies with Paola and Guido. Hearing the car explode, Guido cycles to the scene of the crash. After he has seen the body, he hastens home and packs his bags. Paola panics when the police arrive. She escapes through the back door and drives to Guido's lodgings, in time to catch him as he is leaving. He tells her that Enrico has killed himself. When she has recovered sufficiently from the shock to realize that Guido is leaving, she implores him to telephone her the next day. He says that he will, and gets into the taxi that is waiting for him, telling the driver to take him to the station.

Cronaca and *La Signora senza camelie* are much darker in feeling than *L'Avventura*—actions never have the hoped-for result, because of people's inability to realize how others—or even they themselves—will react. In every interview he gives, Antonioni talks about the fragility of emotions. The characters in the early films are totally unable to allow for emotional changes, and so all actions calculated to produce a particular result are doomed to failure. It was not until *L'Avventura* that Antonioni could see any way out of this gloomy situation.

The sensitivity to objects and locations that distinguished *L'Avventura* is already to be found in *Cronaca*. Antonioni has said, "I have a great feeling for things, perhaps more than for people, although the latter interest me more." He is able to use his feeling for things to aid him in describing the action which is psychological rather than physical, internal rather than external. It is often not obvious from what the characters are doing, but must be suggested through the way they are shown. Antonioni had realized that the human face is a rather inexpressive object when isolated from its surroundings in a close-up. He used no big close-ups at all. Instead he paid particular attention to the relationship of the characters with their setting. The insolubility of Paola's problem in *Cronaca* is demonstrated through her unease in Guido's room, which, by the meanness of its furnishings, represents his social class and the level of poverty to which she would have to descend if she went away with him. This unease contrasts with their happiness at just being together again when they first meet after his arrival in Milan. They are untroubled by class barriers, because the bare neutral countryside does not typify any particular social status.

Apart from the simple social contrast of Paola in Guido's room, there are more sophisticated uses of environment. As Enrico drives to his death, we see shots of Paola waiting nervously at home, photographed with high-key elegance—an angle shot includes a chandelier in the foreground of the picture. Meanwhile Guido, out in the cold, on the bridge, wanders nervously up and down in the darkness. Again the point is a social one, but elsewhere backgrounds are used for atmosphere

Cronaca di un Amore

or symbolic effect. The lovers' second meeting begins in a planetarium. The scene is shot so that the projector is in dark silhouette behind them, a grotesque shape that seems to represent the threat to their relationship. And on the bridge as they plan Enrico's murder, they are seen from a slightly high angle to include a background of men raking out muck from the drained canal below.

In *Cronaca* much more than in the later films, Antonioni relies on significant objects as well as environments. The props, too, are sometimes used to emphasize social distinctions—Paola's white fur bedspread, and Guido's cheap Nazionali cigarettes which are among the most important images of the world Paola cannot return to. More often the significant props are used as symbols: the string of pearls which Paola knocks off the bedside table and on to the floor during her first conversation (on the telephone) with Guido; a pair of huge vermouth bottles, thirty or forty feet high, on either side of the quiet country road on which Enrico is testing the Maserati—a symbol of the inherent disorientation of a capitalist society; Paola's silk evening dress which trails on the muddy streets as she rushes to find Guido after Enrico's death.

There is one key scene in *Cronaca* which unites all the elements in the film. It comes after Paola has learned of the investigation. She is talking to Guido on a staircase around an elevator shaft. As she says that she had to make love to her husband, a messenger boy carrying a bunch of flowers passes. (Enrico had sent her the key of the new car in a bunch of flowers.) Paola's sorry tale is rounded off with the words, "I hate him," and under them we hear the sound of the elevator moving. A shot down the shaft shows the elevator ascending. The camera tilts up with its back to Paola and Guido as she asks him to kiss her, in a moment of typically Antonioni emotional miscalculation. Guido walks away leaving her leaning weakly against the wall of the staircase with the shadow of the bannister forming a contorted pattern across the picture. By his treatment of this simple dialogue scene, Antonioni has brought out its implications and linked it to the rest of the film.

XIII

In *La Signora senza camelie* Antonioni is firing at much the same targets as in *Cronaca*. The heroine is again a socially displaced person, this time a shop girl who becomes a film star, and again she's played by Lucia Bosè. Although Bosè was perfect as Paola, she just will not pass muster as a shopgirl unable to cope with high society. If ever an actress looked sophisticated it's Bosè. The audience finds itself in the same incredulity as the onlooker in a scene where she's rehearsing in a sword-and-bosom melo, the man who gasps, "*She's* meant to be a Calabrian peasant?" Apparently the part was intended for Lollobrigida who, at the time, would have fitted it well.

In *Signora*, and increasingly in the later films, there is little plot which can be summarized to give an idea of the film, but just a series of incidents. I shall therefore deal with them by commenting on the incidents as I describe them, rather than separating description and elucidation. Before the film opens, the young girl, Clara Manni, has been uprooted from her normal surroundings and thrust into the film world. Under the titles she is seen

pacing up and down the deserted pavement outside the neighborhood cinema where her first movie is being previewed. She enters the cinema and walks across to her colleagues. The camera tracks beside her, holding her lonely figure in the foreground while behind are the dark shapes of the audience, and on screen Clara the glamorous Cinecitta starlet singing a romantic song, the girl who is starting out on a promising career.

Next day, on the set of the period movie, we are introduced to Clara's new world. The director is saying "I don't want to do the picture this way, but frankly I need the money." To make the love scene they are shooting a bit hornier for the audience, Clara's bodice is ripped open (foreshadowing Gloria Perkins and "the emotional sickness of our time"). Gianni Franchi, the producer who "discovered" Clara and high-pressured her into films, cautions them, "For goodness' sake remember the censor!" Before she has even finished the picture, Gianni is asking her to marry him. He demands an immediate answer on marriage as he did on her career in the cinema. When she hesitates, he produces her parents all aflutter with excitement.

Gianni interrupts the picture to whip her off on a brisk honeymoon. They return in a shower of publicity to do the location scenes of the picture, but now he decides that it is not good enough for his wife. He refuses to let her finish it. Left with nothing to do she unloads her troubles on the director of the unfinished film, Ercole, known affectionately as Ercolino:

CLARA: What can I do all day? I like to buy things for the house, because I know about materials.
ERCOLINO: Would you like your parents to come?
CLARA: For heaven's sake. Then there'd be three of us bored. I'm used to working all day.

When Ercolino tries to discuss with Gianni a script that Clara has read and liked, he is ranted at for his pains. Gianni is a ludicrously jealous husband. Seeing Clara give Ercolino a friendly peck on the cheek when he comes in, he makes loud kissing noises to show his disapproval. Then he lets fly at poor Ercolino. "You want my wife to play a prostitute! I want her to appear in good films that sell abroad." He is planning to have Clara play Joan of Arc. As far as Ercolino is concerned, the only formula is sex, religion, and politics combined—"perhaps you *could* do that with Joan of Arc." But not Gianni: "I want to make Clara into a great actress. Clara, do you want to make decent films, or to appear in pornography?"

Joan of Arc is shown at the Venice Festival. Clara and Gianni take their seats at the première amid polite applause. But soon Gianni sneaks out "to the projection box" or rather to the bar. There he is faced behind the counter with a row of photographs which mirror his ambitions for Clara. Among the pictures we recognize Katherine Hepburn, Anna Magnani, Bette Davis—and Lionel Barrymore. In the auditorium, the audience is beginning to make ribald comments. Clara, left alone, cannot stand it and leaves. So does a smooth young man in the row behind. He is Nardo, a diplomat, whom we have already seen in the villa where Clara's sword-and-bosom movie came to its sudden halt. His attempts to console the sobbing Clara as they cross the lagoon back to Venice are not motivated by sympathy but by the hope that he will be allowed to offer other consolations later on. But when she has recovered herself, Clara goes back to her hotel without Nardo.

The setback at Venice has given her strength to put her own case to Gianni for the first time. The scene takes place in the train back to Rome. Antonioni has a particular fondness for trains—key sequences in *Le Amiche* and *L'Avventura* are also set in railway carriages.

Antonioni handles Clara's big speech in a characteristic manner. We first see her sitting in the background of the shot. Then as she starts coming out with her own views, she gets up and moves into the foreground.

Clara in LA SIGNORA SENZA CAMELIE

Troubles begin to pile up for Gianni. In the Rome cinema where Joan of Arc has opened, he learns that it is to be taken off, and immediately after he's confronted by one of his backers who wants 60 million lire the next morning. Needing someone to talk to, Clara gets Nardo to drive her out to a deserted spot on the Cinecitta back lot—more landscape symbolism this time for the barrenness of Clara's life and of her work. Again she rejects Nardo. This time he's prepared to give up. We see him cancelling an order for flowers. But when he arrives home, there is Clara on the staircase. All she says is, "Don't ask me any questions."

She gets home late at night to find that Gianni has attempted to commit suicide because of his financial troubles. They have both given up at the same time. Gianni's condition is not serious, but when Nardo phones as the doctor is leaving with the ever-attentive Ercolino, she hangs up on him.

The next sequence is at Cinecitta. An extra gossips that "Things haven't been going at all well between her and her husband for about a month now." Nardo turns up on the set. Clara goes off to a deserted exterior to talk to him.

CLARA: We're trying to put things right by finishing a film which my husband didn't want me to complete. What am I to do?
NARDO: Do what you feel like.

CLARA: I must pay this debt. My marriage has become a commercial undertaking. I have to pay up.

Here we have the same irony as in *Cronaca*, and the Antonioni attitude on responsibility to other people, which on the whole is felt only by the poor or those who have been—Guido, Clara, Clelia in *Le Amiche*, and Claudia in *L'Avventura*. Nardo has no such feelings, as he demonstrates amply later.

Clara doesn't turn up at the opening of the new film. We see her mother in the cinema foyer standing in front of a huge picture of Clara, captioned with the film's title, *La Donna senza destino—Woman without a Destiny*. When her mother tells her over the phone that the film was a great success, Clara still refuses to speak to Gianni but says that she will write.

While Gianni is away on a business trip, she goes off with Nardo. Getting into his car, she tells him that she has left a note for Gianni, saying that she is leaving him for Nardo. This is not at all what Nardo had in mind: he tells her to be careful and take back her note. "Let's go away for a little. We'd be back by the time your husband comes home." Clara goes indoors, picks up the letter, thinks, puts it back again, and goes out.

In a hotel with Nardo Clara receives a phone call from Gianni, who quickly realizes that she has a man in her room. Nardo's reactions prove even to Clara, who is genuinely and naively in love with him, just what a louse he is. His first thoughts are for his career. She says bitterly, "You'd better leave. I don't want to compromise you." He goes out with a hasty "Arrivederci Clara." She replies "Addio," a more permanent farewell.

Once more she needs someone to talk to. She picks her middle-aged co-star from *La Donna senza destino*, who advises her to work at her acting. "Success has come too quickly. You've learned nothing." When Ercolino comes to visit her, she is almost a recluse in her small hotel room surrounded by reproductions of Great Paintings, meaning of course Van Gogh. He tells her that Gianni is starting a new film,

and persuades her to ask him for the main part. He even drives her back to the muddy desolation of Cinecitta in winter. They pass through crowds of extras dressed in costumes of various periods. When they find Gianni, he tells her that he needs a famous actress, preferably an American, and adds as a cruel consolation "You've still got a name that's fine —in certain sorts of part. And youth isn't eternal is it?" The desolation of the surroundings now echoes her feelings. She goes back to Ercolino and tells him that she'll take a part which she has been offered in a period movie. "I'll never be a real actress. I realized that a few moments ago listening to Gianni."

The producer of the film is overjoyed. He leads her on to a tatty little set containing some Bedouin tents where a few plump girls idle around in standard harem kit. "Ecco suo film," he says with a sweep of his arm over his domain. Clara stands unhappily on the set in her luxurious fur coat, symbol of her star status. The producer rushes her over to the canteen to meet Gianni, to whom she's still under contract, collecting a brace of photographers on the way. Gianni willingly agrees to waive her contract. Now realizing that the only future left to her is in crummy movies, she gives in to the situation by telephoning Nardo and agreeing to see him again. Her complete despair is shown in her submission to Nardo on his own terms, although she knows he's selfish and worthless. In the background of the shot is Gianni, the cause of all that has happened to Clara. She puts down the telephone and joins her producer for publicity photographs. The last shot of the film shows her managing to smile for the cameras.

La Signora senza camelie is complementary to *Cronaca* in form/content (two words for the same thing in different guises—there should be a word to cover both: form-content like mass-energy). *Cronaca* is almost an exposition of the Antonioni view of class barriers. Paola and Guido are separated because Paola has crossed the barrier into a higher class and cannot return, while Guido is finally unable to cross. *Signora* builds on the essentials that have been demonstrated in *Cronaca* to show the disastrous effects of the *status quo* on one character, Clara, who, having irrevocably left her original milieu, finds that she is unfitted for survival in the class to which she aspires. Through their form, both plot and treatment, the two films are founded on Antonioni's deeply held belief in the wrongness of a class-based society. He is out to make a fundamental critique of the system rather than to make a superficial attack on the resulting evils.

XIV

Antonioni's last three films form a group as closely linked as *Cronaca* and *Signora*, with *Le Amiche* as a bridge between the styles of the early films and the recent ones. But there are two Antonioni films which stand apart from the main course of Antonioni's development. One is *I Vinti* which was made in 1952, before *Signora*. The other is *Tentato Suicidio* (1953), Antonioni's contribution to the Zavattini-inspired episode film *L'Amore in citta*. Apparently it told a true story about an attempted suicide and was acted by people who had been involved in the original incident. Antonioni has said that it belongs wholly to the neorealist movement, but that it was not the film he had intended as he had been forced to mutilate it for reasons of length.

I Vinti, The Vanquished, is also an episode film, but of a very strange sort. Its title refers to the unbalanced youth of postwar Europe. The three episodes set in different countries—France, Italy, and England—are all concerned with violent death. They are introduced, at least in the British version—which has the hilariously unexpected title, *Youth and Perversion*—by a montage of newspaper cuttings and a pulp sociological commentary. Each of the episodes was filmed on location in the relevant country, using local actors speaking their own language. The intention was to show it in each of the three countries with the foreign-language episodes subtitled. Unfortunately it was

never shown in Britain, was banned in France, and was only shown in a dubbed version in Italy after some censor trouble. Each episode has acquired some national style on top of Antonioni's own. Apart from a few sequences like the tram ride in the French version and the scenes on Banstead Downs in the British, it is not distinctively Antonionian.

The French episode is perhaps the best of the three. A French teen-ager of bourgeois background impresses his friends by flaunting wads of banknotes and signed pictures of pretty girls. The friends are sufficiently impressed to plan his death in order to get the money. They lure him out into the country on the pretext of a picnic, and one of them murders him, only to find the notes are stage money that the timid youth has used to make his extrovert friends respect him.

The Italian episode is the least interesting. It was made from a script dreamed up in a hurry after the State had refused the producer the financial aid he needed. The official objection was to the story which would form the Italian section of the film. *One of Our Sons*, as the rejected script is called, has been published in an Italian magazine (*Cinema*, July 25, 1954) and a French translation appears in Pierre Leprohon's book on Antonioni (in the series *Cinéma d'aujourd'hui*, published by Seghers).

It is the story of a university student, Arturo Botta, who belongs to a postwar fascist group, and of his girl friend Mimma, who comes from a left-wing family—her father owns a seedy swimming pool, a pontoon floating on the Tiber. She finds out about Arturo's activities when she has to hide him at her father's swimming pool after a bomb incident. And so she is drawn into the organization to provide an alibi for Arturo. An expedition to collect plastic explosive is disguised as a picnic, and passes off well, except for some moments of panic when their car is followed, and a telling-off for Mimma who arrives home late. The plastic is made into five bombs, one of which Arturo has to test. Another picnic. As they ride out into the country on a Lambretta, Arturo talks about the imprisoned German leader of the organization. Mimma is not particularly interested, being more occupied by the prospect of making love and by worry that Arturo will catch cold: he wears summer clothes, even though it is cold, to keep up an impression of toughness. They stop on a deserted lane. Arturo brushes aside Mimma's embraces and opens his brief-case to reveal the bomb.

On the big day, the largest bomb, which was expected to produce a massacre, does not go off; the other three do little damage. Except for Arturo and Antonio, the leader of the operation, all the conspirators are arrested. Even this is hardly noticed by the newspapers: the group has failed completely. Arturo tries to get in touch with Antonio. Instead he meets a higher official who tells him that the Party needs level-headed men, not fanatics, and that he and his friends have been expelled. Arturo cannot comprehend why he, who wanted to be one of the Party's most dedicated heroes, should be thrown out. The Party, he decides, is becoming bourgeois and falling under the spell of democracy. Deciding that he must make the supreme sacrifice, he phones Mimma. Frightened by his talk of the sacredness of death for men in their prime, she rushes out to search for him.

He is by the swimming pontoon on the Tiber. Moored to it is a rowing boat which he launches after carefully making enough footprints for a group of people on the sandy shore. When the boat is in midstream, he takes

I VINTI

a small tricolor flag out of his pocket and gags himself with it. A long look around satisfies him that no one will see him from the river banks. He lies down in the boat and produces from his pocket a revolver, which he holds behind his neck so that it will look as if he has been shot in the back. His pretended murder will draw attention to all the other martyrs of the cause, who are rotting in prison; it will spur the inactive to fight by giving them a martyr to avenge. As the other side is too weak to do the job, it must be done for them. Arturo has found the right position. His hand is steady as he aims the gun at the nape of his neck. No one hears the shot, and the boat drifts away on the current. A few hours later, the bank is crowded with police, journalists, and photographers. Everyone is wondering who will carry out the investigation. From the road above, Mimma looks on tearfully.

The story finally used for the Italian episode is uninteresting, and compared to the abandoned project, even at the script stage, inadequately worked out. For the benefit of the authorities, the suggestions that political subversion occurred in Italy have been removed. Now the hero, a young Italian from a rich bourgeois family, takes part in cigarette smuggling, apparently just for kicks. One night his gang is surprised by the police. There is a fight. He is injured but escapes. His wealthy girl friend tries to help him with her car, but eventually he meets his death almost by accident. In a moment of panic while the car is being filled at a country gas station, he runs out into the road and is knocked down by a police car.

The British episode is most peculiar—at least to a native. The dialogue does not seem to have been vetted by an Englishman. In the opening scene, reporter Patrick Barr enters his office with a cheerful "Bitterly hot today!" And the music (by Antonioni's regular composer Giovanni Fusco) is largely constructed from the Londonderry Air—an Irish song. The story is the only one of the three that is about perversion as well as youth. Unlike the other two heroes, the British one, Peter Reynolds, is poor. He lives in a down-at-heel South London suburb, and writes poetry in his spare time. Barr's newspaper receives a telephone call from Reynolds reporting a murder and offering an exclusive story on the discovery of the corpse. He wants a public showcase for himself and his writing. At the inquest a verdict is returned of murder by person or persons unknown. The hero boasts of having committed the perfect murder as there is nothing to connect him with the victim. No one believes his story, so he offers the paper another story telling how he did the murder. In flashback (the only one Antonioni has ever used) we see him pick up a coarse old doll (Fay Compton) outside a cinema, take her up onto Banstead Downs and strangle her on a golf course by a railway cutting. Because of his story he is charged with murder. In court he proudly tells how he did it. He is condemned to death.

Antonioni seems much less happy outside his usual surroundings. He is equally ill at ease among the Po Valley peasants of *Il Grido*. None of the stories in *I Vinti* is dealt with at the length which Antonioni's approach requires. Only in the French one is there any real feeling in the treatment—although the flatness of handling is very apt in the British episode. The film was presumably intended to have an overall structure which would give it meaning above that of the three individual stories. Obviously the pointless and violent deaths are tokens of a troubled world. But this time, Antonioni has failed to link the specific occurrences to the general argument which, on a single viewing, seems sociologically pretty phony. The main question the film provokes one to ask is why on earth he made it. Richard Roud has suggested that it was "an attempt to satisfy that side of him which is genuinely concerned with immediate social issues." This may well be true, but I think that, like most young artists, he wanted his second major work to be as unlike his first as possible, to avoid the impression that he could do only one thing.

XV

But Antonioni seems to be able to do only one thing or at least to make convincing films only about one section of society. The return to home ground in *Signora* produced happier results. His next feature, *Le Amiche* (1955) was even better, and the equal of *L'Avventura* as his best work to date. Unlike any of his other films, it is a literary adaptation, from Cesare Pavese's *Tra donne sole*. "What I liked in *Tra donne sole*," Antonioni has said in interviews, "were the female characters and their way of living out what goes on in their inner selves. Also one of these characters is remarkably like someone I knew only too well in reality, and I wanted to talk about her, to show her . . . I was never particularly troubled by considerations of remaining faithful to Pavese's novel."

The heroine of *Le Amiche* is yet another outsider in the world of luxury. She is Clelia, who left a poor part of Turin to work in a fashion house in Rome. Now risen to an important position in her firm, she returns to Turin at the beginning of the film to open a new fashion salon. She becomes involved with the rich of Turin when the girl who has the adjoining room in her hotel attempts to commit suicide. Rosetta is one of a group of rich young people who habitually go around together. The moving spirit of the group, Momina, is about the least likeable character in any Antonioni film—she has the heartlessness of Nardo and the superficiality of Giulia in *L'Avventura* without the stupidity which mitigates Giulia's unpleasantness. Momina's appearance at the hotel is not motivated by any feeling of compassion for Rosetta, whom she dismisses as "una cretina"; she wants to do a little detective work to pass the time. "Haven't you found a letter?" she asks. "It's customary to leave farewell letters."

Clelia visits her premises to find that decorating work is behind schedule and the architect in charge is nowhere to be found. She is being unpleasant to his assistant when he appears, looks her up and down and says, "You're younger than I thought." Cesare Pedroni is another of Momina's friends. He is not at all disturbed by Clelia's anger; he tells her that jobs always look as if it will take a miracle to finish them in time, but they always get finished, "at least in Italy. We're specialists in miracles." As she rants, he plays a carefree little game with a light bulb. "We'll hire some extra workers," says Clelia. "Naturally," Pedroni answers, "these people are so charming."

Meanwhile Momina has tried to visit Rosetta who is now in hospital and discovered that she made a phone call just before she started eating sleeping tablets. At the hospital she is not allowed to see Rosetta. Only Rosetta's mother can see her, and all she can say is "How *do* I look after a night like that?"

The next stage in Momina's detective game is to find out whom Rosetta was trying to phone. She persuades Clelia to bribe the hotel telephone operator and obtain the number. It turns out to belong to Lorenzo, another of Momina's group, and a painter.

Clelia is now beginning to feel at home among these people—"as if we were old friends. I've always been working and have never had much time to make friends, so it seems natural that we should confide in each other." She is also attracted to Pedroni's assistant Carlo ("un semplice," Pedroni calls him) who lives in the working-class district where she was born. We're shown very quickly that she is going to have the same trouble as Paola in *Cronaca*.

XVI

Momina invites Clelia to go on a picnic with her friends. Even Rosetta, now recovered, is persuaded to go by Momina who swears that no one knows about the suicide attempt. They drive out to the coast. The bareness of the beach and the dunes behind, the overcast sky and the cold wind whipping up the sea provide the usual background commentary on the action, and underline everyone's complete lack of enjoyment from this diversion. The sequence

also serves a similar purpose to the search on the island in *L'Avventura*—that of showing the characters detached from the surroundings on which they normally rely for their amusement. The beach scene is much denser and involves more characters at once than the search. It is the most ambitious piece of ensemble work in any Antonioni film, and perhaps the most remarkable thing he has ever done. It starts with the five girl-friends standing on a platform high above the dunes. On an impulse, Mariella, the youngest and silliest of the group, calls to the others "Come to the sea." And off they rush, followed by their men, across the dunes and down to the beach. But when they get there, they don't find anything to do, and wander around bored. Sometimes one or two gather and exchange a few words before they drift off. The camera takes part in this, panning and tracking around the beach, picking up a person or two, then losing them. All the time, people are moving in and out of the frame to produce untidy, aimless-looking compositions. The photography is exceedingly flat, cutting out bright highlights and deep shadows to emphasize the greyness of the occasion.

They disturb a couple necking on the beach. Momina comments to Nene:

MOMINA: I don't think a man feels anything for a woman he kisses in public.
Clelia has come up to them in time to catch Momina's comment. In extreme long shot, Cesare, Vincenzo (Mariella's brother) and Lorenzo are talking. They turn and walk out of frame—towards Rosetta.
CLELIA: Do you think so?
MOMINA: Why? Don't you mind being kissed in public?
CLELIA: Perhaps not.
Nene walks round behind Clelia and offscreen right after Lorenzo.
MOMINA: Because you like being kissed.

After producing this typical sample of her small talk, Momina hears voices coming from behind a beach hut. The camera stays with her, losing Clelia, as she goes over to have a look—always trying to find some diversion. She surprises Mariella in a clinch with Franco, boy-friend du jour. "Look," she cries, "another one." (Another couple.) "Well, we'll have to follow their example." She has walked back to Clelia, the camera panning with her to include Vincenzo and Cesare in the distance. Antonioni cuts as Momina calls after Nene, whom we see in the next shot pursuing Lorenzo onto the beach. This is by no means the longest or most complex take in the sequence. The whole thing is worked out with such consistency that it is possible to tell where each one of the nine characters is at almost any time in the sequence. Even the most detailed study on the Moviola reveals no mistakes, and no manipulation of time in the cutting. Antonioni's scenes always have the same duration as they would have in life.

Antonioni at work. [Photo: Jack O'Connell.]

Nene is pursuing Lorenzo because she fears rightly that he is after Rosetta, who in the early part of the sequence is kept in view in the background. Her presence on screen reminds us that she is a drag to the party. Occasionally she's called to or referred to uncomfortably. Mariella says to Momina "How can you leave her so alone?" Rosetta has walked right down to the water's edge, and has to run back to avoid a wave. (The linking of Rosetta and water is to appear twice again in the film.) She walks back up the beach in time to catch the end of this exchange:

MOMINA: Nene's running to her Renzo!
MARIELLA: How boring!
(Lorenzo is of course Nene's husband.)
MOMINA: All right, Clelia, takes your brother, you the blond one, Nene Lorenzo, I'll take Cesare, and Rosetta?
MARIELLA: She can kill herself, but properly —there's no one left for her.

For this the camera is looking down the beach so that in the background we see Nene walking towards Lorenzo, and Rosetta coming towards the group. She half hears Mariella's last words. A cut to the reverse direction—from behind Rosetta—shows the reactions of the group as Rosetta speaks:

ROSETTA: Well?
MARIELLA: Nothing we were just talking.
MOMINA: Mariella always talks nonsense.
MARIELLA *(annoyed)*: You think you're a genius among idiots.
MOMINA: Perhaps I am.
NENE *(who has joined the group)*: Are you serious?
MARIELLA: Yes, I said Rosetta . . .
MOMINA *(interrupting)*: You're a fool.

The arrangement of the shot in two planes, Rosetta in the foreground and the others in the background, the closeness of their grouping, and the way in which Nene comes into the frame and joins the group, all serve to show Rosetta's isolation from the others. Mariella's behavior is that of a girl who has nothing to interest her but herself. She can be provoked by a slight insult to become so annoyed that she acts callously, without any consideration for Rosetta.

Now Antonioni cuts to a panning shot of the three men, Cesare, Lorenzo, and Vincenzo, as they walk up to join the group. The sharp cut interrupts the flow of the sequence just as the men interrupt the conversation.

CESARE: Who's mediating?
LORENZO: What's happening?
MARIELLA: There's one girl too many and she . . .
MOMINA: I?
MARIELLA: She . . .
Momina slaps her face. The nearest men pull the two girls apart.

The next shot shows us Clelia and Rosetta standing slightly apart from the others. Clelia is not looking at all happy at what's going on, and she's the only one who genuinely wants to help Rosetta. The camera moves diagonally back to take in the rest of the group as Rosetta, who has had more than she can take, begins to speak. She walks slowly, straight through the center of the group, pausing once or twice. The camera moves when she does, but along the outside of the group.

ROSETTA: Mariella isn't a hypocrite like you. I heard what you were saying. You're playing a ridiculous comedy. Leave me alone! I'm looking for nobody, and I won't listen to anyone, least of all to you!
Rosetta has now emerged from the group. The camera has moved back with her so that she is in the foreground as she turns to make the last remark to Momina

MOMINA: I'm not asking you to.
CLELIA: Please stop it!
MOMINA: Patience has its limits. I'm doing everything so that the little fool won't notice how ridiculous she's made herself.

Rosetta turns away from the group, towards the camera, and sobs. The camera moves back with her as she walks on, away from the group. Lorenzo breaks away from the others to come up to her and take her arm.
LORENZO: Come, don't cry. Today's Sunday and on Sunday people are silly.
They overtake the camera which pans with them as they walk away along the beach. Rosetta turns, breaks away from Lorenzo and runs up the beach. The camera pans back with her to the group.
NENE *(to Momina)*: You're driving her to despair.
MOMINA: Shut up!
Clelia runs off up the beach after Rosetta.

Again the staging of the action sums up the whole situation—Rosetta is outside the group. Then in a moment of desperation she cuts right through it, as she does metaphorically at the end of the film. Clelia and Lorenzo separate themselves from the group, as they do elsewhere, because of Rosetta. The movements are convincing as action—they seem right on the level of external behavior as well as in their context of demonstrating feelings. By going round the outside of the group, the camera emphasizes her passage through it—which would not have been nearly as noticeable if the camera had done the obvious thing and tracked in front of her. The remarkable thing about this scene is the way Antonioni always manages to have the character whose behavior is most significant at any moment occupying the attention of the audience, without a large amount of cutting, without losing the reactions of the other characters which form the essential context by using close-ups, and above all without making the actors move falsely or unspontaneously to suit the demands of the composition.

With Rosetta out of the way, everyone starts wandering around again. Cesare and Mariella go off behind a dune, only to be disturbed by Momina who wants Cesare for herself. They are back in the routine of idle chatter and aimless philandering as if nothing had ever disturbed them. Only Nene is worried, as she fears that Rosetta will take Lorenzo from her.

In the train back to Turin, Rosetta voices her pessimism to Clelia. "What have I to live for? To say what kind of dress I'm going to wear? And what then?" Clelia realizes what's wrong with Rosetta. She has never had time herself for boredom or emotional crises because she has had to work. Later work will provide an escape for her from personal problems. Meanwhile she prescribes it as the cure for Rosetta. Again we have a key scene set in a train, symbol of transition. As in *L'Avventura,* the main element of the scene—Rosetta's desperation, Claudia's resistance to Sandro—is very soon reversed. And the whole section of the film including the beach scene is both a physical and emotional journey for Clelia, who has begun to discover what her new friends are like.

XVII

The rest of the film is devoted to three counterpointing stories which represent three aspects of the sexual/social continuum—the central story is now of the Rosetta-Lorenzo-Nene triangle, contrasting with Clelia and Carlo, Cesare and Momina.

Nene is woken up one morning by a porter bringing Lorenzo's paintings back from the gallery. She phones the gallery, and learns that she has been asked to exhibit in a big New York gallery. Lorenzo has not. This has already been foreshadowed in the art gallery sequence when a customer asked about the ceramics which were not in the catalogue. Nene is worried that her success will break up her marriage, so all she says is "I'll have to ask Lorenzo."

But he is out meeting Rosetta who is in better spirits again. The photography is bright and lustrous and the location is a happy one—on high ground looking down a wooded slope to a deep valley and a river. The scene opens on a group of riders on horseback. The camera pans with them to Rosetta and Lorenzo as he asks her why she phoned him. "I wanted to ask you to destroy my picture. I wanted there to be nothing left to remember me by." The feelings of worthlessness had completely taken possession of her, and suicide alone was not enough.

Lorenzo, whose ego needs boosting even though he doesn't yet know about Nene's success, is flattered at the thought that he might have been the cause of Rosetta's desperation. She is already happy at being the center of his attention. "If I played with you, I might make you the purpose of my life, even the object of my love." But why didn't she tell him before? "You didn't notice and I couldn't tell you. You were going to get married." As she admits this to him, she is backing away from

him towards the river (this has a significance which will be apparent later). To underline the linking of her with water and the idea of him driving her towards the river, the white horses, which passed them at the start of the scene, reappear down by the river as he goes forward to take her in his arms.

The contrast between this scene and the one which follows it is the contrast between *L'Avventura* and *Cronaca,* for Rosetta and Lorenzo, rich unstable girl and creative artist whose vocation has not borne fruit, are like Anna and Sandro, just as Clelia and Carlo are like Paola and Guido. Carlo takes Clelia to see some furniture for the salon. "The shop is tiny, but the furniture is beautiful and cheap." Cesare has already said, "It won't do. I know that without even seeing it." But Clelia still goes. On the way she tries to explain to Carlo what she feels for him, that in her business life she has made few personal contacts, that now she needs someone to be close to her: "I need a little warmth." Some of this explanation is conducted in front of a shop window filled with wedding bouquets. Carlo is rather offended by the thought that she is using him. Things get worse when she sees the furniture shop and tells him, "There's no use going upstairs. It's not what I'm looking for." Carlo wrongly decides that she thinks his taste just isn't good enough for her.

She takes him to see the tenement building where she was born. "If I hadn't moved away, we might have met here. I would probably have fallen in love with you." (There's another journey back to somewhere from the past in *La Notte.*) Clelia, going back to her birthplace to show Carlo that she doesn't think she's better than him, now looks out of place—smartly dressed against a background of squalor.

XVIII

The third story, Momina and Cesare, proceeds smoothly according to the accepted rules. She has invited him to visit her. As a cover, she has also asked all her girl-friends to tea. This tea party, which goes on until Cesare arrives and the girls all dutifully file out, is almost as stunning as the beach scene in its handling. It is dominated by Momina, both directly and through the setting, her apartment, which determines the shape of the scene.

Clelia is the last of the girls to arrive. She tells Momina that Rosetta hasn't shown up at the salon. "She won't come," says Momina. "Does she expect me to beg her forgiveness on my knees?" Through their reaction to Rosetta's nonappearance we come to understand a little more about the girls.

MARIELLA: Pity! Now we can't go out together any more.
CLELIA: I could use her now.
MOMINA: Why should she work?
CLELIA: To take her mind off things.
MOMINA: There are better ways.

Clelia is still upset by Carlo's inability to cope with her attitude to him, something which she had unthinkingly not expected. She decides to call the salon to see if Rosetta is there, but Nene says she will do it. Momina is prompted to offer a little advice in the light of her experience, and we learn more about her.

NENE: I'll have to call home anyway to see if Lorenzo is home yet.
Mariella is arranging her hair in the reflection from the window. Nene is dialling.
MOMINA: Don't do it! My husband, too, always called me supposedly to tell me where he was. Today he sent me the keys for his new apartment in Turin. He has understood that I hate country life.
NENE: Are you going with him?
MOMINA: Perhaps.
MARIELLA: It's been so cozy here. At single women's places, one always thinks that something bad's going on.
Mariella sits on the window sill and pulls the curtain round her shoulder. Momina opens a big box of chocolates and takes out the keys.
MOMINA: He sent them in a box of chocolates.

The sweet and the bitter.
Nene: A charming idea.
Momina: I'm not supposed to eat any chocolates.
She drops the key back into the box with a gesture, closes it, and replaces it on a side table.
Clelia: Here's Rosetta.
Momina: If only she doesn't make a scene!

Rosetta doesn't make a scene. She apologizes to Clelia and promises to'be punctual the next day. Mariella and Momina start questioning her about where she has been, as Mariella has noticed that her blouse is unbuttoned. She goes off into the bathroom to comb her hair. Momina pursues her with questions. The next four shots are those described in the extract.

	Dance music.
9 In living room looking towards arch leading into bathroom. MS behind Mariella, camera panning left and tracking forward as she walks away from it, and turns round to speak.	Mariella: I'm bored.
Camera tracks in to arch, losing Mariella. There is a Venetian blind across the arch. In the background through the blind we see Rosetta's back as she goes into the bathroom from the bedroom, and powders her nose. Momina enters the frame in foreground behind the blind.	Momina: Are you following a beauty treatment or are you in love?
Rosetta turns round smiling to face Momina and the camera.	Rosetta: Neither. Momina: I don't have to be told. I understand now.
Rosetta goes offscreen right to bedroom, past Momina who follows her, but is still onscreen on cut.	Rosetta: What? Momina: I understood long ago.
10 In bedroom looking towards doorway from bathroom. Rosetta comes through door in MS, looking happy, followed by Momina. Pan left with them to include Clelia. They come to stand one on each side of her, Rosetta left, Momina right. Through arch into sitting room we see Nene in ELS.	Rosetta: What? Clelia: What's all the secrecy? Momina *(to Rosetta)*: She's found out that you were going to call Lorenzo. And now?
Rosetta waves a finger from side to side and smiles. Momina smiles. Clelia looks at Momina and does not smile.	Clelia: What are you saying? Momina: Lorenzo. Clelia: Lorenzo! Rosetta *(happily)*: Lorenzo.
Rosetta walks away from the other two (pan left with her, losing them and Nene). She turns, leans back against the wall.	Lorenzo.
11 As "10" before final pan (MS Clelia and Momina, ELS Nene). Momina walks offscreen right talking. Pan slightly to left as Clelia lets down Venetian blind obscuring Nene, and then pan with her as she walks over to right where Momina is standing in front of a mirror, applying cologne behind her ears.	Clelia: And Nene? Momina: You won't understand. You're not married. If I have an adventure I prefer to tell my husband. Clelia: Why?
Momina looks round towards Rosetta who is now behind the camera.	Momina: Because I really love him. Clelia: But Rosetta is Nene's friend.

12 Reverse direction looking toward Rosetta in LS picking nightgown off bed. Pan left with her to include the backs of Momina and Clelia at left in foreground. Momina goes over to Rosetta and takes the nightgown. Clelia moves towards them away from the camera. She sits down pensively on bed. Momina and Rosetta have crossed so that Rosetta is back to camera screen left and Momina is facing camera at right.	ROSETTA: Where did you buy this nightgown? MOMINA: I think Nene isn't indulging in illusions. A woman who is superior to her husband can't be happy. ROSETTA: Why d'you say that?
Rosetta goes across to screen right and sits on bed. Slight pan with her. Momina now in midscreen strokes Rosetta's hair. Clelia looks fed up. Rosetta lights a cigarette. Momina walks over to foreground screen left to face the other two (¾ back to the camera). Momina turns away from the other two towards the camera.	MOMINA: You know very well. But the main thing is that you like Lorenzo. CLELIA: I don't understand you, Momina. MOMINA: You should know how difficult it is to find the right man. The Prince Charming of today takes dope and dances the mambo. Have fun while you're still young or you'll be sorry when you're old *(the dance music gets louder under her speech).*

Although it's difficult to visualize the actual movement of such a scene from a verbal description, I hope that it may be evident from the extract how the shooting of the scene brings out both its feeling and its implications. I'm thinking particularly of the end of shot "10" where a telling piece of action has been fashioned out of the way Momina, Clelia, and Rosetta each say Lorenzo's name. The pan with Rosetta away from the others allows us to concentrate for a moment on her happiness, and the combination of movements—hers and the camera's—is lyrical in feeling. Notice also the way Nene is in the background except for this moment, and the significance of her handling when we see her again after the cut on Clelia saying "And Nene?"

After the four shots I've quoted, we are back in the sitting room with Mariella and Nene. They go into the bedroom in time to catch Clelia, who is losing patience with Momina, saying, "You're wrong," to her, and then in explanation to them, "Momina's talking pure nonsense." Nene borrows a book of matches from Rosetta to light a cigarette. On the flap is a drawing of Rosetta by Lorenzo. We see this in big close-up as Momina's voice says, "Cesare is ringing." By linking Nene's realization that Rosetta is Lorenzo's mistress with Momina's announcement of Cesare's arrival, Antonioni is stressing that the two situations are aspects of the same general condition.

Momina and Cesare play their romance by the rules. Momina is happy with this: it's the way she's accustomed to operate—no involvement, no pain. Cesare despises her for her lack of seriousness, just as Clelia despises him. He has a job, although he doesn't take it seriously. He is content to play with Momina. In the last shot of the sequence, taken from outside the house, he is kissing Momina by the window. He notices a man in the yard below

Clelia's salon in LE AMICHE. *This is the only extant still from this remarkable film that could be found in Rome; it has as yet no American distributor.*

and mimes to him to get the hell out. As Momina closes the blinds, the camera tilts down to show the maid opening the side door. They go inside. The poor mimicking the rich?

XIX

Back to Clelia and Carlo. She is picking the models for her opening show. Out of jealousy she rejects a girl who flirts with Carlo. Then she realizes what she has done and hires her.

Lorenzo in a hotel room with Rosetta also has a moment of truth about his romance. Disturbed by the single-mindedness of her passion for him, he says, "You should have a job that really fills your life." She replies, "I'd like to be your wife." This is given added force by the sordidness of the setting and by a piece of business: Lorenzo opens the door just as a man and a woman come out of a room in the background. He ducks back behind the door. We realize that he is not prepared to make any sacrifices for Rosetta, that she has deceived herself in thinking he loves her. As they leave, she says, "I'm fed up with all this secrecy." Out in the more neutral atmosphere of the street, Lorenzo tries to tell her, as far as his lack of courage will let him, that he is not the ideal man for her. "I'm a lying coward," he says. Rosetta ignores his self-deprecation and remarks that she will tell Clelia that she is giving up the salon.

She arrives there as the opening show reaches a successful climax. A wedding dress is shown amid applause, and all the other models come on in evening dress. Nene asks Rosetta to go outside with her. In a corner of the changing room, surrounded by racks of clothes, Rosetta tells Nene of her love for Lorenzo. "I don't know if I could ever give him up." She even manages to convince Nene that Lorenzo loves her. Nene agrees to give Lorenzo up. She will go to America, and Rosetta can tell Lorenzo that he needn't discuss it with her. Setting this scene in a room where models change their clothes suggests the impermanence of sexual relationships in the milieu of the film.

To celebrate her success, Clelia takes the group out to dinner. They go slumming—to a trattoria in a backstreet in the sort of district where Clelia grew up. "Tonight a mircle will happen!" says Mariella. What miracle? "We'll have fun!" Before they go in, Rosetta tells Lorenzo that she has spoken to Nene. The camera is behind her so that it is his reaction we see. "You did what?" She walks round a car to face the camera as she explains, "She started it. She wanted me to tell you that you needn't worry . . . she's going to America." Rosetta goes off into the trattoria leaving Lorenzo alone in the dark street, facing the camera.

Cesare has picked up an old tramp off the street. Everyone claps in delight at this novelty. The man is given a meal—at a different table. Lorenzo walks past Rosetta and goes over to Nene. As they eat, Cesare does a sketch of Mariella in her wedding dress (she is engaged) and in fun signs it Lorenzo. But Lorenzo gets furious, and when Cesare says "I'm not joking with society idols who have failed," he punches him. There is a scuffle. When they have been pulled apart, Lorenzo goes out followed by Rosetta. He asks her to leave him alone, but she follows. They stop on a corner in the light of a street lamp. "I'll always stay with you. You need me." But Lorenzo rejects her: "I have to tell you the truth.

I don't need anyone." He moves round the corner into the shadow. Then Rosetta runs away down the street into the distance. A fade closes down. There is a sudden cut from darkness to daylight as a stretcher bearing Rosetta's body, which has just been dragged from the river, is being put into an ambulance. Now the significance of the earlier shots which connect Rosetta with water is apparent. Antonioni wants us to realize that in the circumstances—social ones—there is no other possible outcome except suicide for Rosetta; that Lorenzo in his failure has no chance of helping her.

Clelia is explaining the tastes of Turin women to her boss when Momina comes in. All Momina can say is "Who would have thought of it?" Clelia turns on her there in the salon. "You should have . . . You gave her the key to your apartment . . . You don't know what feelings are . . . You killed her, you and your cynicism." The customers draw back at this unseemly outburst. One says, "It doesn't concern us." But for Antonioni, Rosetta's death as (albeit indirectly) a victim of the system concerns everyone. There is another side to the tragedy—the irony of Rosetta being saved from suicide over Lorenzo at the beginning of the film only to kill herself because of him at the end. This is the final appearance of the old theme of the futility of action affecting others.

Lorenzo returns to Nene. He tries to explain. "She told me that she loved me and I persuaded myself that I loved her too." But when he was with her he was always wishing to be with Nene. "Why do you love me?" he asks her. "Perhaps because you cost me so much." For Lorenzo's sake Nene will give up her trip to New York. In this at least the film has moved away from the complete pessimism of *Cronaca* and *Signora* towards *L'Avventura.*

But for Clelia and Carlo, things do not work out. She has arranged to meet him, thinking that she has lost her job. Before he arrives, she sees her boss who offers her the job she had before in Rome as she cannot continue in Turin. A career woman like Clelia, she has used her work as an escape from emotional complications. "I'm satisfied with myself and above all I've no time to ask myself whether I'm happy or not. Believe me that's the greatest blessing." Now that she has the choice between Carlo and her job, she cannot face the idea of relative poverty with him. The only way out Antonioni sees for her is working compulsively.

Carlo promises to see her off on the train she has to catch to Rome that evening. Not finding him at the station she phones him. No answer. He is at the station but he does not let her see him as the train leaves. In this lack of courage he is like Guido in *Cronaca,* who says that he will see Paola the next day, although he is going, for good.

Le Amiche, then, has elements of both the earlier and later films. It combines the pessimism of the early ones (Rosetta) with the glimmers of hope which appear later. It is more comprehensive than any of the others in treating the usual subject matter from three angles. Of the three stories, the only one which progresses smoothly is the one which obeys the corrupt conventions of the society in which it takes place. In Momina, we have the most complete expression of Antonioni's hate of the system. The only leading character in his films who has successfully adjusted to the system, she is also the only one who is utterly detestable (to Clelia and the audience, though not perhaps to Antonioni).

XX

Le Amiche is the transition film between the early and late periods in another way: in its structure. Through successive films up to *Il Grido,* there is a reduction in plot and its gradual replacement with a different sort of structure, which is common to the last three films. *Cronaca* is the only one which has a plot in which the external action can be summarized briefly. The minor characters always have a functional place in the plot. *Signora* reduces the neat dovetailing of plot. Instead the film follows a character through a progres-

sion of events which lead him or her to a different position at the end. Paola in *Cronaca* had not been changed at all by what happened to her in the film. *Le Amiche* has forsaken plot completely for an interlocking pattern of incidents which is so complex that it is impossible to pick out a story line. All the characters have a significance more important than their contribution to the action. Two, Cesare and Mariella, have no essential effect on what happens to Clelia or to Rosetta. This is a forerunner of the situation in *L'Avventura* where all the minor characters are significant as an environment for the main action, although they hardly take part in it.

With the plot construction has disappeared the irony which is something essentially derived from the plot. In its final appearance in *Le Amiche* it has become rather attenuated compared to the earlier films where it was the main theme. Consequently the feeling of futility has disappeared. Its presence in the early films reflected the mood of much of serious Italian cinema at the start of the 'fifties. With the removal of the one thing which linked him with his contemporaries, Antonioni parted company completely with the rest of the Italian cinema.

The next film, *Il Grido* (1957), is the first one based entirely on the idea of the emotional progression and its physical counterpart, the journey. There is a word which I have been hesitating to use as I shall be accused of drawing unwarranted parallels, although it covers this structure. The word is odyssey. I think, however, that its use here is justified. The situations in which Odysseus was involved along his journey had an effect on his state of mind as well as a significance above that of mere incidents.

Plot engineering never seemed to be much to Antonioni's taste: in the linear structure of the journey he seems to have found the ideal vehicle. It is well adapted to his talent: the insistence on giving events their full duration is not conducive to brisk plotmanship. And the central theme of change now gives each film its over-all shape.

XXI

Having found the most effective shape for his films, Antonioni first used it in an unsatisfactory work. The defects of *Il Grido (The Outcry)* get in its way very badly, especially on first viewing. Like *Signora* and *I Vinti* and even *La Notte*, it has a seriously flawed surface.

To begin with, Antonioni has gone outside his usual little world again, and failed again in making his characters convincing. In this he is an extremely limited director. It's said that he made a very thorough study of conditions in the Po Valley before starting on *Il Grido*. Certainly that's what it looks like: very accurate but external and lacking life, this in spite of the fact that he spent his childhood there. And if he aimed to deal with immediate social problems, he ended by making a film with slighter social implications than any of the others.

The film was partly American-financed, and suffers a little from having three foreign actors in it. Although he'd handled foreigners very successfully in *Le Amiche* (where Momina and Rosetta are played respectively by British Yvonne Furneaux and German Madeleine Fischer) things turn out less well here: Betsy Blair looks thoroughly out of place, and Steve Cochran is only moderately acceptable. Both, according to Antonioni, were unwilling to accept his usual method of directing actors—telling them what to do but not why they were doing it. The third foreigner, a British former stripper called Lynn Shaw, does excellently.

Il Grido has an atmosphere which is pursued relentlessly and humorlessly throughout the

Aldo by the river: IL GRIDO *(The Outcry).*

film: it's not tragic, just ever so glum. And the glumness is reinforced by the surroundings—the Po Valley in winter, all bare and muddy. The sameness of the landscape throughout the film reflects the hero's inability to forget. "The completely open horizon counterpoints the psychology of the central character," as Antonioni has said. But after a couple of hours one finds oneself adding, "Who cares?"

Aldo and Irma have been living together in the small town of Goriano for seven years. She has had a child, Rosina, by him. Her husband had left her to go to Australia. At the start of the film she learns from an official that her husband is dead. She takes Aldo his sandwiches but rushes off because she cannot face him. (We do not know yet that she is going to leave him for another and slightly less poor man.) We see Aldo first at his work, for his abandonment of his job and his inability to settle down after he loses Irma provide the subject of the film. He is a skilled hand at a sugar refinery, where he works high up on a tower. Irma bringing his sandwiches is seen from behind him as he stands at the top of the tower. We see the unfriendly countryside all around. He has raised himself up. Soon he will fall.

Aldo learns the news in a very Antonioni way. The good part, her husband's death, comes in the warmth of the kitchen. The conversation is interrupted by Rosina, returning from school. It continues with the bad news out of doors—among a clump of pollarded willow trees with mudflats in the background.

After abortive attempts to make Irma stay with him, Aldo leaves Goriano, taking Rosina, and wanders from place to place, failing to settle down or to forget his unhappiness. Each episode shows this in a different way, and demonstrates the inability of any of the people he meets to help him. The characters appear one after another, then are left behind. Aldo is less intelligent than other Antonioni protagonists. He cannot find ways of forgetting as, say, Sandro would. Nor does he have the social distractions available to the others. *Il Grido* is the reverse of *L'Avventura:* a film about Aldo's inability to forget.

After a cart trip away from Goriano ("Fine town, Goriano . . . happy people," comments the driver), and a night in a hotel, where they are disturbed by a boxing match downstairs, Aldo brings Rosina to the home of an old flame of his, Elvira. She lives with her younger sister, Edera, in a large house on the banks of the Po. They have men friends who race hydroplanes. Aldo, who is a skilled mechanic, helps repair one of the hydroplanes for a race. Afterwards on the bank in the rain (of course) Aldo sees Edera having a row with her boy-friend. He walks away from this reminiscent quarrel, followed by Rosina. Irma turns up bringing Aldo's clothes for him while he is out, and talks to Elvira. In the evening the sisters and their friends all go to a dance, and there Elvira tells Aldo that she knows that he wouldn't have come back to her if Irma hadn't left him, that he is only doing it for Rosina. Meanwhile Edera has won a popularity contest. She totters home drunk and tries to seduce Aldo. He and Rosina leave next morning.

Aldo has to reject a job on a remote building site because there is nowhere for Rosina to live. A series of small incidents like this take Aldo's plight and his journey a step further.

One of the lifts which they hitch on their journey ends at a roadside gas station. Its owner is a blousy young woman called Virginia (how convenient it is that no two characters in Antonioni have the same first name). With her lives her senile father. As Aldo and Rosina arrive, Virginia and two policemen are bringing back father, who keeps running away. Be-

Aldo and Virginia.

cause Aldo helps Virginia with the pumps, she lets him stay the night with Rosina in an outhouse, and then offers him a job. He stays on, and becomes her lover. Rosina teams up with the old man, and goes with him when he makes trouble with neighbors who live on the farm that was his until Virginia sold it to buy the gas station. He is relevant to Aldo's situation as a man who has lost his work and because of that, his grip on life. Virginia wants to get rid of him and of Rosina, both burdens she is unwilling to accept. The old man is packed off to a home.

After they have disposed of him, they wander round the town. Aldo nearly gets into a fight. Rosina runs off. We next see her asleep on a piece of waste land just oustide the town. The ground is strewn with big cable reels. Aldo and Virginia go around to the other side of them, spread their coats on the ground and sit down. Meanwhile Rosina wakes up and starts playing a little game of collecting pebbles. The camera is on the same side as Aldo and Virginia when Rosina starts looking among the reels, and comes through between them into medium shot. She stares towards the couple on the ground offscreen, and then backs away, dropping the pebbles one by one. Virginia insists that she couldn't have understood. All Aldo can say is "Irma."

So Rosina has to be sent back to Goriano. By now she isn't speaking to Aldo. As her bus moves off, Aldo runs beside it trying despairingly to explain things to her. Without Rosina, he can't face life with Virginia. He goes into the café where she is waiting, looks over towards her and leaves without a word.

He takes a job on a dredger. With another member of the crew he talks of escape to South America, encouraged by the captain of the boat who paints a rosy picture of life there.

But escape is no solution. Aldo takes up with another girl, this time as poor as he is. Andreina works in the rice fields in the summer and just manages to keep alive by a bit of prostitution in the winter. We have already seen her going off with the captain of the dredger. Aldo passes her hut when she is sick with malaria. He gets a doctor and forces him to attend to her. But later he sees a couple of policemen passing, takes fright and runs off. When Andreina recovers she goes to find him and return the donkey jacket which he had lent to her. He is unemployed, living in a rush hut on a mudflat and eating only the coarse fish he is able to catch. She stays with him.

Andreina is a much more generous girl than Virginia, but Aldo is so sunk in his memories that he never manages to communicate with her. He tells her how he met Irma. They are standing on a mudflat which recalls the one in the background when he learned Irma was leaving him. It is completely bare except for a couple of decoy ducks sitting incongruously in the middle. The actors are seen either in disjointed long shots or alone in medium shot to emphasize their separation. While Aldo talks about meeting Irma, Andreina is playing with one of the ducks. "Then what?" although she's not really interested. "I had a good job at the refinery, with responsibility. I worked high up. I could see my daughter playing." "I was pregnant once," she remarks with an apparent lack of connection: conversations in Antonioni often turn into counterpointing monologues.

They have no work and no money. The local shopkeeper will only sell food for cash. The man who is sharing the hut with them goes home to his brother. When the Po floods after the spring thaw, the hut will be submerged. Already rain is pouring through the roof. Unable to stand her hunger any longer Andreina sneaks off to get a meal by sleeping with a café owner. Aldo follows her. He stands outside the café shouting her name until she comes out. When he objects to what she's doing, she bawls him out. She relents too late, he has walked off. She is still sobbing when the fat owner comes downstairs. "You can go to hell too," she says, and goes out.

Fade-in to Aldo on a truck approaching Virginia's gas station from the opposite direction to that of the tanker before. Virginia has a coat over her dressing-gown. She asks him, "Still

looking for a job? Or something else? Not worn out yet?" When he's inside collecting his suitcase he sees Virginia's father who has been thrown out of the home because he kept on escaping. Virginia remembers that there was a card from Irma for Aldo. She thinks it was about Rosina, but she's lost it and can't tell him what it said. The camera is on the truck with Aldo as it drives off, and Virginia recedes into the distance. She is left behind just as Aldo leaves everything in the film, except his misery.

When the truck reaches the outskirts of Goriano it is diverted by police. Aldo gets off. The road into town is closed because of a riot. He walks into town, breaking through crowds demonstrating against a proposed American airbase which will put peasants off their land. We see the workers in the sugar refinery leaving to join the demonstration. In the deserted town Aldo notices Rosina going into a house. He peers in through the window and sees Irma powdering a young baby. She catches sight of him; she goes out after him. He finds an open gate into the refinery, and goes in. Irma sees him climb up the tower to where he once worked. She calls out to him. Then things turn ambiguous—not usefully ambiguous, just unclear. He starts to sway and then falls to the ground. It looks like vertigo, but that seems a pointless ending, so presumably it's suicide. The last high-angle shot shows demonstrators running in the distance and tilts down to Irma kneeling over Aldo's body.

The personal/political linkage which is intended between the destruction of Aldo and the destruction of Goriano's whole way of life seems terribly forced, partly perhaps because the film and its hero have become such a bore that we have lost sympathy. Along its length there are a few good and meaningful scenes like the ones I've described, and a number of nicely calculated incidents. Example: to impose his will on her Aldo grabs Irma's arm as she is putting on Rosina's milk to warm and succeeds only in making her drop the saucepan. She asks, "Now what'll I give Rosina?" But elsewhere it is a drag—not that it aspires to the monumental tedium of *La Terra Trema,* just that it seems to communicate less than any other Antonioni film, even perhaps *I Vinti.*

XXII

Having tried to explain how almost everything which people cheered or detested in *L'Avventura* was present in the earlier films, I'm left with the simpler task of writing about why it looks different from its predecessors. There are, I think, two main reasons for the difference: one personal, one technical.

The personal reason is the appearance of hope in Antonioni's picture of the world. Although he had already lost the obsession with futility which pervades the early films, in *Il Grido* he is more consistently gloomy than in any of the others. At least Paola and Clara and Rosetta had some good times before things went wrong. In *Il Grido* these are all over before the picture starts. At the end of *L'Avventura* there is hope; that Claudia and Sandro will stay together, and that Sandro will, after his moment of truth, be able to work up the strength necessary to drop his degrading but lucrative work for Ettore and practice again as an architect. If I were a gossip columnist, I would attribute this new tentative optimism to the arrival of Monica Vitti in Antonioni's life.

The technical advance in *L'Avventura* is very simple: it is the wide screen. *L'Avventura* is in a screen ratio of 1.85, I'd guess, from a couple of viewings in ideal conditions. The new shape has allowed Antonioni to get much closer to his characters without losing anything important. On a normal screen, a shot containing two or more people just standing and talking will necessarily have the camera rather far from the actors. This distance is bad in *Il Grido* and perhaps worse in parts of *Signora,* although what's happening there is more interesting in compensation. *Signora* has almost no cutting and approaches a one-take-per-scene technique, which Antonioni has now replaced by an increasing amount of cutting. In *L'Avventura* the two-shots have the actors' faces as large on the screen as they would be in a medium close-up

on a normal screen. This is important for Antonioni who relies so heavily on our observations of the characters' behavior. We can be close to them without having them isolated from each other and the background in a close-up. *Le Amiche*, incidentally, solved the problem in rather a different way, by shooting group scenes on more than one level, with the characters standing on a slope or some standing, some sitting, to produce a sort of vertical depth of field.

Apart from the optimism and the wide screen, *L'Avventura* does have very close antecedents in the early pictures. It is, as Antonioni remarked, *Il Grido delle Amiche*. From *Le Amiche* come many of the characters—one can trace parallels to various extents between Claudia and Clelia, Anna and Rosetta, Sandro and Lorenzo (both played by Ferzetti, too), Giulia and Momina, Ettore and Cesare. From *Il Grido* comes the journey structure, although this time it is used to greater effect. The surroundings shape the events. The island, barren and unfriendly, breaks up relationships, isolates the characters from each other. The journey in train and car brings the changes in Sandro and Claudia; the places they pass through are not merely a reflection of what is happening inside them, they help to cause it. The big hotel, home of the rich, weakens, even corrupts Sandro. The dawn signifies the end of the destructive night, the beginning of something new. The bare, cold car park is an escape from the warm, ornate corruption of the hotel, the emptiness in which a different and perhaps better future can be created. The car park is less attractive, less inviting than the hotel, but is the alternative which offers hope. For the first time, Antonioni's characters have found a conclusion that does not imply defeat and renunciation, but expresses mutual shame and forgiveness, and therefore contains the possibility of progress.

XXIII

La Notte is an attempt to go beyond what was achieved in *L'Avventura*. In fact, I don't think that anyone who hasn't seen *L'Avventura* has much chance of understanding it.

La Notte starts with hope. The first shot tilts up from the overcrowded streets of Milan in the rush hour to the tall Pirelli building. The cool beauty of Gio Ponti's architecture is an image of the possible future environment, a triumph of art and science working together. It embodies a perfection to which man in his personal relationships can only aspire. But here it is, rising out of the traffic jams and the confusion. A couple of coldish shots along the top of the building remind us that better does not mean more lush—we learned that at the end of *L'Avventura*. Then under the titles, down we go, in two of the longest vertical traveling shots ever seen, toward the chaotic present. At first we see the rest of Milan only as a reflection; then a different angle includes a direct view as well. This credit sequence goes beyond the plain fact of change presented at the beginning of *L'Avventura*. ("These new flats will stifle our poor villa," says Anna's father.) The change is potentially for the better. Significantly, though, the Pirelli building is the only piece of good modern architecture in the film.

In *La Notte* we are shown another progression, again of a couple, Lidia and Giovanni. But this time the testing point in their relationship comes after ten years of marriage. As in *L'Avventura*, their personal crisis is linked with another crisis, in Giovanni's work—he is a novelist.

The action is compressed into less than 24 hours—Saturday afternoon to early Sunday morning. Perhaps this is a reaction to accusations of diffuseness in Antonioni's previous films. However, it does take the idea that the duration of events is important a stage further by representing a smaller section of time more completely.

XXIV

The visit to their dying friend Tommaso, which forms the opening section of the film, is the trigger to the estrangement between Lidia and Giovanni. Or rather, it helps to bring

out into the open a situation which has already grown up unacknowledged. We learn that all is not well between them as they go up to Tommaso's room. The camera is inside the elevator so that we see them coming in from the foyer of the clinic (a modern building which "evokes the idea of a perfect and inexorable science"). The script (the published version written after the film, not by Antonioni) describes it like this:

In the lift which goes up without any vibration and with hardly even a slight hum, Giovanni and Lidia avoid looking at each other. It is an unpleasant moment, made even more painful by the surroundings and the decor. Lidia looks at the ceiling, Giovanni at the control panel. Then the hum stops and the gate opens automatically.

Tommaso, as a failure (a critic or columnist of some sort), in the extreme situation of knowing he's about to die, is forced to reconsider his life. "I realized how many things I'd left undone. . . . I began to ask myself if I hadn't stayed on the fringe of an undertaking that concerned me. . . . I didn't have the courage to get to the root of things. . . . And very often I consoled myself by saying that I didn't have the intelligence." Giovanni interrupts him—"If you talk like that there'll be nothing left for me to do but to stop writing, and look straight away for a good job. . . . But you're only saying it in fun." Giovanni feels that what Tommaso says is equally applicable to himself. (A recurrent motif in Antonioni is characters seeing themselves in others: the audience can do the same. When Tommaso talks of failure, it's his failure.)

Tommaso's desperate desire to be close to them (twice he says that they are his only friends) points their avoidance of contact with him and each other. Instead both of them make a display of solicitousness, which keeps them at a distance from him. Giovanni brushes aside Tommaso's references to his new novel which has just been published. Lidia stands behind the head of the bed, where Tommaso cannot see her. Shots of her tend to include the view out the window. When a helicopter passes, she rushes over to the window to look out at it. Seeing Tommaso have a stab of pain, she hastily offers to get a nurse. All the time it's obvious to us that she really wants to escape.

The framing of the shots carries the idea of the couple's estrangement by frequently showing Tommaso in two-shot with just one of them. On one occasion when he is in pain, they each hold one of his hands. He is between and linking them.

Even Tommaso becomes aware of how they feel about him. He is annoyed when Giovanni talks of him getting better. "Treat me as a friend, not as an invalid. I know very well how this is going to end."

This first scene contains in outline most of the themes that are developed later in the film. The place of the artist in modern society. The crisis in Giovanni's career and in Lidia's marriage with him. The corruption of the benefits of life in a scientific age when they are placed at the service of a capitalist society. Champagne for the dying rich, beautiful nurses to keep up their morale. These images suggest a dying society and culture which are being kept alive artificially.

XXV

Outside the clinic, Lidia weeps convulsively. She is leaning against a wall. Her posture demonstrates her emotional need for support. In the clinic Giovanni has his encounter with the nympho. She asks him for a match. Antonioni cuts from LS to a single shot of Giovanni. Behind him the elevator doors close, cutting off his retreat. Very corny. Giovanni, completely drained of resistance, allows himself to be dragged into the nympho's room. She is completely oblivious of whether he is aroused at all. Suddenly he comes to life and returns her caresses with as much intensity as he can muster (much less than she can, because he's Marcello Mastroianni). There is a link between her and Lidia, expressed visually in the shot of her against the screen-filling expanse of bare

wall. Giovanni feels, wrongly, that he has excited in her the passion that he can no longer produce in Lidia. Unlike Lidia, all she needs is the physical presence of a man, any man. It's only when the nurses come in and slap the girl's face to stop her hysteria that Giovanni understands what had happened.

The drive from the clinic to the publishing house, which is holding a reception to launch Giovanni's new book, starts with a very lengthy silent shot taken through the windshield of the car. Giovanni repeatedly looks round at Lidia, trying to bring himself to speak. It's obvious that he can't keep silent for long about what has happened, but first he needs to muster his courage. For her part, Lidia stares straight ahead miserably, only glancing at him once. We are aware of the gap between them, and the length of the take allows us to experience the duration of the silence, to feel their isolation building up as they are unable to speak to each other.

The car runs into a traffic jam, of which we're shown a few documentary shots. The jam has two functions: one is a reference back to the shot which opens the titles sequence—the confusion of the present; the other has to do with the journey that's in progress. The movement of the car reflects the way in which the emotional changes are progressing. On the whole, the things which are pushing them apart take place when the car is moving: the silence, for example. The car stops. Giovanni puts his hand on Lidia's knee (high shot showing only her and his hand). This is the physical evidence that he's trying to re-establish contact. He asks her if she's not too tired to go to the reception. He has to tell her something she won't like. She asks, "Do you really have to?" He is just launching into his story. Lidia says, "What girl?" The traffic starts moving. As they drive slowly he tells her what happened. She is as calm as he is agitated. When they have to stop again, she asks why he called the incident unpleasant. He explains that he thought for a moment that he was the cause of the girl's passion. Now Lidia is nervous. The car starts moving again. She is sufficiently upset to make absolutely the wrong remark—"It's always an experience. Good material for a novel, *The Living and the Dead.*" Giovanni is hurt by her unconcern. "Is that all you can say?"

The emotional gap has widened further, and the rest of the scene, as the car continues on its way, is accordingly either shot from behind them for two-shots or in single-shots—not close-ups. Some people have the impression that Antonioni used lots of close-ups to get even nearer to his actors than in *L'Avventura.* This is not true. Most of the single shots aren't any closer than the two-shots in *L'Avventura.* Their function is the separation of the characters from each other to parallel their emotional isolation.

Lidia is distressed by her unfortunate remark, for she tries to make light of the incident. "That girl's the lucky one . . . because she's not responsible." Her last remark before the car draws up at the publisher's is: "It hasn't changed anything. . . . Don't worry." That is the truth: her feelings for her husband have ebbed so far that she is not jealous of his near-infidelity. This theme reappears more strongly at the end of the film.

The reception shows us a little of what Giovanni has achieved by his writing. We already know that he hasn't made a vast amount of money (his car is neither large nor new), although he's doing quite well financially (both he and Lidia are well dressed). Giovanni has had a modest, but fashionable, success, and this cocktail party is evidence of how good he is at being a success.

For Giovanni this is the reward for his work: silly questions ("I see you always sign at the left . . ."), mechanical smiles and handshakes. The book is called *La Stagione,* The Season: something else that is transient. Lidia looks at a big picture of Giovanni in a display case (which is metaphorically where he is at the time) beside his novel. She feels outside everything that is happening in the room and not concerned in her husband's success. She watches a couple of girls come in. One says,

"I'd love to write a novel." The last shot of the sequence looks down on a table as Lidia pushes her arm between the backs of two separate groups of people to put her drink down.

Instead of going home, she wanders around. We see her stop to stare at a car park attendant who is leaning against a wall, eating his sandwiches. As she walks off he notices her and stares after her. She turns and smiles at him. She passes a couple of men who are walking in the opposite direction and joking. For a moment she shares their laughter. From our observations of her behavior we sense that she is trying to overcome her feeling of isolation, not only from Giovanni, but from people in general.

She walks along a street of dull and rather inhuman new flats. An extreme long shot shows that next to the flats is an old and partly demolished slum building. The town-proud materialists have had it screened from the road by an advertisement hoarding covered with Omo posters. Lidia finds a door in the hoarding and enters, escaping from the present and her loneliness (represented by the impersonal coldness of the flats) into the past which looks more friendly. In the yard of the old building, she tries to comfort a crying child, but without success. She wanders back towards the door, looking at things, and touching them as if unsure of the reality of the world she is moving in. The symbolism here is pushed a little too hard in a couple of close shots: her feet beside a broken old clock lying on the ground; her left hand, with wedding ring, pulling a large flake of rust off an iron door. As Lidia walks back into the present, we return to Giovanni, who is arriving home.

Alone in his study, Giovanni acts out his state of mind. He pulls a sheet of paper out of his typewriter, reads it and drops it on his desk. Then he leans back in his seat looking glum, because his writing has become stale. He gets up and paces around the room, picking up a cutting to glance at it, then going over to the window to stare out. This is a delaying action. He doesn't want to settle down to work. Finally he lies down on a couch to read his mail.

Back to Lidia: a high-angle extreme long shot of her appearing round a corner. Most of the screen is filled by an expanse of plain mosaic wall, stressing the coldness of the architecture which makes her feel a stranger to her surroundings. A closer shot shows her against the wall, looking around her. The sudden noise of a jet accentuates her feelings of fear at being so completely alone. It is a hot Saturday afternoon and the street is deserted. She walks past the entrance hall of the block and looks in at the porter. When he notices her, she walks away.

Part of Lidia's problem is sexual, and during the first half of the film, phallic symbols keep popping up. The champagne bottle in the Tommaso sequence was one. Later there are the rockets. The most blatant of all comes at this point in the film. Lidia threads her way along a row of concrete posts, absently fingering the first few. A tracking shot just above shoulder level behind her leaves us in no doubt of their significance. After she has passed two or three, her little game is stopped by an old woman who is eating her lunch off one. The camera cranes down to a more normal angle and tilts up as she walks away.

The tilt up is countered by a tilt down to the street with Lidia and the camera a hundred yards further down the street in front of one more horrid modern block of flats. A low-angle shot makes us feel the weight of the buildings oppressing her. She leans against a lamp-post for support.

A cut from the no-sky claustrophobia of this shot takes us to the open landscape of the edge of town as Lidia arrives in a taxi. A few large sheds and occasional houses alternate with patches of wasteland covered in rubble and obviously destined to be built on soon. An area of change. Onto one piece of wasteland troop a gaggle of tough young men. One removes his shirt and after a formal exchange of insults with another starts a fist fight. Lidia is hypnotized by the violence (as Giovanni was in the scene with the nympho). Her expression betrays sexual desire, but with her genteel back-

ground she can't help also being repelled. Eventually she cries "Basta!" until they stop. The victor gets up. While he puts his shirt on, he looks her over with a defiant leer. She walks off, but breaks into a run as he starts to follow. Like Giovanni with the nympho she has realized what was happening.

No sooner is she back at the taxi than she sees some young men in the distance setting off rockets. Her need to be with people makes her join the small crowd who are watching. The sight does not detain her for long. Once more she wanders off.

At home, Giovanni, who has dropped off to sleep, wakes up with a start and calls Lidia. She's not in. He asks their neighbor, but she hasn't seen Lidia for two days. He picks up the phone, thinks better of it and wanders out on to the balcony. A long shot of the block. In comparison he's so minute that our eyes have to search around the screen before we spot him. A shot from behind him along the balcony showing a man looking out of his window in the next block. A rather closer shot of the man, who just smokes and stares out at Giovanni. Antonioni's comment on urban life: everyone filed away in his own pigeon-hole, out of touch with people in the surrounding pigeon-holes. This in itself links to Lidia's essentially urban problem of outsideness.

The phone rings. It's Lidia who is now at an open air café. It is a place where the couple used to meet before they were married. So, as in *Le Amiche*, we have a journey back to the past in an attempt to recapture something lost. We get an indication that this is wrong from the café owner who comes up to Lidia and says, "There's a hotel nearby if you're meeting anyone. . . ." She is a very fat middle-aged woman grotesquely dressed in girlish clothes. Like the visit to Tommaso the scene will bring out only their separation.

Lidia goes through a gate into a courtyard: more shots of old buildings. Giovanni arrives. "Why come here?" he asks. "By chance, perhaps." Again single shots of them expressing isolation, and one in which he walks away from her, the camera tracking with him to leave her in the background. The excuse for calling him was to see the rockets. "The way they go up, it's so pretty." But the launching has stopped.

Giovanni, who is the less aware of the alteration in their relationship, says "It looks all unchanged." Lidia adds "It will, and soon." Change, for Antonioni, is the one certainty. It is because Lidia recognizes one change that she suffers more than Giovanni, and is the dominant character in the film. Antonioni has said, "It seems to me that female psychology is a finer filter for reality than male psychology. Anyway, women are less hypocritical by nature than men, therefore more interesting."

Lidia and Giovanni walk across an overgrown railway line. He says, "These rails were in use when we came here." And that again is a comment on the decay of their relationship.

Lidia in the bath calls to Giovanni to pass her the sponge. In a naturally offhand way, he picks it out of the washbasin, gives it to her and goes out. The shot of her is held; we only see the lower part of him as his is a casual action. Lidia is upset by the lack of attention. She talks to him as he dresses in another room. She's bored with staying at home. "Let's go to the Gherardinis," he shouts. "Whatever you like, but don't let's stay at home." Giovanni doesn't know what Gherardini wants with him. Lidia guesses correctly: "Every millionaire wants his intellectual. He's chosen you."

While they talk she makes some display of drying herself. But he doesn't notice as he's accustomed to seeing her naked and the fact of her nakedness has ceased to mean anything.

She comes out of the bathroom wearing a new dress, and does a fashion-model walk down the hall for Giovanni's benefit. He notices the dress, but not her. She turns around to look at him, and the smile drains from her face. He asks, "What's the matter?" But she can't tell him. Instead she manoeuvers to get him closer. "Do me up." While fastening her dress he puts down his whisky glass on a handy piece of abstract sculpture. The degradation of art theme again. She has now decided not to

go to the Gherardinis'. "Somewhere else. . . . I'd prefer to be with just you." He kisses her on the neck. "Perhaps that would be better." She turns, hoping to capitalize on the intimacy of the moment, but he has picked up his glass and is out of reach.

The night-club act is another piece of modern grotesqueness—a combination balancing/-contortionist/striptease number which recalls the eroticism theme of *L'Avventura*. It seems to interest Giovanni in a way that the sight of Lidia in the bath did not. However, by fixing his attention on it, he is avoiding her gaze which is centered on him. She notices this: "Watching you can be very amusing . . . when you're with me you seem to be acting." Giovanni is not going to be led into conversation. "Look at her she's not bad." To emphasize the break, there is a cut to the performers with Giovanni and Lidia in the background. We see that the act is done with much skill, but absolutely no grace. A close shot over her shoulder as she sips her drink, then puts her glass down. She runs her hand over the jewelled clip of her handbag and then touches Giovanni's cuff links. She smiles privately at him. According to the script, the cuff-links have the same stone in the same mounting as her engagement ring. Giovanni acts exasperation at being distracted from the floorshow. Again Lidia expresses her need for Giovanni to value her more—"Don't minimize my capabilities. I have thoughts too." In their mutual discomfort this is turned to a joke as she describes the arrival of a thought. More floorshow. When the thought has arrived, she will not say what it is, only that it is not pleasant. Her gesture of straightening his collar is filled with tenderness she still feels for him.

But the evening together has failed to bring Giovanni closer to her again. She suggests that they go to the Gherardinis'. She has changed her mind because "It gives us something to do." The trip to the suburbs, the bath scene and the night club were her attempts to break down the barrier that had grown up between them. The party is going to be what the night-club already is for him—an external distraction which will cover up the trouble. They perceive different facets of the same crisis: Lidia is the more sensitive to her failure in rebuilding their relationship, Giovanni to the stalemate in his career. This is brought into the nightclub sequence when Giovanni says, "Life would be tolerable but for its pleasures." "Original?" "No, I no longer have ideas—just a good memory." The visit to Gherardini, the millionaire who wants to buy Giovanni as his tame intellectual, is, then, their unconscious acknowledgment of their double failure.

XXVI

The rest of the film takes place in and around the Gherardinis' house. It is as characteristic of the upper strata of capitalism as the hotel in *L'Avventura*. Architecturally it's undistinguished—the sort of diffuse luxury that any puppet architect would produce for a rich client with slightly "modern" ideas. From the house a wide lawn slopes gently down towards a swimming pool and a circular dance floor which surrounds a statue of a laughing satyr. Nearby a quartet plays soggy modern jazz. A row of tables are loaded with an opulent buffet far in excess of the potential consumption of the guests.

At first the party succeeds in its function as a distraction for Lidia and Giovanni. Accordingly we too are distracted from them and our attention is first switched to the house and some of the people at the party. There's Berenice, a raddled, neurotic woman in her middle thirties. She's Anna from *L'Avventura* ten years later.

Another of the guests is a solid-looking blonde girl called Resy (short for Maria Teresa). Constantly needing people around to divert her (a more permanent version of Lidia's trouble of the afternoon), she seizes on Giovanni as someone to idolize. She wants him to tell her a lovely story about a beautiful woman who is loved for her intelligence. But how could it end? Resy goes for self-sacrifice: her heroine would give up her lover to another woman. Giovanni is still sufficient of a writer

to ask "Why does she give him up?" But Resy prefers self-indulgence: "Because it makes me want to cry."

Having failed in her attempt to get through to Giovanni, Lidia is now avoiding contact with other people. She refuses to let Berenice introduce her to a playboy friend, Roberto, and even uses his arrival to escape from her. Wandering through the house, she comes on Gherardini's daughter Valentina sitting alone on a staircase reading a vast egghead volume *I Sonnambuli.* At this point we're not shown Valentina's face but merely made aware of her presence.

It's Lidia who first mentions her to Giovanni, to dodge the issue when he says "You never seem to enjoy yourself any longer." "I do in my way," she replies. "There's a girl inside who's enjoying herself in her way. . . . She's reading *I Sonnambuli,* and she's very beautiful." This remark, however strange it may seem, in the circumstances has no deeper motivation than the avoidance of an argument.

Seeing the Gherardinis approach, Lidia tries to escape only to be turned back to them by the sight of Roberto on the prowl. The whole conversation with Gherardini is given a particular sort of ludicrousness by its setting. Having seen his house and its grounds, we are hardly sympathetic to his opening gambit. "It's absurd to talk of wealth these days. The rich no longer exist." One feels that one is hearing a well-rehearsed sales talk. "I have always regarded my many enterprises as works of art, and I can say that the money I make . . . it's as if it doesn't concern me." Through the character of Gherardini, we are shown the hypocrisy of the liberal capitalist. His attitude seems utterly self-centered when he says, "What's important for me is to create something solid to live on after me." The more he says, the sillier and more high-flown becomes the parallel he draws between Giovanni's work and his own. "Believe me, we are the sole architects of our lives. What would you do, Pontano, if you didn't write?"

Giovanni's crisis is mentioned directly for the first time in the film by Lidia: "A few years ago he would have committed suicide. But now . . . you should know, Giovanni. . . ." And so we learn more about the nature of his trouble which is partly a feeling that there is no place for him in a technological society. "I don't give myself that much importance. There are other ways out. [One of which Gherardini later offers him.] Today a writer asks himself all the time if his vocation isn't a reflex that's—irrepressible, certainly, but almost anachronistic. . . . You industrialists have the advantage of constructing your stories with real people, real houses, real towns. The rhythm of life and even that of time are in your hands." This is put in its proper perspective by Lidia: "It's been a particularly bad day." Giovanni's questioning of his vocation is not separate from the rest of his life.

Gherardini's wife keeps interrupting her husband's monologue, much to his annoyance. Unlike most of the idle rich, she doesn't seem to be either a neurotic or an all-out hedonist. Her intelligence, of which she's obviously proud, is devoted rather endearingly to deflating her husband's pomposity. When she's had enough of the conversation, she leads Lidia off, leaving him saying "Perhaps all our privileges will be swept away, but that will be a good thing. Yes, a good thing."

XXVII

If Gherardini and his wife are rather different from any previous Antonioni characters, their daughter Valentina is quite without antecedents in his films. Her character breaks refreshingly across all the assumptions that were becoming dangerously consistent in the other films: that wealth was incompatible with self-awareness and ideas of responsibility to other people.

It's relevant that we see her first playing a game she has invented (with her compact on the checkered tile floor). So too is the intellectual preciseness of the MJQ record she's playing, in contrast to the flatulent jazz that's going on outside. The game is a metaphor represent-

Veronica and her game.

ing her whole life. (In another scene she says "I'm just a girl who loves golf, tennis, cars, cocktails.") A game in which she makes the rules, but is involved wholeheartedly so that the result is serious:

VALENTINA: To win, you have to make the compact stop in one of those squares. The end row.
GIOVANNI: What's the prize?
VALENTINA: We'll think what we'd like and ask for it at the end of the game. I'm called Valentina.
GIOVANNI: Valentina . . . do you often lose at this game?
VALENTINA: I've only just invented it. . . . Once I lost everything.

Within the context of the game Valentina's character begins to be established. When other guests gather round and start betting on the players, Giovanni is upset by the size of the stakes. Valentina picks on his weakness: "You're worried about the losers . . . a typical intellectual attitude . . . an egoist with a bleeding heart."

The next scene between Giovanni and Valentina shows us a little more of her and him a little more of himself.

GIOVANNI: There's one way of bringing us closer . . .
VALENTINA: You crave affection?
GIOVANNI: You don't?
Silence. They look at each other. Giovanni starts again.
GIOVANNI: You know, I owe you a debt. Just now I gave up.
VALENTINA: Give me a little more time to relish the idea of this debt.
GIOVANNI: Agreed . . . but don't forget.
Valentina, who was moving away, stops.
VALENTINA: Each day I seem to forget something.
Instead of answering, Giovanni kisses her gently.

From a medium shot Antonioni cuts to a high-angle shot including Lidia who is looking down at them.

We have reached the climax of the film, not that any scene is built up emotionally as a coda. In the rest of the film various themes are brought together. Antonioni's method is exposition rather than dramatization. After the game, incidents happen in this order: (1) Lidia avoids Roberto. (2) She phones the clinic and learns of Tommaso's death. (3) She sees Giovanni kiss Valentina. (4) Giovanni is offered a job by Gherardini. (5) Valentina finds out that Lidia is Giovanni's wife. (6) Lidia tries to talk to Giovanni, but he rushes off after Valentina. (7) When it starts raining and guests jump into the pool, Roberto stops Lidia from jumping and bundles her into his car.

These seven incidents show the destruction of what little is left of the couple's relationship, leading up to the moment when Lidia is unable to resist Roberto. The order in which they happen is meaningful because sequences are linked together in significance by their juxtaposition. For example, (2), (3), and (4): the death of Tommaso (their shared past); Lidia seeing Giovanni kiss Valentina (his first voluntary attempt at infidelity); Gherardini's offer (which would mean the abandonment of Giovanni's vocation). In an even more complex way this recalls the hotel scene of *L'Avventura* where Sandro betrays his vocation and Claudia with Ettore and Gloria respectively.

Giovanni's conversation with Gherardini shows us more of the millionaire's brand of paternal capitalism, and makes it very clear that if Giovanni works for him, his job will be even less rewarding than Sandro's estimating. "I have started a cultural program for my employees. I wish to rejuvenate the spirit of my firm. I have noticed a lack of rapport between the management and the workers. And do you know why? Because they don't know the story of the firm and of me, its founder." Gherardini's materialism penetrates his whole life. (Earlier, showing his roses to a guest—"Over there are more than 3,000 rose bushes.") So it's hardly surprising that it comes out in his view of culture. The whole cultural project is no more than Industrial (and Public) Relations. He backs up his explanation with a diagram which he draws on a sheet of paper with decisive strokes. A managerial gimmick if ever there was one, it demonstrates nothing. He wants Giovanni to write a history of his firm, "but that's not all, I also want you as one of our directors. Wouldn't that please you: to work here, to live as we live? Excuse me, but what do you earn now? . . . Your wife's family is wealthy isn't it?" While he is talking, Gherardini scrawls a row of 0's on his paper, ready to put a number in front of them when he names his price. Giovanni is beginning to be sales-resistant: "You're well informed, but you've missed that I have means of my own . . . and then, I write a lot of articles for the papers." Gherardini's next remark is quite astounding, although he would not see that it was in anv way extraordinary: "Don't you want independence?" Giovanni immediately questions it: "Independence, by what definition?" That is not the sort of remark that Gherardini condescends to notice. "Think it over, Pontano, think it over, and remember that in my firm, I pay top salaries as a matter of policy." There's a meaningful cut straight from this to his wife's hitching up her skirt to show some guests a combined garter and billfold, complete with dollar bill. An onlooker makes a crack about extending the dollar area.

Valentina's look of disgust at this exhibition turns to one of horror when her mother calls to Lidia who's standing on a balcony. (One of the recurrent visual motifs in the party is Lidia looking down on the others, particularly Valentina and Roberto, as if at a distance from everything that affects her.) The blow to Valentina in learning that Giovanni is married has its counterpart for Lidia when she tries to tell him about Tommaso's death and fails because he's chasing after Valentina. He comes on Lidia sitting alone during his search for Valentina. "Beautiful here, isn't it?" He sees Valentina in the distance and starts after her before Lidia has pulled herself together enough to say urgently, "Giovanni!" All she gets for an answer is: "I'll be back in a moment."

Giovanni's refusal to listen has left Lidia even more desolate, without any will of her own. Leaning against the piano on the lawn, she lets herself be taken up by the rhythm of the music. Soon her conscious misery has gone, although underneath the emptiness remains. When a man asks her to dance with him, she does, only to find that he can't dance. At this, she even manages a wan smile as she dances a moment alone.

When the rain scatters the dancers, one girl is left embracing the stone satyr in the middle of the dance floor. Some of the others rush down to the water and jump in—one is reminded irresistibly of the Gadarene swine. Lidia finds it all amusing. She's up on the spring board and about to jump too, when Roberto stops her. This is the last time she is seen above the others. She does not resist as Roberto leads her to his car.

In the next scene with him, though, she does reject his advances. This scene is related thematically to those on either side of it—both involve Giovanni. In the previous sequence he is looking for Valentina but finds Resy. He tells her a little story and chats for a moment. It's not long though before he tires of her company as she has nothing to offer him—her relationship to others is entirely one of taking, not of giving. And so it is with Roberto. His long conversation

with Lidia is shot from outside the car. As we don't hear what they say, we assume that it is not worth hearing. If part of the reason for Lidia's rejection of him lies in Roberto himself, what she actually says is "I can't." The suggestion of conscience links with the next sequence in which the first words are Valentina's "I draw the line at home-wrecking." The car ride itself is another of Antonioni's journeys. Lidia's progress away from Giovanni is halted physically when the car has to stop at a railroad crossing. The symbolism is taken even further by having them get out of the car before Roberto tries to kiss Lidia and she refuses. One can see what Antonioni is aiming at. It just seems a little ludicrous to make them get out of the car and stand in the pouring rain to help the imagery along.

But the following scenes with Valentina show Antonioni at his best, aided enormously by Vitti's performance. In the character of Valentina there is greater self-awareness and sensitivity to others than we've seen before in Antonioni. Her order to the servant to bring more candles for her room (the electric light has failed) is, in a way, symbolic of her part in the film.

Valentina is able to describe her own feelings with a clarity which was previously the sole prerogative of the director. "Tonight I was feeling sad. Then as I played with you, it passed. Now it's coming back. It's like the sadness of a dog." She wants to be as honest about her relationships with others. "It seems to me that love limits a person. It's a bit of a fraud—creating emptiness around us." We learn later in the scene that her honesty upsets other people, and that she's recently had an unhappy love affair.

Encouraged by the understanding he finds in her, Giovanni tries to explain his troubles: "I believe now that I'm no longer capable of writing. I know what to write but not how to write." Another parallel with Sandro in *L'Avventura:* Giovanni's personal life is reflected in his inability to work at his vocation. It's not his ideas and convictions that have been lost. He lacks the force necessary to create a work of art, to struggle at converting his ideas into a formal entity. For him it's a novel, for Sandro a building. The ideas are part of his make-up. They may change but they aren't lost. It's in the practical task of producing something concrete that Giovanni is vulnerable.

Valentina's reaction to his confession is typically both honest and deprecatory: "You're weak, like me." But why does he tell her this? She's just a girl who loves golf, etc. "And beyond that there's nothing else you love?" Valentina replies sadly, "Yes, everything." She's encouraged by Giovanni's interest in her which one imagines is rather different from the attentions she's normally paid by men of her own class. After making him promise that he won't laugh at her, she plays him a tape recording of a short piece she has written herself.

A description of the "useless sounds" she has to hear although she doesn't want to, it is a perceptive piece of writing. What it tells us about her (apart from her perceptiveness) is that she is troubled by the meaninglessness of most of the things she notices. She wishes to perceive only those things that have meaning. It's hardly being facetious to say that she'd like life to have the concentration of an Antonioni film.

When the recording is finished, Giovanni surprises Valentina by asking to hear it again. She rewinds and turns on again. Silence. "I erased it. Drivel!" Her destructiveness amazes Giovanni. Why did she do it? "Because mine is not a compulsive vocation." And when Giovanni says that she's wasting her intelligence, she replies with remarkable self-awareness, "I'm not intelligent, just wide-awake. That's different. It's enough for me to observe things. I don't need to write about them." As she talks she is playing with a wire toy which can be formed into various shapes, and holding it up to judge each one before going on to make another. Once Antonioni characters have plucked up the courage to talk honestly about themselves and really attempt to communicate, they are not to be stopped. When Giovanni tells her that they'll probably be seeing a lot of each other as her

father has asked him to work there, Valentina goes right on with her own story. "Last year I thought I was in love with a boy. But . . . I don't know . . . perhaps I'm not normal . . . perhaps I'll change, but each time I've tried to communicate with someone, love has disappeared." The truth is painful and therefore has no place in a level of society whose perfect member is Momina of *Le Amiche*. "Why are you going to work for my father—you don't need the money. . . . You need someone to help you get started again." "Not someone—you. Don't be afraid." "I'm not afraid." He's about to kiss her when the lights come back on. "You see, it's ridiculous," says Valentina, seeing in the incident exactly the meaning Antonioni would give it.

Valentina and Giovanni confronted by Lidia and Roberto: two infidelities that didn't come off. Valentina takes Lidia into her room to dry. They start talking and discover that they like each other. Giovanni has been affected by his encounter with truthfulness in the shape of Valentina. So when Fanti, another millionaire, ends an anecdote about Hemingway with "Still he's a man who knows his job. He's worth what he earns—millions of dollars and that's not to be rejected even by an intellectual," Giovanni is able to say, "It's difficult to decide what is, for an intellectual, to be rejected or kept." He really becomes outraged at Roberto's contribution to the conversation—a facile quote from a book. "Our age is antiphilosophical and weak," etc. He is using this as a justification of his way of life, to shrug off personal responsibility: if our age is like that, why should he be any different? Giovanni's attack on Roberto is personal, as Roberto might, for all he knows, have made love to Lidia, and at the same time aimed at his way of life: "I know that passage, the words of an author I admire. But quoted here they somehow disgust me . . . because the gentleman has spoken them with complacency, although they were written in desperation."

Before this conversation, we have seen Lidia's hostility unable to survive the genuine kindness of Valentina. After Giovanni's little

"Perhaps nothing."

piece of self-assertion, they are confiding in each other, Valentina about her inability to fit in with others, Lidia about her desperation. She asks Valentina about her age—"Eighteen and many, many months." "You don't know what it is to be old and to feel that all those years no longer make sense. [At this point Giovanni comes in unnoticed.] I'd like to die tonight. I swear it. Then at least this agony would end and something new would begin." "Perhaps nothing." With two flat words, Valentina stops Lidia's dramatization of her misery. As she and Giovanni are about to leave, Lidia says to Valentina, whom she now likes and pities, "What I said before—it wasn't from any jealousy on my part. None at all. That's what's so wrong." They exchange routine politenesses about seeing each other after the holidays. Valentina says, "This year I shall come back later—much later." Their farewells to Valentina are filled with tenderness, as she has shown them something that they did not have the courage to admit before—the truth. In fact, she has said very little about them, but her remarks about herself are so honest in spite of her unhappiness, that with her they are forced to be honest about themselves. Giovanni strokes Valentina's cheek, Lidia kisses her. As the couple go out, Valentina says "You've completely exhausted me, the two of you." She kicks off a switch. In a beautiful image of her

exhaustion, the light goes out obscuring her features and leaving her in silhouette against the dawn outside.

XXVIII

The couple walk out into the park, past Resy who has run out of interesting people and is sitting with a girl friend weeping profusely. In the cold but hopeful light of dawn, Giovanni tells Lidia of Gherardini's offer, which he says he will refuse. She in turn tells him of Tommaso's death and of what Tommaso has meant to her. "He saw in me a power and intellect which I lack." She talks about Tommaso's attempts to make her learn, how he talked only about her, how Giovanni had been something new in her life as he talked about himself. That was why she loved Giovanni, not Tommaso. Having broken the ice and started talking seriously to Giovanni she is able to tell him how she feels.

LIDIA: If I want to die, it's because I no longer love you. That's the reason for my despair. I would like to be old already, to have devoted my whole life to you. I don't want to exist any more because I can't love you. There. That's the thought that came to me in the night-club when you were so bored.
GIOVANNI: But if you tell me that, if you really want to die . . . that shows you still love me.
LIDIA: No, it's only pity.
GIOVANNI: I have given you nothing . . . I amount to nothing. I have wasted and I'm still wasting my life, like an idiot, taking without giving anything or giving too little in exchange. Perhaps I'm not worth much. If that's what you're going to say, you're right . . . it's strange that only today did I realize that what we give to others comes back to ourselves.

Lidia breaks in once to reminisce some more about Tommaso—that she would have let him make love to her out of boredom, but he never tried. Giovanni carries straight on from his previous thought. Although they are at last talking to each other, they are not having a conversation. Their trains of thought are hardly crossing. Lidia looks offscreen towards the musicians who are still playing.

LIDIA: What are they hoping for? That the day will be better if they play?
GIOVANNI: Lidia, let's give up this discussion. Let's try to build on something solid. I love you. . . . That's it. I'm sure that I've always loved you. What more do you want me to say? Let's go home.

We realize that Giovanni does not believe in what he's saying, that he's casting around for a way out from an embarrassing conversation. Lidia realizes that Giovanni has not fully understood the depth of the trouble. The reading of the letter is meant to be a way of bringing him to face the whole truth. It also crystallizes the feeling of them talking to one another but without being affected by the other's remarks. They are both talking into space, physically as well, because they're seated side by side looking out across the park rather than at each other. The scene is largely broken up into single-shots and two-shots of backs. What Lidia reads is a love-letter: it is a description of a man's feelings when he wakes up earlier than his mistress after their first night together. This reminder of their past is in a different spirit than the journey to their old meeting place in the suburbs. This is no attempt to rebuild what has been lost, only to show how things have changed. The letter ends:

"At that moment I realized how much I loved you, and my feelings were so intense that my eyes filled with tears because I thought that it must never end . . . that for me our whole life would be like waking up this morning—feeling you, not just beside me, but part of me, in a way that nothing or no one could destroy, except the tedium of habit which I feel as a threat hanging over us. And then you started to wake up gently. And smiling while you were still in your sleep, you kissed me, and I felt that I had nothing to fear—that we would always be as we were then—united by something stronger than time, stronger than habit."

A pause, as Giovanni stares at Lidia, wondering why she has read this long letter to him (the quoted passage is only about a quarter of it). "Who wrote it?" "You did." For me, at least, this does not really work as a scene. But whether or not one can believe that Giovanni would forget in this way, the intention is obvious—to show that time has changed a relationship that had seemed solid and permanent. The build-up of the letter, besides strengthening the emotional contrast that follows, calls to mind the reference to rhetoric in Antonioni's statement about the fragility of the emotions.

As the script puts it, "Giovanni looks at her in silence, exhausted by the truth she has uncovered: their love no longer exists." It is Lidia, who, like Claudia, has to make some sort of gesture. She puts her hand on Giovanni's. But this small gesture of pity is enough. Giovanni kisses her hand with almost the desperation of Tommaso at the beginning of the film. When he takes her in his arms, she tries to resist him, realizing that he wants to make love to her as an easy way of putting things right.

LIDIA: No . . . no . . . I don't love you any more . . . I don't love you any more. . . . And you . . . you don't love me.
GIOVANNI: Be quiet . . . be quiet.
LIDIA: Say it . . . say it.
GIOVANNI: No . . . I won't . . . I won't say it.

Lidia stops resisting. He pushes her back onto the ground. The script says (and I must take its word, as the British censor has had his mucky fingers on the film at this point)—"A sort of animal passion, a memory of what was, and what could be, grips them. And the caresses which Lidia and Giovanni exchange reveal this hope." The camera tracks back diagonally from them, losing them and leaving only the golf course in the cold, misty light of morning. The combination of bleakness and hope is that of *L'Avventura.*

Although the couple have escaped from the corrupt milieu of the Gherardini house, the conclusion is a compromise. Lidia only lets Giovanni make love to her because she hasn't the will to resist: she can't see any other hope for them. But the fact that Giovanni makes love to her indicates a desire on his part to maintain their relationship. Antonioni says it is "the compromise which is found today in morality and even [!] in politics. The characters this time find themselves, but they have trouble in communicating because they have discovered that the truth is difficult, that it demands much courage and determination which is unattainable in their social environment." In one way it is a more hopeful film than *L'Avventura* because it insists on the certainty of social as well as emotional change, and because this time the couple are helped by another character—Valentina. This is the first time in any Antonioni film that we are shown one person able to help others. In the earliest films, such attempts are automatically doomed. Here admittedly, she does not help them by a conscious action, but merely by her existence. Valentina herself is essentially a hopeful character—in spite of her unhappiness—as she is evidence that individuals can overcome the influences on them from a corrupt society.

La Notte has also progressed formally from *L'Avventura.* There is much heavier stressing of the general as well as the particular significance of each action.

As the method has become more rigorous, its snags have become more apparent. There is a tension between the genuineness of the behavior which the audience can observe and the need to use it as an exposition of emotions. And in *La Notte* I start to feel that spontaneity has been sacrificed to exposition.

XXIX

L'Eclisse can be viewed as the third part of a loosely connected trilogy on personal relationships in postwar society. It is concerned with the same themes as its two predecessors, but it is as a partial reversal of them that it is the completion of the trilogy. Not that it is the opposite of them in the way that *L'Avventura* is the opposite of *Il Grido.* There the contrast was

L'ECLISSE

between the leading characters: a simple man who could not lose the memory of his past life and a sophisticated man who finds it only too easy to forget. In *L'Eclisse* the social level and the problems of the characters are very similar to those in *L'Avventura* and *La Notte*, but their choices are the reverse. It is this opposition which links the film to its predecessors—just as *Il Grido* and *L'Avventura* are connected by the contrast between them.

In style it is very much more fragmented and more detailed than either *La Notte* or *L'Avventura*, particularly in the first scene and the extraordinary ending. In the last 58 shots, about seven minutes, neither of the leading characters are seen. The fragmentation of the first scene is successful as an atmospheric device. It conveys that feeling of tiredness in which one takes in rather little except isolated details, a lack of contact with one's surroundings. Even in the long shots, our eyes are often drawn to a detail, like the small electric fan which pivots from side to side on its stand. Before either of the two characters start to talk, we realize from the evidence presented to us that it is early morning, that the couple have reached a crisis, that they have been talking all night and have nothing left to say to each other. We are aware of the time of day even before the girl draws back the curtains, letting in the light (a metaphor which has antecedents in *La Notte*) before turning to face the man and say, "Well, Riccardo?"

Riccardo (Francisco Rabal) is in his thirties, a well-to-do intellectual whose serious character is echoed in his chastely furnished apartment, and in the mainly abstract pictures which line the walls. The girl, Vittoria (Monica Vitti), is in her twenties and dressed well but simply in a plain black dress. Just now she is looking very tired but determined. For their first exchange the camera is oddly placed behind each of them in turn so that they are in line with it, and one is seen directly over the top of the other's head. The camera even tracks behind Vittoria in this position as she walks towards him. As he is sitting, these shots with her looking slightly down at him embody her determination compared to his abstraction which covers an unwillingness to come to grips with what is happening to them. Before this moment, although each has gazed at the other, the look has been avoided.

VITTORIA: Well, Riccardo?
RICCARDO: What is it?
VITTORIA: Everything that we've said tonight.
RICCARDO: Yes. Let's decide.
VITTORIA: It's already decided. I'm going.

Riccardo is struggling to keep alive a relationship that is already dead. One moment he bursts out desperately: "What ought I to do. Go on, tell me what I can do and I'll do it." The next he is miserable and almost begging for her pity: "I wanted to make you happy." To this last gambit she replies, "When we met, I was twenty, and I was happy." Riccardo goes out, she draws back some more curtains. In a gesture of frustration at the lack of resolution, she thumps the table with her fist. From the next room we hear the sound of Riccardo's electric razor.

We learn that Vittoria has been translating articles from the German for Riccardo. She is sorry that she can't go on with it, but knows someone who will do it instead. Riccardo, like Giovanni at the end of *La Notte*, will not admit that things have changed. But unlike Lidia,

Vittoria does leave the man.

Riccardo has still not given up and this has a physical expression connected with the journey motif. He catches her in his car and then gets out and walks with her. He's always accompanied her home, so why not today? Just to break the silence he says, "Vittoria, we've never been out together so early in the morning." He even suggests they have breakfast together. When they reach the block where she lives, her final words to him are rather apologetic: "Well, goodbye . . . It was a terrible night for me too . . . I'm sorry."

Her flat is also quite slick, but less expensively than Riccardo's. The furniture is modern. On the walls are record jackets and advertisements for art exhibitions. She looks out of her window at the trees outside stirring in the wind. These seem to provide an image of instability as a comment on the breaking up of a relationship; the shot has an antecedent in *L'Avventura*. Claudia, standing alone in the car park at the end of that film before Sandro comes out to her, is seen against a background of willow trees shaken by the wind. The image makes other appearances later in *L'Eclisse*.

XXX

In the previous two films, a large part was played by money as a corrupting force. Sandro in *L'Avventura* has abandoned his vocation for the easy money he can make by estimating for a successful architect, Ettore. Gherardini in *La Notte* is a man whose only noticeable characteristic is his wealth. A measure of Lidia's desperation at the end of that film is her comment that Gherardini's offer of a job for Giovanni is a good opportunity. Whatever salvation the two couples achieve in these films it is partly due to their final escapes from the world of Ettore and Gherardini.

This aspect appears more strongly in *L'Eclisse* where there is a direct conflict between feelings and money, without the complicating factor of artistic vocations. Piero (Alain Delon) is a stockbroker, the junior partner in a firm run by Ercoli (Louis Seignier). Vittoria meets him when she goes to the Rome Stock Exchange to look for her mother, needing someone to talk to after her break with Riccardo.

She arrives as a wave of buying and selling is building up. Delon is frantically buying up shares of one company as the price rises, so that he can sell them again at the top of the market and make a considerable profit. This time the money is presented as an end in itself rather than through its effects. Vittoria's mother is sitting in the area reserved for clients looking on attentively. She kisses her daughter and greets her with "How come you're here?" Piero, who is the mother's broker, comes up to consult with her. As they discuss whether she is going to sell her shares, Vittoria watches with interest as if this is all strange to her. Piero advises mother to hang onto her shares until the price has risen further, to make some money. He turns to Vittoria and says "You don't know me, but I know you. How are you?"

The business of the Stock Exchange is interrupted by a voice from a loudspeaker. It announces the death of one of the brokers in a motor accident and asks for a minute's silence in his memory. Vittoria and Piero are separated by a pillar. He leans round behind it to speak to her:

PIERO: We do a minute's silence like football players.
VITTORIA: Did you know him?
PIERO: Sure . . . but here, you know, in a minute millions change hands.

Suddenly at the end of the minute the noise starts again and everyone goes about his business as frantically as before.

The conversation when they get outside is not at all what Vittoria came for:

MOTHER: Do you want to know how much I made today?
VITTORIA: Mother, I've got to tell you something . . .
MOTHER: Tell me, darling . . .

But before Vittoria has a chance to confide in her, mother is haggling with a fruit seller about

the price of some peaches. And when Vittoria remarks that it's not worth arguing about twenty lire, her mother's reply is a reminder that millions are made with lire. By this time Vittoria has lost all hope that her mother might be a possible source of comfort.

MOTHER: Listen . . . Where are you eating today? With Riccardo?
VITTORIA: Yes, with Riccardo.

XXXI

The next section of the film is a series of diversions for Vittoria, perhaps as a way of forgetting herself. It starts with her entering her apartment at night and unwrapping a small parcel which turns out to contain a piece of rock with a fossil plant in it. She finds a hammer and nail and sets about hanging the fossil on the wall. But the noise brings in her next door neighbor, a young married woman called Anita, whose husband has been awakened.

As they talk, the telephone rings. Anita says a few words and turns to wave at a woman standing on a balcony higher up an adjacent block. This is Marta, to whom Anita is talking on the telephone. Marta's apartment is filled with all sorts of trophies which she and her husband collected in Kenya. She speaks with a slight foreign accent and uses occasional words in English and French. Vittoria is fascinated by the various exotica. She dresses up in native costume and blacks her face. Completely taken up with the spirit of pantomime, she does a little dance with a spear. The sequence connects with the business of the wigs in *L'Avventura*. Even in disguise Vittoria keeps her personality. But the hostess gets fed up with the game and says "That's enough" in English. Vittoria stops, looking a little ashamed at her performance. Marta talks about life in Kenya. It's evident that she's very much a colonialist at heart. Everyone has revolvers there, because there are only 60,000 whites against 6 million Negroes.

Riccardo has not quite given up. Vittoria is lying in bed when he appears in the road outside her apartment, yelling her name and throwing pebbles at her window. Vittoria dresses hastily and telephones a friend. "Franco . . . it's Vittoria . . . don't joke . . . it's serious . . . I've left Riccardo . . . it's a difficult moment for him . . . don't leave him alone." The man's voice on the telephone says "You're alone too."

The central part of the film has been cut very heavily in editing: whole scenes have been removed, either by Antonioni or by the Hakim brothers who produced the film and gave him a lot of trouble, as they did Losey, whose *Eva* they also produced. However, Antonioni did cut a lot out of *L'Avventura* in editing (there mainly scenes illustrating Sandro's artistic crisis, which were probably too didactic in nature for the director's taste), and the missing scenes which are printed in John Francis Lane's book in the Cappelli series (by far the best presented of the Antonioni scripts) do seem less than essential. The first is between Vittoria and her mother who comes visiting when she hears from Riccardo that the affair is over. She is reproving although she didn't really like Riccardo who was a socialist.

Vittoria's air trip to Verona has also been cut, omitting conversations with the pilot who is Anita's husband, as they pass near a storm which scares Vittoria. Originally their arrival in Verona was an accident caused by a fault in their radio compass. In the final version all is calm. The sequence is restricted to shots of Vittoria with Anita and others from her point of view—the trailing edge of the wing and landscape behind it, and the backs of the pilots. "Let's go through that cloud," cries Vittoria happily. The choice of camera positions invites us to share in her enjoyment of flying, for this is the only time in the film that we see Vittoria free from emotional troubles. The journey away from Rome is also a journey away from her troubles.

The mood of the sequence at Verona Airport is of warmth and well-being induced by the surroundings, not by other people, as part of her happiness seems to stem from the fact that

life is not complicated by relationships with others. Anita and her husband have left her alone. She is just enjoying the sun and watching the planes landing and taking off. She wanders up to the airport café, looks at a couple of Negroes sitting at a table, ignores an American at the bar when he says hello to her, and sits down outside. This is the third reference in the film to color, but they do not seem to be tied together at all. Vittoria is an outsider who is just observing the things around her, as she did before in the Stock Exchange. Lidia in *La Notte*, as she walks around Milan and its outskirts, is also isolated from the people she sees, which deepens her desperation as it extends her feeling of estrangement from her husband. Vittoria's isolation, on the other hand, comes as a relief from the business of coping with other people—throughout the film she is avoiding or severing relationships rather than trying to build them. She shies away from relationships which seem to involve interdependence. The Verona sequence is an interlude between Riccardo and Piero.

XXXII

Back to the Stock Exchange. Piero is brandishing a minute portable electric fan. Later we see it in the hands of another broker. During the very long sequence in the Stock Exchange, we watch apprehension build up into panic during a recession in the market. As prices fall, and more and more brokers are trying to sell, the apparent chaos which we saw before during Piero's buying spree is even greater. Everyone is running to and from the telephones. Piero rushes into a box, picks up the receiver and tells the operator that she's a pig if she doesn't get him Florence immediately. A couple of hours later, the Stock Exchange is packed and news is beginning to come in of similar recessions abroad: Wall Street is weak, and they're selling in Frankfurt. When Vittoria arrives, gloom is general, and her mother is acting as if she had lost everything. She bewails her loss as if it were her nearest and dearest that had gone—and in a way it is. She blames the socialists, who are undermining everything.

Vittoria is fed up with her mother's stupidity, but is nevertheless curious to know whether there is any foundation for her misery.

VITTORIA: Is what happened really serious?
PIERO: With money, everything rights itself . . . for some it's a disaster . . . a complete disaster.
VITTORIA: And for my mother?
PIERO: For your mother it shouldn't be a drama . . . she's lost about ten million lire.

He points out a man who has lost two or three hundred million. Vittoria is fascinated by this man who has lost so much money at one time, and she follows him. He buys some pills and goes into a café for a drink to wash them down. He scribbles something on a slip of paper. When he has gone, Vittoria picks it up. He has drawn some placid little flowers. Piero is not very interested in this: he shrugs his shoulders as if to say "How silly!" and starts dialing a number on the café's telephone. "You never stop," Vittoria remarks. Piero looks baffled: "Why should I stop?" Vittoria's curiosity about the Stock Exchange is not yet satisfied. "Where do all those millions they lost in the Stock Exchange end up?" "Nowhere." Piero's answers to her questions leave her just as puzzled. The more they talk and get to know each other, the less common ground they can find for communication, let alone agreement.

In the remaining scenes, we learn more about them at the same time as they get to know each other—up to this point we know very little about Vittoria's life and nothing about Piero's except that he is a broker. The first stage is a visit to Vittoria's mother who's "not the flower-drawing type." They arrive at her apartment before her. Compared to Vittoria's it is run-down—the wallpaper bears the shadows left by pictures which have been taken down. On a sideboard are a large number of photographs. They show a couple, her mother and father, on their wedding day, and later. We see the pictures in close-up, and it's obvious that her parents were very poor. Vittoria cannct understand why her mother keeps them; now she's

secure her husband's memory doesn't matter to her.

VITTORIA: That's what my mother's afraid off: poverty.
PIERO: Everyone's afraid of that.
VITTORIA: I don't think we are. Just as I don't think about becoming rich.

In her bedroom she draws in the dust on the furniture, and then lies down on the bed, which is much too short for her Piero sits beside her. When he bends over to kiss her, she avoids him, and gets up; nothing else can happen as her mother then arrives home.

In the office of the broker Ercoli clients are gathering to find out the worst and to blame him and Piero. Eventually Piero gets so angry that he bawls out one little man. "When you came to me you had only 200,000 lire . . . do you remember that? In two years I made you seven or eight million . . . then I told you to stop and you wouldn't . . . you got greedy . . . because of that you lost a few million." In spite of the man's feeble protestations at the onslaught, Piero tells him that it's his fault, that he should try getting his money back some place else. He terminates the meeting with a vehement "You make me sick!" The lusting for money which Piero despises in his clients, including Vittoria's mother, is only a less sophisticated version of his work–it is not really the greed itself that bothers him.

XXXIII

Before we see Piero and Vittoria together again, we are shown the way he treats his other girl friends. He leaves the office to go down to the "bestiola" who is waiting for him. She turns out to be an attractive and well-dressed girl, who is perhaps a little plump and, one would guess, not very bright. She has obviously been waiting some time. In the first shot of her we see her through the grille which protects the window display of the jeweler's shop outside which she is waiting. She is annoyed at the start and when he asks her why she has dyed her hair, she takes offense. Piero would probably not be too keen at the best of times: someone to sleep with occasionally, but no more. And tonight he is not particularly interested:

GIRL: Let's go.
PIERO: Where do you want to go?
GIRL: And what are we going to do?
PIERO: You're right. You go and I'll stay here.

When she has gone, he strolls along the pavement, whistling to himself. On a sudden impulse he leaps into his Alfa-Romeo which is parked in the street and drives off very fast. Dissolve to the road outside Vittoria's apartment as Piero drives past. Vittoria is sitting by the window typing. A drunk who is tottering past calls up to her "Ciao cara." She smiles "Ciao, but who are you?" The drunk lurches off just as Piero comes into view.

PIERO: Good evening.
VITTORIA: 'Evening.
PIERO: What are you typing?
VITTORIA: I'm translating some material from the Spanish.
PIERO: How does one say "Can I come up?" in Spanish?
VITTORIA: One says "Not a chance." Nasty language, eh, Spanish.
PIERO: I don't see why we should lose time like this.
VITTORIA: Me neither.

We see that they have quickly come to like each other, which is hardly surprising as they are both young and attractive. Before the conversation has time to progress further, Piero's car comes racing down the road with the drunk at the wheel. Vittoria does not know where there is a police station and lets Piero in to telephone.

The next morning Piero is watching his car being fished out of the artificial lake made for the Olympic boating events. Vittoria also turns up out of curiosity. She is horrified to learn that the car contains a corpse, more so when she discovers that it is the friendly drunk of the night before. Piero's worries are rather different.

PIERO: They should be hauling it out of the water very slowly. The body will be nothing but dents.
VITTORIA: You're only thinking about the body.
PIERO: I'm also thinking about the engine . . . it'll take at least a week to repair.

He decides to sell the car. As they walk away, Vittoria asks him if she's making him waste time. He answers tactlessly that she isn't and anyway he had to come. Vittoria laughs but he is embarrassed. Before he can explain, Vittoria says "On the other hand I came to see you. Am I stupid?" Now Piero smiles, as he finds this flattering. Vittoria turns to him and suddenly becomes serious. The scene has a peculiarly uneasy feeling caused by a sort of dislocation between the words and the reactions. Once again we are shown that they like each other a lot, but aren't able to communicate. There is a tension between their shared physical enjoyment and the differences that come out in conversation, even over little things.

A little piece of shared fun: they find a balloon tied to a deserted baby-carriage outside the block where Marta lives. Vittoria calls up to her to get her rifle. They free the balloon, and Marta bursts it as it floats past her balcony. They are happy together in this way. He does a little caper as they walk along and then they bow to each other. They come to a pedestrian crossing. "When we get to the other side," he says, "I'll kiss you." But she doesn't let him, although he tries twice. The background is of leafy branches rustling in the wind—the second appearance of that motif. "I'm going," she says, and walks away before he can say anything. She seems already to sense the differences between them. One can see other reasons for not letting him kiss her in mother's apartment, when, after all, they were alone together for the first time.

That night she telephones him but does not reply when she hears his voice. He gets more and more annoyed, shouting "Pronto! . . . Pronto! . . . Pronto!" before slamming down the receiver. Next afternoon, though, she is

Antonioni directing Delon and Vitti in L'ECLISSE.

waiting for him at the spot where she left him the previous day. She has to wait for some time before he shows up. The place is a street corner from which can be seen one of the pylons supporting the floodlights for the Olympic Stadium. On the corner is a building site with its scaffolding screened from view by straw matting. Beside it are heaps of airbricks and a water barrel. A very typical Antonioni location.

Piero's apartment is large and old-fashioned, probably typical of a wealthy bourgeois family: rich dark wallpapers, one or two large, rather sentimental paintings, oval framed photographs, and a bronze statuette of a knight in armor—"What's that?" "It's always been there." Vittoria, who is used to something a little more chic and modern, is surprised that a young man should have such a large and gloomy place.

VITTORIA: You live here?
PIERO: Not always. I was born here. . . . Do you want something to drink?
VITTORIA: No. When you're not staying here, where do you live?
Piero is embarrassed.
PIERO: Well . . . I have another apartment, a smaller one.
VITTORIA: A love nest. Why didn't you take me there?
PIERO: Do you want a chocolate?

He is baffled by this girl who is happy to talk frankly about the subjects which, one imagines, his other girl friends would avoid. When he hands her a box of chocolates, she tells him not to treat her like a visitor. She asks him what he did the previous evening. He had dinner with a millionaire. "Or with a call girl?" "And what time do I have to go with call girls," he says, and then adds jokingly "The call girl is me." He asks Vittoria what she did. "So many questions. One doesn't need to know someone to love them. . . . But then . . . one doesn't need to be loved." She was with friends last night. He wouldn't know them as they're not on the Stock Exchange. She has realized that he leads a very limited life. He tries to explain the fascination of the stock market, but can only say that when you get caught up in it, it becomes enthralling.

Again there is the contrast between the conversation and the accord in the love scenes Their first kiss is through the glass of a bookcase door: this may seem corny, and the sort of thing one remembers seeing before somewhere. but in its context it seems right, as well as foreshadowing the playfulness of the final love scene. As they kiss a second time, passionately —without the glass—the shoulder of Vittoria's dress is torn apart. She goes off into his bedroom. She takes off her necklace and is beginning to undress, when the sound of a church clock striking the hour makes her pause for a moment. She looks around the room, and seems to be intimidated by the gloomy luxury and the family portraits. Indeed the only relief from the mood of the room is the light from the window. Vittoria goes over and looks out. A group of people come out of the church. A soldier is leaning against a wall eating an icecream. We hear Piero's voice outside, asking if he can come in. She tells him that he can't, but begins to open the door just as he comes in through another door. After a beautifully contrived piece of business—a little game with their hands—they begin to make love passionately.

Cut to a pair of male feet with the almost conical shape of the indoor Olympic cycling track in the background. The sharp drop in temperature marks a contrast in mood, for this is to be another dialogue scene. The feet are Piero's. He and Vittoria are lying on a grassy bank.

PIERO: Then you won't marry me?
VITTORIA: I don't have any nostalgia for marriage.
PIERO: Where does nostalgia come into it. You've never been married.
VITTORIA: No, I didn't mean that.

The scene ends on a note of complete incomprehension: Piero cannot understand why Vittoria is unwilling to enter into any permanent relationship.

Final scene of physical happiness. Piero and Vittoria are lying on a couch in Ercoli's office. It is too narrow for both of them—"There's always one arm too many." The love scene is all laughter. Again there is the kiss through glass and a lot of happy romping on the floor. The doorbell rings. They both look up. Piero doesn't answer it although it rings two or three times, but Vittoria looks serious because she's beginning to feel embarrassed. "It's late," she says, "for you not for me." They straighten their clothes and go out into the hall. Their final embrace is very serious.

PIERO: I'll see you tomorrow?
Vittoria nods.
PIERO: I'll see you tomorrow and the day after.
VITTORIA: . . . and the next day and the one after that . . .
PIERO: . . . and the one after . . .
VITTORIA: . . . and tonight.
PIERO: At eight. Usual place.

They exchange a final look as she goes out. She walks down the stairs. The stairwell is boarded up, which somehow seems threatening. He goes back into the office and replaces the receivers of the four telephones which he had taken off while she was there. Her descent, moving away from him is intercut with shots of him as the

telephones all begin to ring and he does nothing about them. She emerges into the street. We see her standing outside the jeweler's shop where Piero's cast-off *bestiola* waited for him. Then a shot of her seen through the grille, just like the other girl, from which Antonioni tilts away to the trees on the other side of the road. Cut to the trees without the grille in the foreground. Pan back to her as she turns and looks at the door of the offices, and walks out of frame. The traffic noises stop.

XXXIV

That is the last we see of either of the leading characters. There are still 58 shots and about seven minutes to go before the end title. The sequence is a montage of shots of the corner where Piero and Vittoria met, and the area around it, passing from late afternoon to night. Originally this was not to be a montage sequence and was preceded by a scene in which Vittoria meets Riccardo in the street. They greet each other as acquaintances, but nothing more, and go their separate ways.

The no-characters montage sequence is not done in the dialectical manner of Resnais; *L'Eclisse* is not *Rome mon amour*. But then someone once described *L'Avventura* as *Taormina mon amour*, so who knows what critical follies are going to be provoked by *L'Eclisse* when (or rather if—the Hakims are asking ridiculous amounts for the rights) it reaches Britain and America.

The main components of the sequence are shots of things and people that we have seen before when Piero and Vittoria were meeting. A nurse wheeling a carriage. The matting which covers the building works on the corner. A horse and carriage for trotting races. The water barrel into which Vittoria threw a twig while she was waiting for Piero. The pylon with the floodlights for the stadium.

The second series of shots which appear during the sequence mark the time of day but are also in themselves worrying or sinister. Two buses pass. The second one turns the corner so that the wheel comes very close to the camera. A man gets out reading a paper; the headline on the front page is THE ATOMIC RACE. People are going home. The fountain which has been playing in the EUR gardens is turned off at dusk. The street lights go on. Another bus passes.

There is a third stream of shots in the sequence which are atmospheric or symbolic. Again we see trees in the wind. The bark on a tree trunk with ants crawling on it. Water trickling away out of the bottom of the water barrel; the camera tracks to follow the course of the water until it reaches a culvert. Three shots of the jagged outline of a building with balconies which jut out, seen almost in silhouette. The noise of a jet plane (recalling *La Notte*). The last shot is almost despairingly cold and abstract: a huge close-up of a street lamp, surrounded by a halo of light.

Twice in the course of the last seven minutes we are reminded of the leading characters, both times as double takes. The camera tracks across the road behind a man who could be Piero or Riccardo but turns out not to be. A blonde girl waits for someone. We hope that it is Vittoria, but again we are disappointed. The disappointment involves the audience more closely in the failure of Piero and Vittoria to keep their date. Our most recent memory of them is as attractive and charming young people. We are sorry that they are breaking up.

The feeling of the final sequence, though, is much stronger than this. At a first viewing I was quite terrified by the ending of *L'Eclisse*, much more than by most things which are calculated to terrify. I think this comes from the coldness which builds up during the sequence as night falls. The feeling is one of solitude—even the shots of people are of people alone. Antonioni said that at the end of *L'Avventura* the protagonists had arrived at a mutual sense of pity. "What else is left if we do not at least succeed in achieving this?" Piero and Vittoria have failed to establish a relationship. Although they are fond of each other and physically attracted, their outlooks on life are so different

that they cannot find any real understanding. And what is left? Solitude.

The other thing that makes this conclusion frightening is its lack of specificity. The shots could be of the evening after their last meeting in Ercoli's office, when they fail to turn up for their date, but it could equally be any other evening. We are invited to generalize, to conclude with Antonioni that solitude is man's usual state. Although the invitation has never been so clear as in the conclusion of *L'Eclisse,* we are expected to do so in all three films, to relate the actions not just to the characters themselves, but to put them in their social, political and temporal context. All the small external references in the films point the way to this—diverse examples: unemployment, a rock number, a revolutionary design of motor yacht *(L'Avventura),* socialism, the replanning of cities, industrial relations *(La Notte),* the Twist, the color problem, the bomb *(L'Eclisse).* Very closely tied to the time at which they were made, the films are in no way didactic, that is, they do not set out to make a comment, but only to present the director's view of the world.

This view is consistent throughout the last three pictures. The appearance of *L'Eclisse* would seem to make superfluous discussions of whether the ending of *La Notte* is more or less optimistic than the ending of *L'Avventura,* and indeed whether either is optimistic at all. We see from the contrasting example of Piero and Vittoria that although it is possible to generalize from the problems which face the characters in all the films, the resolutions are specific and depend on the individual psychology of each of the couples. The picture of life and personal relationships in the second half of the twentieth century is too complex to allow a glib summing-up of Antonioni's outlook. The meaning of over six hours of film can hardly be compressed into a few sentences of conclusion. But finally the value of Antonioni lies less in the generalities than in the observation and the manner of presenting behavior. His triumph is the maintenance of spontaneity in the face of the most intricate calculation in the *mise-en-scene.*

The form of the "trilogy" comes from the parallel between the first two films, particularly in their endings which are countered by *L'Eclisse.* The first two end at dawn with a renewal of a relationship which had been partly destroyed during the previous night. *L'Eclisse* starts at dawn with the breaking of a relationship: Vittoria leaves Riccardo's apartment alone, whereas the other couples escape together from the place where they have spent the night. The .dawn symbolizes self-knowledge and a fresh beginning. At the end of *L'Eclisse,* Piero remains in Ercoli's office which is an image of capitalism, like the hotel in *L'Avventura* and Gherardini's house in *La Notte.* Vittoria leaves alone again. Consistent with the symbolism of the previous films, *L'Eclisse* ends with the coming of night. The last sequence of Antonioni's trilogy of change centers on the image of progress which was already to be seen in the opening sequence of its first film: a building site.

August, 1962

NOTES:

Interviews quoted: *Cahiers du Cinéma 112* (translation in *NY Film Bulletin,* June 12, 1962); *L'Express* (translation in *Sight and Sound,* Winter, 1960-61); preface to the French script of *La Notte;* discussion at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome published in *Bianco e nero* (translation in *Film Culture,* Spring, 1962).

Script extracts are mainly taken from the published scripts: *L'Avventura,* edited by Tommaso Chiaretti (Milan—Cappelli: French translation published by Buchet/Chastel); *La Notte,* translated into French by Michele Causse (Buchet/Chastel); *L'Eclisse,* edited by John Francis Lane (Cappelli).

Where possible the published texts have been modified in accordance with the final version of the film (the scripts appear to be written at rough-cut stage, before the final dubbing of the films). The other extracts are based on notes made in cinemas, except in the case of *Le Amiche,* which, with the invaluable assistance of Charles Barr, I was able to view on a Moviola.

For *L'Eclisse,* which I have only seen once at the time of writing, I have had to rely very heavily on John Francis Lane's invaluable book on the film to supplement my notes and my memory.

I would also like to thank those of my colleagues on *Movie* who have read the manuscript at various stages for their comments and suggestions.

Films of the Quarter

Pauline Kael

From the U.S., *Lolita*—the first *new* American comedy since those great days in the 1940's when Preston Sturges, singlehanded but Hydra-headed, recreated comedy with verbal slapstick. *Lolita* is black slapstick, and at times it's so far out that you gasp as you laugh. At its best (which is about half the time) it makes most of the "New American Cinema" look square: Stanley Kubrick has suddenly brought American films into the second half of the twentieth century, leaving the "avant-garde" behind. An inspired Peter Sellers creates a new comic pattern—a crazy quilt of psychological, sociological commentary so "hip" it's surrealist. It doesn't cover everything: there are structural weaknesses (the film falls apart, I think, mainly because it needs the towns and motels and highways of the U.S. and as it was made in England, this dimension of the material is lost) and there's even a feeble attempt to "explain" the plot. But when the wit is galloping who's going to look a gift horse in the mouth? Critics, who feel decay in their bones.

> Because of the length of the Antonioni monograph, we have had to postpone reviews of many interesting films. However, we have included our usual "Films of the Quarter" section, to give brief notes on films current during this period. In our subsequent issue we plan to include a large number of brief reviews, in order to catch up.

The reviews are a comedy of grey matter. Doubts may have remained after Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.'s ex cathedra judgment that *Lolita* is "willful, cynical and repellent . . . It is not only inhuman; it is antihuman..I am reluctantly glad that it was made, but I trust it will have no imitators." Then *Show* appealed to a higher primate: "For a learned and independent point of view, *Show* invited Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr, the renowned theologian, to a screening in New York and asked him for an appraisal." And the renowned theologian discovers that ". . . the theme of this triangular relationship exposes the unwholesome attitudes of mother, daughter and lover to a mature observer." (Ripeness is all . . . but is it enough?) This mature observer does however find some "few saving moral insights"—though he thinks the film "obscures" them—such as "the lesson of Lolita's essential redemption in a happy marriage." (Had any *peripheral* redemptions lately?) If you're still hot on the trail of insights, don't overlook *The New Republic's* steamy revelation that "the temper of the original might . . . have been tastefully preserved" if Humbert had narrated the film. "The general tone could have been: 'Yes this is what I did then and thought lovely. Dreadful, wasn't it: Still . . . it has its funny side, no?' " It has its funny side, oui oui.

From France, *Jules and Jim*—with everything that is so horribly lacking in *La Notte* and *Marienbad* (a human atmosphere, radiance and feeling and wit and character, intelligence without cold aestheticism, suggestiveness without riddles) a beautiful film, visually reminiscent of *A Day in the Country*. Of the European directors who learned from Renoir, only Truffaut seems to have the warmth that is the meaning of the lesson. From France also, finally, the restored version of *The Rules of the Game,* now "officially" a masterpiece (selected in the 1962 international poll of critics as third among the greatest motion pictures of all time) and so

complex in its mingling of genres—lyric poetry, macabre farce, a great chase—that it can sustain even the weight of official greatness.

From Japan, Kon Ichikawa's passion film, *Fires on the Plain (Nobi).* If Dostoyevsky had been a film-maker telling his Grand Inquisitor story with a camera, it might have been much like this great visual demonstration that men are not brothers (the setting is Leyte, the subject is modern man as a cannibal, and the cannibalism is conceived in Christian terms as a Mass). *Fires on the Plain* is an appalling picture, so powerfully felt and so intensely expressed that it turns rage into epic poetry.

Stanley Kauffmann

The three months ending July 31st produced some American films of interest. Chief of these was *Lolita,* whose screenplay Vladimir Nabokov seduced out of his own novel. The savage satire, the poetic horror, the lyric sexuality were all diminished in the name of practicality. What was left—a rather sodden study of a sad middle-aged fumbler—was well performed by James Mason, Shelley Winters, Peter Sellers, and Sue Lyon, a postgraduate nymphet. Stanley Kubrick's direction had flashes of fire and hate but not enough—not nearly the imagination and wit that (for examples) de Broca or Godard or Truffaut might have brought to it. From beginning to end the film was boxed for delivery to the Code seal office and the Legion of Decency. Those who think that the film should not be judged against the novel cannot argue away the fact that the producers are relying heavily on the novel's reputation to attract audiences. If so, why is comparison not appropriate? And must we always concede that to judge a novel-derived film on its own merits means to assume that films are a lesser, more restricted form than novels?

Ernest Hemingway's quintessence consisted of writing realistically about romantic people and situations. Martin Ritt's *Hemingway's Adventures of a Young Man,* from A. E. Hotchner's screenplay, captured some of the sense of encounter between a young man and a world of "unforgettable characters." The film suffered from softness of will and from Susan Strasberg; and Richard Beymer, as the hero, proved that an odyssey does not require an absolutely convincing Odysseus if the people he meets are convincing.

Lonely Are the Brave, Kirk Douglas' tolerable modern Western, also suffered from lack of resolution and anxiety to please; but it contained some mordant moments.

A Kind of Loving, with which John Schlesinger makes a welcome feature debut, is one more of the English "social realies." Its trite story is wedded to a setting that is essentially irrelevant, but Alan Bates' performance as the hero, built on pungent dialogue by Willis Hall and Keith Waterhouse, is touching.

The best for last. *The Island,* written and directed by Kaneto Shindo, is a film without dialogue about a farmer, his wife and two small sons who scratch out their living on a tiny island in Japan's Inland Sea. The veracity of every moment in the film, as performed by accomplished actors, is a much-needed rebuke to the sophistries of neorealism. More importantly, the film is a pure statement of love, of a cosmos realized and sustained by interdependence, of a happiness too simple for most of us to aspire towards.

Gavin Lambert

One revival, four new films.

The revival in fact is a reconstitution—of Renoir's *Rules of the Game,* restored to its original length, which adds about thirty minutes to the versions previously shown. It is still a wonderfully fresh and vital film, which Renoir has described as a "documentary on the condition of society at a given moment," the moment being 1939 and the society the French upper class and its domestics. It now seems oddly reminiscent of another, earlier moment in

France: the years around 1848 as Flaubert described them in *Sentimental Education.* Flaubert's hero began as a romantic, but his introduction to Paris society gradually taught him to substitute sexual intrigue for love, charm for sincerity, and elegance for conviction. Most of the characters in *Rules of the Game* learned this lesson before the story begins, but Renoir shows them as endearingly childish sophisticates, quite unaware of their own alienation or of representing a vanishing way of life. The comedy is affectionate as well as sharply ebullient. The sequence of the country shoot is as much a "cinema classic" as Eisenstein's *Odessa Steps,* and the subtle use of depth of focus and overlapping dialogue foreshadows Welles' more spectacular experiments in *Citizen Kane.* How interesting it would be now to revive some other unfamiliar Renoir pictures—*La Chienne, Toni, Swamp Water.* Like Buñuel he's one of those solitary masters with a great body of work, but only two or three of his films seem to be in general currency.

Of the new films, Truffaut's *Jules and Jim* at times recalls Renoir. This charming, sad, and anarchic fable about love and friendship, has a similar blend of tragedy and comedy, a response to period as poetic and exact as *Partie de Campagne,* and its actors achieve the same kind of spontaneous relaxation. Truffaut is an ironist in the purest sense. Somewhere, Hilaire Belloc wrote that with certain social and personal situations, if you *tell the truth* about them, you cannot avoid affronting convention and hypocrisy, and the result is inevitably ironic. The *ménage à trois* is surely one of them. I don't find any "changes of mood" in the film, which follows a very straight ironic line and disconcerts only if you're expecting a more conventional one.

Kubrick's *Lolita* I liked more than the novel. Although Nabokov did the adaptation himself, the film has a different temperament, and the relationship between Humbert and Lolita becomes more of a love story, less of a caustic but dispassionate account of an obsession. The clinical and literary bluff, so to speak, is removed; and Kubrick directs with a fascinatingly deadpan quality, never explaining, never apologizing, just letting us watch this extraordinary offbeat couple fiercely and ridiculously destroying each other. James Mason and Sue Lyon are perfect. Peter Sellers, though, is overindulged, and represents the less successful, more farcical level of the film, which in spite of a few lapses is a very original and intriguing piece of work.

In filming *A Taste of Honey,* Tony Richardson is a bit handicapped by the slightness of the material. Like the play the film is good when dealing with the mother and daughter, vividly played by Dora Bryan and Rita Tushingham, and rather vague and one-dimensional whenever the mother's suitor and the young homosexual come on the scene. The director adds his own sense of urban background, though, which even if it sometimes becomes foreground has a unique atmosphere of melancholy and humor, and almost carries us through some of the faltering moments. And lastly, someone has dubbed and put out Franju's *Les Yeux sans Visage* as *The Horror Chamber of Dr. Faustus.* This is a sophisticated horror film, with sequences of an almost lyrical ghoulishness.

Dwight Macdonald

Two movies outstanding this quarter, both American: Lumet's *Long Day's Journey into Night* and Kubrick's *Lolita.* Are We finally beginning to rival Them? Do two swallows make a spring? Anyway it's nice for a change to be able to praise some native products. (Strictly speaking, Truffaut's *Shoot the Piano Player* should be included, since it was only lately released over here, but I've written about it years ago; I don't like it as much as his earlier *The 400 Blows* or his later *Jules and Jim,* but it's a most exciting failure.)

With *Lolita,* Kubrick makes a comeback from the *longueurs* and *horreurs* of *Spartacus* and demonstrates he's still the ablest of our

younger directors. Spirited, comic, and grotesque, it has his special cinematic virtues: a beautiful sense of form; a tempo so brisk that the film seems shorter than it is, a rare illusion in movies today; superb use of the camera; and a ruthlessness in getting his effect, let "good taste" fall where it may. He has discovered one actress—Sue Lyon as Lolita is right in every intonation and expression, the American nymphet in all her impudent vulgarity—and he has done well by Peter Sellers, who gives his best comic performance since *I'm All Right, Jack*. That I was nevertheless disappointed is a backhanded compliment; from almost any other American director, *Lolita* would have been a delightful surprise; but one expects more of Kubrick. Minor complaint: the phlegmatic, inarticulate James Mason was a disaster as Humbert Humbert who, in the novel, is the most intellectually vivacious monologist since the hero of Diderot's *Rameau's Nephew*. Major complaint: the other charm of the novel is its celebration of the erotic, and Kubrick has deliberately eliminated this. I see the commercial reasons—to placate the Legion of Decency and to get that M.P.P.A. seal of approval which unlocks the golden doors of neighborhood box offices. But I'm interested in Kubrick as an artist rather than as an entrepreneur, and I'm sorry he bowdlerized. We need more eroticism —and less sadism—in our movies.

Sidney Lumet has done very well by what is probably our greatest play—Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night*. He has made a film which is not unworthy of the original, and I can think of no higher praise. The three hours in which we follow the tragic family life of the Tyrones, compact of love and hate and past hopes that have curdled into present failure—this long time seemed not enough. As the drama built to the crescendo of the final night scene (which Lumet handled masterfully) one actually kept hoping it would keep on, one was still eager for more information about this, the most interesting family in the (admittedly rather brief) history of the American theater. The first half hour or so was offputting; Lumet's chief weakness as a director is over-emphasis; the lines kept being blurred by needless close-ups and "business" (as in the dialogue between father and son in the garage in which every exchange is punctuated by dramatically meaningless fiddlings-around with wrenches and other props). But once the play really got into stride, Lumet kept pace with it and his weakness for close-ups became a strength because one wanted to see the faces of these mimes that had become so fascinating as people. Katherine Hepburn's performance was a revelation to me, since she has hitherto struck me as mannered, to say the least; but here, stimulated by O'Neill and Lumet, she comes out as a superb tragedienne. Ralph Richardson as the father was up to the high level of Frederic March in the stage version, though he played it quite differently, and Jason Robards, Jr., was as good as he was in the play, which is very good indeed. The only weak point was Dean Stockwell, as the young O'Neill, but, leaving aside the fact that he isn't much of an actor, perhaps this role is a specially difficult one—the stage actor also made a botch of it. All in all, the most moving moving picture I've seen since *Jules and Jim*.

Jonas Mekas

In the feature-length category, François Truffaut's *Shoot the Piano Player* is the only movie worth reporting here. It is, no doubt, a beautiful piece of cinema. I admired the craftsmanship and style of Preminger's *Advise and Consent*, but the rest of it bored me, no matter what *Cahiers du Cinéma* says. *Saturday Evening Post* stories are not for me, even if they are well written. Varda's *Cleo from 5 to 7* is as precious and innocently pretentious as was *L'Opéra Mouffe*. New Dassin, *Phaedra*, is a disaster. Albicocco's *The Girl with the Golden Eyes* is another piece of precious Paris *schmaltz*.

Boccaccio 70: De Sica is very, *very* bad. I liked Fellini's apocalyptic humor and his sense of screen (not cinema). Visconti's piece is the

best. I think it is a better and more serious work than *Shoot the Piano Player*. It is a small masterpiece of style, atmosphere, bourgeois manners and decor.

I saw one excellent documentary, Michael Putnam's *Hard Swing*, about a San Francisco stripper. The film has a great economy of style (he said he took 3,000 stills before shooting it), and obectivity. It falls into the tradition of the great French realists of the end of the nineteenth century. Leroy McLucas' expressionistic documentary, *Dulce Domingo Dulce*, shot in Cuba, is an almost lyrical poem about the sugar-cane workers. I have seen hundreds of films on *workers, arbeiters, comrades, rabotniks*—this is the first time it worked. (McLucas is one of the best known Cuban rebel photographers.)

I should also mention two contributions to the poetic cinema: Ray Wisniewski's *Doom Show*, a foreboding flash into the scared subconscious of man; and Ken Jacobs' *Little Stabs of Happiness*—spontaneous, careless vignettes of absurd and humorous poetry. Jacobs' movie, in its techniques, its style, its poetic inspiration, and for sheer beauty of its images—gave me the purest aesthetic experience this past quarter of the year.

P.S. *Hard Swing, The Second Harvest, Doom Show* and *Little Stabs* are being distributed through the Film-Maker's Cooperative, 414 Park Avenue South, New York.

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