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THE ART FILM

L'Avventura

DIRECTED BY

Michelangelo Antonioni



" L ' A V V E N T U R A "

(The Adventure)

Story *Michelangelo Antonioni*
Screenplay *Michelangelo Antonioni*
Elio Bartolini
Tonino Guerra
Director of photography *Aldo Scavarda*
Art director *Piero Poletto C.S.C.*
Costumes *Adriana Berselli C.S.C.*
Sound recording *Claudio Maielli*
Film editor *Eraldo da Roma*

Musical score — *Giovanni Fusco*

DIRECTED BY MICHELANGELO ANTONIONI

C A S T

Sandro *Gabriele Ferzetti*
Claudia *Monica Vitti*
Anna *Lea Massari*
Giulia *Dominique Blanchar*
Raimondo *Lelio Lutazzi*
Princess Patrizia *Esmeralda Ruspoli*
The Actress *Dorothy De Poliolo*
Corrado *James Addams*
Simoni *Renzo Ricci*
(Anna's father)

An Italo-French co-production

Running time: 145 minutes

L'Avventura

Derek Hill

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 science and technology... *L'Avventura* naturally does not pretend to have the answer to the disturbing questions it raises. It's enough for me to have posed them in cinematic terms.

Michelangelo Antonioni

One perceptive critic has remarked that *L'Avventura* shows what might happen to some of the characters of *La Dolce Vita* after the parties are over. Anna, the daughter of a diplomat, finds her relationship with her lover, an architect who has abandoned his integrity for the sake of easy money, becoming increasingly brittle. Together with Claudia, Anna's close friend, they join a group of wealthy, idle and hugely bored people on a visit to a jagged island off the Sicilian coast. Anna disappears; and the others comb the now menacing island. During the search the architect holds Claudia's arm a moment longer than she needs for support. She gazes at him unbelievably, just as she later tries to struggle loose from his kiss. But some flicker of the inevitability of their affair has already reached her. She recognizes that to love a man who can turn from his fiancée when she is missing, maybe even dead, is to invite suffering; but logic is an inadequate defense. Together they continue the search, and as it spreads from the island to the mainland the people they encounter each seem to stress the temporary nature of their happiness. By now Claudia finds herself guiltily hoping they will never find her friend. Eventually her betrayal is matched by an abrupt, brutal act of unfaithfulness by the man, as inevitable as the affair itself. Even then Claudia cannot condemn him, for he too, she realizes, does what he must and not

what it seems he might. He has casually destroyed her, and they both know he can do it again. Yet the barriers are down. In one of the most perfect endings the cinema has known, a moment of mutual compassion is achieved. "The conclusion at which my characters arrive," Antonioni has written, "is not moral anarchy. They come, at the most, to a kind of shared pity."

Michelangelo Antonioni, born in 1913, studied at the University of Bologna. After a period as editor of the Italian magazine *Cinema*, he worked as assistant to Rossellini, Marcel Carne, Visconti and De Santis, and wrote the script for Fellini's *The White Sheik*. His first film, a documentary which anticipated the neo-realists, was *Gente del Po*, made in 1943. Seven years later, after several more documentaries, he wrote and directed his first feature, *Cronaca di un Amore*. Since then he has made *I Vinti* (1952), *Le Amiche* (1955), *Il Grido* (1957) and *L'Avventura* (1960). His latest film, *La Notte*, has been acquired for distribution by United Artists.

Antonioni is responsible for the subjects and scripts of all his films apart from *Le Amiche*, which was adapted from a novel. He shoots entirely on location, finding natural settings far more stimulating than the studio, and he favors unusually complex camera movements rather than routine cuts. "I need to follow my characters beyond the moments conventionally considered important for the spectator; to show them even when everything appears to have been said," he has been quoted as saying. Two kinds of composition have become characteristic - long shots where the characters appear on two, three or more planes in a significant setting, often with an almost three-dimensional effect, and close shots of two characters turned away from one another even while in conversation. Even more typical is the haunting melancholy of the mood. In an Antonioni film everything seems to be happening for the last time; it is as if the world might end the next day.

L'Avventura, Antonioni's masterpiece, shows his superlative craftsmanship not merely at the service of what he has to say but actually reinforcing it. What happens could be shown in half the time, but Antonioni's lingering concentration increases the film's perceptiveness in a unique, often revolutionary fashion. The whole of the island sequence, for instance, develops the characterizations of the people shown as it isolates them from their usual luxurious surroundings. Their behavior in an emergency is examined against a bare, primitive setting. The sense of place conveyed by the extraordinarily vivid photography and sound track visually and aurally amplifies the points usually made solely through dialogue. And this kind of interplay between figures and landscape is sustained throughout the film.

In choosing to set his story among people with seemingly limitless resources of money and time, Antonioni has not divorced their feelings and experiences from our own. Their freedom from the business of everyday living might have made them appear self-indulgent in their emotions. Instead it simply allows an uncluttered concentration on their inner lives. Paradoxically a film that takes as one of its themes the difficulty of true communication between people itself communicates with such an intensity that we understand the principals more profoundly than if we had known them all our lives.

Though he deliberately dwells on those sequences which make their effect by implication and atmosphere, Antonioni has an exceptional talent for crystallizing key characteristics in half-a-dozen shots and a brief line or two of dialogue. The most explicit, immediately powerful instance occurs when the architect deliberately upsets a bottle of ink over

DEREK HILL is on the staff of *Sight and Sound*, the English film magazine.

a young stranger's sketch of a doorway. He does it not by any forceful gesture, but with an almost tentative swing of a key ring backwards and forwards until the bottle is hit; and in the tiny incident we are told more about this man than most films divulge about their heroes in their entire running time. Similarly an encounter with a couple savaging one another after a few weeks of marriage and the fierce mutual seduction of a married woman and a boy painter share this rare economy. Only once is the spell broken, when Claudia and her lover amuse themselves listening to an attempted pick-up on a train. Here Antonioni seems puzzlingly patronizing in his attitude to the only working class characters who appear in the film. But the lapse, though disturbing, is only momentary.

In Italy *L'Avventura* was coolly received by both critics and public, and ran into considerable censorship trouble. Indeed, Antonioni was prevented from attending the London Film Festival (where his film was awarded the Sutherland Trophy for the most original and imaginative film introduced at the National Film Theatre in 1960) by a threat by the Milan authorities to ban his film and prosecute him as the producer of an obscene work. Some Church opposition has been rumored, too, perhaps because the Catholic authorities noticed such subtleties as the strange ghost town dominated by a church, the nun who has never seen the view from her own bell-tower, and the little procession of priests and children linked to the ink-spilling episode.

At the 1960 Cannes Festival *L'Avventura* was given a loutish reception by a public eager for sensationalism, and Antonioni and his marvelous star, Monica Vitti, were reduced to tears. But the jury divided the prize for cinematic experiment between *L'Avventura* and the Japanese *Kagi*, and it also received the award of the Societe des Ecrivains du Cinema et Television. Readers of the French new wave magazine *Cahiers du Cinema* voted the film the best of the year, and it enjoyed critical acclamation and a long Paris run. In London, despite trade press sneers and predictions of box-office disaster, it again enjoyed many rave notices and enormous public success. *Sight and Sound* called it the film of the year.

L'Avventura, perhaps more than any other film, divides audiences in quite unpredictable ways. People whose outlook on art - and on life - are apparently identical respond with quite opposite reactions. The secret, I believe, lies less in theoretical attitudes towards living than in practical experience of it. If you believe yourself and everyone else to be capable of rational analysis and subsequent rational behavior in any situation, your admiration for *L'Avventura* may be confined to its magnificent technical control. But if your principles have ever proved fragile, you'll remember *L'Avventura* all your life.

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