

Lavventura by michelangelo antonioni

[Art & Culture](#), [Artists](#)



L'avventura (Michelangelo Antonioni). During the 1950s and 1960s, Italy underwent drastic social, economic and cultural changes. Discuss the formal strategies used by Antonioni to critique these changes, particularly in relation to gender relations within the bourgeoisie. Michelangelo Antonioni's famous black and white trilogy of films made in the early 1960s starts with L'avventura of 1960. It was made in black and white and has become one of the classics of Italian cinema, influencing future generations of film makers. The film is set in the striking visual landscape of Sicily, and exotic place, even for most Italians, characterised by rocky scenery against which the film's young characters appear out of place and somehow disconnected from their everyday lives. This place of so-called "adventure" which could be also translated as "affair" is at the same time attractive, and somehow threatening, because it is a location of mystery and loss. The plot centres around a character called Anna who suddenly goes missing, and the narrative revolves around this central event without explaining how or why she has disappeared or resolving the question of what happened to her. This lack of a satisfactory traditional storyline forces the viewer to concentrate on the present moment, the moods of the characters, the stunning scenery, and what it all really means. This paper explores the intentions of the film to critique social, cultural and economic changes that were taking place in Italy just after the second world war, with particular reference to gender relations within the bourgeoisie. The fate of Italy after the second world war was economically good, since rapid industrialisation brought prosperity and a new openness to modern influences from northern Europe. Culturally, however, there were a number of challenges, not least in the adjustment

from fascism to a new capitalist free market economy and the lingering influence of conservative forces like the Catholic Church. Italy was not immune to the student disturbances of the 1960s demanding a more liberal curriculum, and socio-political movements like feminism and free love across the Western world. These tensions were exacerbated by an unequal distribution of wealth between the industrial north of Italy and the rural south, including Sicily, where old traditions like the organized crime of the mafia were regaining power. Economic indicators boomed but at the same time waves of protest emerged, largely due to “ a failure of the institutions to adjust adequately to the pace of change brought by the miracle” (Dunnage, 2002, p. 148) L'avventura is a film about dislocation, in other words it depicts people who find themselves in unfamiliar territory both in terms of what happens to them, and how they feel about it. The familiar fixed points of time and space are confused: “ the disappearance of Anna... creates in a more subtle way a similar temporal disruption: for the subsequent narrative falls under the shadow of an indeterminacy that renders “ before” and “ after” problematic.” (Restivo: 2002, p. 125) Sicily is a prehistoric landscape, marked by natural features and inexplicable natural phenomena about which the urban characters are completely ignorant. It is as if Anna's disappearance is a metaphor for Italy's loss of innocence and youth in the mad rush to take advantage of modernity and all its artificial, manufactured benefits. Anna returns to a rural extreme of Italy, at the boundary between earth and sea, and her disappearance there causes hardly any impact to the environment or to the characters in the film. In fact her two friends embark upon a romantic relationship as if she had never

been present! This indifference is a critique of Italy's materialism which is as barren and heartless as the rocky landscape all around. Bondanella points out also how element of alienation echoes European philosophical ideas of the time, such as existentialism, where people lose faith, in traditional supports like religion, family, or even politics, and drift in a moral maze, not knowing the difference between right and wrong and carrying the burden of a "fossilized value system" (Bondanella, p. 270). The way that Antonioni conveys this very modern view of the world is in characterization which shows the actors out of synchronisation, often standing together but facing in different directions, for example. There are breaks in communication and spells of silent frustration and silence, as for example in the closing scene where Sandro and Claudio seem to want to talk to each other openly and honestly about all that has happened, but they are somehow inhibited and unable to make genuine contact. They are filmed against a towering background of rocks, arches and skylines, looking as if they are aliens in a strange land. It is as if they are just thrown together, and happen to be there by chance. Liehm notes that this is a deliberate tactic to set the audience thinking for themselves: "He (= Antonioni) renounces any stated thesis, any intervention in the flow of event, and any interpretation of the facts. He observes and describes the flow of life." (Liehm, 1984. p. 178) In other words what Antonioni wants to focus on is the position of young people in a society which has broken with its past. The old certainties are no longer available, and gender relations are subject to cataclysmic pressures which we neither understand nor control. Antonioni's cinematic techniques are in stark contrast to the commodifications of American cinema in this period. The

camera appears to take its time and editing is unobtrusive. Instead of an action packed narrative with a clear perspective and forward moving trajectory, there is a much more haziness about cause and effect and a far more casual pace. Each frame is expansive, taking in more than just the human players to allow the surroundings to play their part too. There is often no clear foreground or background, and characters are often placed at the edge of the screen, as if to question what exactly is important in this moment. Clues as to the moral values placed on individual people, or actions, are removed, so that for example Sandro and Claudio appear in a social vacuum, where their love can be seen without the moral judgements of their usual middle class social circle. In some ways the two women are made into sex objects, giving Sandro the masculine privilege of choice, but it could be equally argued that all three of them are victims. In this weird setting, anything is possible, and the point of the film is to make the audience reflect on human emotions as they appear in isolation. The great achievement of L'avventura was to capture the mood of a particular time in Italy. It had a studied boredom about it, giving rise to a whole new film tradition which used images, not as a backdrop to dialogue and narrative line, but as part of the message of the film. Unforgettable landscapes and wistful human characters together depict the loss of direction that was experienced in Italian society immediately after the Second World War. The characters are stylish, tremendously attractive, but at the same time searching for a new place in a new, and unfamiliar world and leisurely merging of emotions and milieu in the slow-moving range of the camera is what guarantees this film its place in the history books. References

Bondanella, P. (2009) A History of Italian Cinema. New York: Continuum.

Dunnage, J. (2002) Twentieth century Italy: a social history. London: Pearson.

Liehm, M. (1984), Passion and defiance: film in Italy from 1942 to the

present, UCLA Press Angelo Restivo (2002) The cinema of economic

miracles: visuality and modernization in the Italian art film. Durham and

London: Duke University Press Mark Shiel (2006), Italian neorealism:

Rebuilding the cinematic city. London: Wallflower