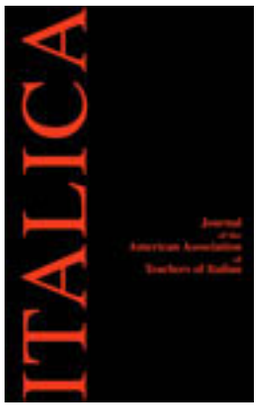

L'avventura, *Intimate & Immense*

In a short article he wrote for *Corriere della Sera* entitled "Le avventure dell' *Avventura*," Michelangelo Antonioni directly addressed what was to become possibly the most dominant point of contention and discussion concerning his film for both critics and audiences. It is an important comment that bears being quoted here at length:

> Tutti si chiedono vedendo il film: dov'è finita Anna? C'era una scena in sceneggiatura, poi tagliata non ricordo perché, in cui Claudia, l'amica di Anna, è con gli altri amici sull'isola. Stanno facendo tutte le congetture possibili sulla scomparsa della ragazza. Ma non ci sono risposte. Dopo un silenzio uno dice: <<Forse è soltanto annegata>>. Claudia si volta di scatto: <<Soltanto?>>. Tutti si guardono sgomenti.
>
> Ecco, questo sgomento è la connotazione del film. (146)[1]

Just what exactly Antonioni meant by, "this dismay," will be brought up later. The point of beginning yet another discussion of *L'avventura* (1960) with this quotation is that it brings up not just one of the most contentious issues of the film, but also one of its most important juxtapositions. This is the give-and-take interplay of intimacy versus immensity, a dominating juxtaposition repeatedly propped up by a film already ripe with seemingly contradictory juxtapositions. For the sake of this discussion, intimacy and immensity must be seen in light of all their connotations; for artistic ideas of intimacy and immensity are more than their definitions, closeness and largeness. With intimacy arise the sentiments of familiarity, kinship, and security, sentiments that at first seem to work against notions of immensity and its connotations of expansiveness, and even more, possibility.

The binary that is first invoked through the disappearance of Anna is of course that of absence and presence, a key issue to the film that has been discussed many times in reference to *L'avventura*. What has not been discussed, however, involves the notions of intimacy and immensity that the absence of Anna invokes. Intimacy of course corresponds to presence, for with presence comes a closeness, and in reference to film, it brings up the interplay of the viewer with a character that is on screen and therefore intimately involved with the spectator. The disjunctive element of Anna's disappearance arises partly because of the attachment or intimacy that has been formed between character and audience. With absence one can look at not only the antonymous notion of separation but also at this idea of immensity. Absence is immense, because it is infinite, pregnant with possibility. It is very differ-

ent from nonexistence. Since the film has not specified what has happened to Anna, her absence implies a host of possible explanations. These possibilities are exacting on a viewer accustomed to being intimately connected to a character, and to being accustomed to closure when a character disappears from the film, whether this be due to death, departure, or any other narrative element that explains the disappearance. Intimacy and immensity are not of course necessarily antonymous concepts, but they become especially relevant to each other in reference to film, a medium in which the constant interplay of a visual setting and the characters within it works to create a fluctuating juxtaposition between what is happening on screen and what might come from off screen. In this sense the diagetic elements of each shot can be seen as inherently intimate, while the extradiagetic elements, whether these be sounds whose sources originate off screen or the wraith-like presence of an unexplained disappearance, can be seen as immense, that is infinite with possibilities.

Antonioni is making this juxtaposition between intimate and immense both through the narrative, (Anna's disappearance) and through the visual representation of space. Man's relationship with nature, an ambiguous and complex one in all of Antonioni's films, comes under close scrutiny in *L'avventura*. The interplay of man and landscape becomes especially important to this film, and it represents one of the most important interplays of intimacy and immensity. French art historian Anne Cauquelin outlined the difference between setting and landscape when she called landscape, "space freed from eventhood" (22).[2] Landscape is the setting minus the narrative, which means sans characters and events. Critic Martin Lefebvre explains quite lucidly how in varying moments in a film, the background can function as a setting and as a landscape (22). This delineation, however, is not as clear-cut in *L'avventura* as critics have made it out to be. Nevertheless, one thing that can be agreed upon involves the importance of the interplay between the actor and the landscape, the representation of which oftentimes lends as great a significance to the arrangement of space as to the actor in *L'avventura*.[3] This significance is only relevant in relation to the events of the narrative and the characters. This is why the idea that Antonioni's depiction of landscape and space works to at times dissolve the story from the film is not exactly correct.[4] Landscape, a representation of the immensity of nature, retains an existence in this film, which is never autonomous but wholly interconnected to the human figures on screen, whose psychological states reflect upon the representation of space while this representation in turn reflects back upon the characters' psychologies.

There is a very short, oftentimes overlooked scene, which bears close examination, because it illustrates much of what is meant by the interplay of actor to landscape and of intimacy to immensity. It arrives

once the group of friends and lovers has anchored its boat just off the deserted island. The audience has just witnessed the fight between Anna and Sandro in which words exchanged between lovers fail to reconcile any differences, an idea directly expressed by Sandro when he tells Anna: "Le parole, credi a me Anna, servono sempre meno. Confondono." This is then followed by a shot of Giulia lying on the rocky surface of the island. "Cambia il tempo," she says, which elicits yet another deprecatory remark from her husband in which he tells her to stop being so literal. In the next scene, the only noises heard are those of the sea. The scene, shot from above, shows a rocky ground being hit periodically by the crashing waves. No characters are present until Claudia enters the screen from the left side, gingerly hugging the rock to her back for safety. This is an example of what critic Seymour Chatman sees as one of Antonioni's quintessential directorial effects, the use of prediagetic space, which he describes as the presentation of space before the entrance of the character. Along with the use of postdiagetic space (the lingering of the camera on the space after the character has left it), this technique serves to saturate the space with significance.[5] It also serves as an indicator of the relevance of the landscape to the significance of the shot. By lingering on the rocks and the ocean before the character has entered, the audience is made, whether subconsciously or consciously, to pay as much attention to the landscape as to the character. This technique highlights the importance of the landscape much more than if the audience had been introduced to it in the scene at the same time as the character, since one's natural inclination as a viewer draws one's attention to the human element of the composition.[6]

In this particular scene waves seem to explode against the island. One in particular shoots up from the bottom right side of the screen causing Claudia to lean back against the rock behind her with her hands against it, but this is not the typical view of miniscule man set up in contrast to an awesome sea. Shot from above as the scene is, Claudia's position resembles that of a jumper out on a building ledge. It is not fear, however, that is the dominant sentiment of her body language, but

rather a contradiction: she kicks her leg out against the wave in response to its crashing. She does this playfully,[7] even though due to the position of the camera and her body language, which is hugging the back rock, it seems as though she were unsure of her position and possibly even afraid. The final movement of her kick is seen from a new angle though, as the film cuts to a shot of her from in front. Shot from in front, the audience sees that she is actually not very high up or in any realistic position of danger. The previous positioning of the camera from above has created a contradiction of sentiments, between fear and playfulness.[8] Shot from in front, the sea does not retain its menacing quality as it does from above, and her position hugging the rocks does not give off the same feeling of danger. From above this is ambiguous, creating this contrast. It is emblematic of the film's positioning of its characters to the natural world, which is an uneasy and ambiguous one. The characters are never fully confident in the face of nature without being in complete awe of it to actually fear it. An ambiguity arises that leaves an uneasy space between Claudia and the sea, between her character and nature. This is an ambiguity, which need not be represented in any traditional visual manner, such as a facial response to a crashing wave. The spectator's view of Claudia from above imbues the viewer with a sense of danger that is then removed when the shot switches angles. The effect of this scene shot from above is to emphasize the interplay between the character and the sea.

Another thing to consider is that Claudia is also in a very intimate position in this shot. Though her face is not shown, her body language, closely hugging the rock, walking across it hesitantly, intimately connects her to both the island, what she clutches to for safety, and to the audience, who are meant to see her in a vulnerable position. This is in contrast to the sea, whose crashing waves act like an invader entering from off screen. The sea is clearly immense in this scene, a notion emphasized by its ever-present existence on screen while connected to the greater sea outside of the shot, exemplified by the waves and the catalyst of their force which originates in the greater expanses of the sea and the coming storm off screen. The interplay of Claudia and the sea represents an interplay between man and the unknown, with the sea functioning as yet another symbolic presence of the beyond and unknowable. In this respect, as a landscape it is inherently immense, a huge forceful presence which butts up against Claudia's intimate humanity.

Now consider Pasolini's idea of cinematic poetry and the long pre-grammatical history that accompany the images with which the director constructs the significations of his film. The sea of course has a particularly elemental character if considered as an archetype.[9] What would then be the pre-grammatical history of the sea? It can be both calm and restless. It can be looked at in relation to land, since here it is

butting up against an island, both surrounding it and wending into it. One of the early shots of the search for Anna frames Sandro above a crack in the island with the waves wedging into it, functioning both as a reminder of the sea's invasive quality as well as a foreshadowing of the possibility of Anna's absorption by it. Jung identifies the sea as related to the Mother archetype, assigning to it a dual nature. On the positive side, he relates it to fertility and fruitfulness, and in addition, to sympathy, wisdom, and spiritual exaltation. Its contrary symbolic resonances include notions of secrecy and darkness, as well as topological associations such as the abyss and the world of the dead. He also states that, "The sea is the favourite symbol for the unconscious" (177–8). The specificity of this particular sea must also be considered. This being the Mediterranean, it takes on a host of elemental implications. It is Homeric, the middle of the earth, and tied to a pre-historical past highlighted by the fact that these are the Aeolian islands, and that shots of volcanoes continue to surface. None of these notions are especially novel, of course, and this paper does not seek to place *L'avventura* under the scrutiny of a Jungian analysis. However, the archetypes that Jung identifies in his work help to pinpoint the function of the sea in the film, which is manifold and too complex to detail in a work of nonfiction. Perhaps the only way to accurately delineate the full weight of the sea in this film would be through another film. Plus, one must never forget that the sea is not the only archetypal landscape image in *L'avventura*. One could just as easily have factored in, and one must factor in, Antonioni's use of the barren desert island, and the cityscapes that play important roles later on in the film.

The most important aspect of the scene discussed above, however, is not the representation of the Mediterranean but its representation in relation to the human figure in the bottom part of the frame. This is a narrative film after all, even if the narrative is usually one of the least discussed aspects of it. What then can we make of Antonioni's human characters in relation to such powerfully archetypal elements as the sea? One clue arrives later on during the search for Anna when one of the men in the search party unearths an ancient vase. Patrizia picks it up and carries it over for the others to take a look at it. One of the main themes of the film surfaces in what is then said: "Lì sotto c'è una città sepolta." There are cities of significations buried under all of Antonioni's images and compositions. Here the island becomes almost palimpsestic, and though the characters on it are capable of recognizing its layers, they are not capable of appreciating them. Giulia enters the shot and asks Corrado if they should ask to have the vase, which prompts yet another one of his sarcastic remarks. What does she want with it, he asks, to use it merely as a container for her geraniums? The vase here is intricately tied to the landscape from which it was found, and in this brief exchange, it comes to represent the inability of the hu-

man figures to interact in a meaningful and proper way with it. Would they desecrate the buried treasures of this ancient land the same way Corrado desecrates Giulia's unconscious impulses of joy and enthusiasm through his snide comments? By the end of the scene the vase is dropped and broken. Giulia says, "Che peccato," or "What a shame," assigning to its destruction the usual quotidian response, a sentiment repeated when Raimondo, the one who dropped the vase, responds by saying, "Regolare," or "It figures." According to Pasolini, film is poetic because of its use of pre-grammatical images, but not every film utilizes these pre-grammatical elements to such stunning effect the way *L'avventura* does. Antonioni is not just juxtaposing man against landscape, but the subconscious of man with that of the landscape. A landscape's pre-grammatical, archetypal history is its subconscious.

A useful way of looking at the interplay of landscape and actor in *L'avventura* is through the lens of landscape painting. It is something that too has been discussed at length in relation to Antonioni's work, but perhaps here something new may be said. In a footnote to her article on *Red Desert* (1964), Millicent Marcus nicely summarizes many of the comparisons that have been made between Antonioni's films and the canvases of a host of different painters, from Mondrian to Hopper to Alberto Burri (192). Rudolf Arnheim likened *L'avventura*'s meandering structure to a Jackson Pollock painting because of the fact that in both, according to him, nothing happens.[10] Since it seems that there can never be too many parallels made between great artists across time and mediums, this paper would like to make a more literal comparison between Antonioni and another painter, Caspar David Friedrich. One painting that beautifully elucidates the infinite dynamics that are invoked when man is juxtaposed against the immensity of the sea is his landscape Monk by the Sea. Apart from the obvious parallel between the positioning of the lone figure against the marine backdrop and those similar shots in *L'avventura*, there are a host of psychologically and emotionally expressive parallels between the two works. In the painting the lone monk is engaging in a dialogue between himself and the sea and the sky, which looms over him, dwarfing the man. It is pure romantic painting, which like romantic literature, depicts nature as saturated with a personified form of expression, an almost psychological aspect before the era of modern psychology. Friedrich illustrated this idea when he said that, "The painter should paint not only what he has in front of him, but also what he sees inside himself" (Van Liere 272). It is a comment that conjures up many similar statements both in the prose and poetry of the British romantic poets. The landscape's immensity becomes symbolic of the most intimate psychologies and expressions of the human figure in the foreground.[11] The great difference between painting and film, however, besides the duration of the image in film, is the fact that the painter has manipulated his vision

of the sky with his paintbrush in order to serve his needs. Arnheim has stated that, "Whereas in painting (and also on stage), the objects of reality may seem painted—that is, they are supposed to seem as though they were painted—this seems to be impossible and distracting in film" (Merjian 152). This comment was written before the advent of modern-day special effects, and with films such as *300* (2006) splashing across screens around the world, such a comment is no longer always relevant. Antonioni, however, does not manipulate the landscapes of this film in any way other than through composition, such that the realist façade is never destroyed. Nevertheless, the kinship between the director and Friedrich remains, because through their compositions, the interaction of landscape to man takes on a literal (in the visual sense) as well as figurative (in the psychological sense) dialogue.

Since Antonioni's use of landscape in *L'avventura* oftentimes comes about prediagetically, it takes on a specific kind of relevance in relation to landscape painting. This is due to the fact that his landscapes usually come accompanied by human figures, and these are the landscapes this discussion has been highlighting. Lefebvre says that, ". . . if we can ascribe to Antonioni the intention of presenting a landscape, it is because the filmic treatment can lead us to see the space as autonomous and to detach it from its narrative function" (39). This idea has already been partly discussed, but it bears a reassessment. Though moments in which the narrative seems to dissolve into the background occur in *L'avventura*, the narrative never loses its relevance to the shot, because it has already been established. In *L'avventura*, landscape is used more than plot sometimes to express psychologies, and although this does not directly affect the movement of the sequence of events that make up the plot, it helps to develop the psychologies of the characters who make up the narrative. By doing this, it helps to illustrate motivations and helps to create a subconscious foundation for what the characters will do and how they will act, which is what moves the plot. Though oftentimes in these landscapes the characters may be accessories visually, they are never accessories symbolically. The thematic weight of the landscape is created by the interplay of human fig-

ure to landscape. This relates to what Derrida saw as the dissolution of the differences between ergon and paregon, which he saw as in a constant interplay between one another.[12] Their inherent interconnectedness is what ascribes meaning, and it is this idea that frames the relevance of Antonioni's landscape shots to the human figures he places among them. One of the most important moments of the film, for example, depends upon this interplay for the full expression of its significance.

This moment comes the morning after the disappearance of Anna, after Claudia has woken up. The camera eventually moves outside of the hermit's shack in which the group passed the night and the storm. The first view of landscape comes when Claudia opens the window to the shack to peer out on the rising sun, but the sunrise is shot behind Claudia's back as she watches, framed by the window. It is delivered to the audience through the lens of an intimate interior moment of Claudia's gaze. The first outdoor shot then comes with a view from above on the cliffs of the island looking down on waves crashing against the coastline. The camera slowly pans upwards and to the left revealing Sandro perched on the cliffs in yet another one of Antonioni's prediagetic moments. He peers out over the ocean in silence with the only sounds being those of the heavy winds.[13] Then Sandro takes a seat on a rock, but only for a moment, because he turns his head and notices Claudia walking over. He gets up and walks over towards her, but the audience does not know why he has arisen until later, since Claudia does not enter into the shot from the left side until after Sandro has turned his head and walked over in her direction. It is the first in a remarkable series of montages that will mark the first moments of romantic recognition between the two future lovers. All of this is only alluded to and so subtle that an audience cannot perceive it on first viewing the film. The shot of Claudia and Sandro together, alone at first, positioned high atop the rocky surface of the island, is grand and majestic. Shot from just below the level of the surface on which they are standing, with rocks and dirt taking up the bottom quarter portion of the shot and the sky dominating the rest, the two human figures take on epic proportions. Though not dwarfed by the sky in the way the monk is in the Friedrich painting, they stand against it, not quite silhouetted, in a manner that invokes shots of the Southern landscapes from *Gone with the Wind* (1939) or the Montana vistas of the more recent film by Ang Lee, *Brokeback Mountain* (2005). *L'avventura*, after all, is by no means the first film to have ever positioned its characters in such a dialogue with the landscape, but the way it uses their positions among landscape to illustrate so much of the psychology of the film is remarkable.[14] This is the first truly intimate moment between the two characters in *L'avventura*. It comes during the calm of an early morning after a storm from the night before has subsided, and it

essentially sets up a new intimate association between two characters who could not have been expected to ever be associated intimately in the film. This is the shot that leads to the montage of the two of them moving across the landscape of the island with the fisherman wandering around, interspersed into the shots that represent Claudia's and Sandro's first psychologically interconnected moments. This is when Sandro will turn his head suddenly after having looked at Claudia. The audience does not know why initially, but it represents the recognition on his part of his attraction to her. Shortly thereafter he will touch her hand as she moves past him over the rocks, eliciting a shocked look from Claudia which then marks the first acknowledgement on her part of a new, intimate association between the two of them.

All of this is set up in the first shot of the two of them perched on the cliffs, but its origins go back even further into the scene. They begin with the camera peering downwards on the crashing waves before it pans up to find Sandro. Once again, Antonioni's use of prediagetic space has imbued the landscape with significance, which he will then use as he pans up to meet Sandro and Claudia in order to create a visual dialogue with them during the first moments of their intimacy. By doing this he has psychologized the sea and the sky as well. What makes this scene especially innovative, though, is the fact that the psychology of the landscape does not match that of the characters. Prior to this, when Claudia looks out on the sunset from inside the cabin, the landscape matches the actor, it is intimacy against intimacy, with the sun compartmentalized into the framing of the window through which Claudia looks out upon it, bringing it down to a less massive scale. The landscape of the exterior shots is very different. Beginning with the sea violently crashing against the rocks, and then moving over towards a view of the expansive sky, the landscape here becomes immense and expansive, despite the fact that the sky is now calm. In contrast stand two characters embarking upon quieter, more intimate moments, suggesting that perhaps the intimacy that will be formed between Claudia and Sandro is not a true intimacy, but one separated by an immense psychological chasm that will never fully be bridged. This is then furthered by the role of the rocky terrain during the successive

montage of their first romantic recognitions. Both Claudia and Sandro never rest in comfort during these shots. They move difficultly across the terrain, rocks always separating them in some way. Sandro turns his head after his first intimate thought of Claudia, but he then walks off screen and the camera lingers on the same shot of Claudia stumbling about along the rocks in the background, the object of his thought and the long distance between them at the moment Sandro turned his head unexpectedly now emphasized. When he touches Claudia's hand later, it is as she climbs over the rocks past him, and as she turns she is separated by him visually due to the landscape, since she has by then moved onto a rock situated higher up than where Sandro is standing. These are all moments of quiet intimacy, all expressed visually and without the exchange of anything more than looks, yet they are all buttressed up by a landscape that is expansive and craggy, almost as though the surface of the island were the barren surface of the moon and the sky were the solar system looming in the background.[15] Much has been made concerning the fact that this is an isolated empty island, but the fact of the matter is that the Aeolian archipelago is not an isolated place, and the fact that there are oftentimes views of other islands in the background exemplifies this. The island seems to have become more isolated by the presence of the storm, but everyone could have easily left before it. Those who stayed did so by choice. The landscapes of the scenes surrounding Anna's disappearance and Sandro and Claudia's first moments of intimacy, represented by the rocks of the island, the sea, the sky, are much more isolating than isolated. They serve to isolate the characters more symbolically than literally.

I would now like to look at the first moments of Sandro's and Claudia's physical intimacy. Other than the kiss Sandro forces upon her in the boat, these come after the visit to Noto. The camera lingers on the abandoned town while the car carrying the couple drives away in the distance. This then dissolves into a shot of pure ecstasy, a close up of Claudia smiling unapologetically as she is held up in the arms of Sandro. She is framed close up against the backdrop of another looming expansive sky. The camera then pulls back slightly revealing the backdrop: the couple is once again standing above another landscape of a coastline in which a set of train tracks run across. As this is being revealed the couple walks over to a patch of grass where they lie down, falling downwards out of the shot, the camera lingering yet another time postdiagetically on the landscape in the background. What follows is the primary love scene, a remarkable montage that only takes up a few minutes within the text of the film yet which necessitates a close reading that will hopefully not exhaust the patience of the reader too much. As the landscape remains on screen after the couple

has fallen out of the shot, all that is heard is the sound of Claudia saying Sandro's name. Then there is a shot from above in which Claudia's face comes into view as she lies on the ground with Sandro's back hovering above her. Once they roll over, and Claudia moves on top of him, the film cuts to a shot of Claudia above her lover. It is an extreme close up of her face that takes up almost the whole frame, causing Sandro to disappear from the shot for a moment. All this time Claudia sighs out the word *mio mio mio* over and over. In combination with the close up of her face and its subsequent expressions of ecstasy, the shot of her face as she is lying down becomes not just an intimate moment but an immense image, as it takes on an almost landscape-like quality, especially since it rests horizontally across the screen. Just as Sandro moves further into the shot, as he kisses her and lifts his head upwards, the film cuts to a shot from above revealing the back of Claudia's head which once again fills up the frame. Sandro's hands cradling it remain barely recognizable in the margins of the frame. In this same shot, her head moves over to the right side and Sandro's face reappears from underneath. Then her head, still only seen from behind, moves to the left side of his face. As a result of this movement his face now dominates the shot. Once again the camera cuts to a shot from the side level with the ground, behind Sandro's head. Claudia's face rests underneath his until she moves back over and on top of her lover, and the shot is once again dominated by her face. Sandro remains once more mostly off screen except for his hand which is cradling Claudia's face and the slight view of his own face at the bottom of the screen. It vacillates between a position on and off screen as he continues to make love to Claudia, until the camera pans slowly upwards when Claudia kisses his hand eliminating him from the visual composition. What remains is similar to the earlier shot of her face and its ecstatic expression in extreme close up, as it comes to dominate the entire screen. The only connective thread of the diagetic composition to the extradiagetic human element of the scene, Sandro, is his hand. It is his hand, which throughout guides her on and off screen, closer to and farther from him. It seems to be what the camera is following more than the faces. Sandro's hand pulls Claudia back down to kiss him, bringing his face back into view and allowing him to share in the shot. After this comes one more shot from above, of Claudia's back and Sandro's face as he lies on the ground, followed by another close up of

her face from an angle that is almost the reverse of that prior, as she kisses Sandro from above him. His hand, however, remains in the shot. His head then slips back into frame as he kisses her, and then it falls back out of frame as it drops to the ground, and finally they come to share the composition once his head falls back into view. The lovers are then interrupted by a landscape view of the train moving across the landscape below, until the film cuts back to the two lovers lying against the ground, flat against the surface of the terrain as the same train rushes past them, causing them to sit up and take notice.

Hopefully this description of such a short montage did not prove too wearisome to read. It of course reads easier if one has the clips from the film freshly in one's mind. However, it was necessary in order to detail the immense complexity of such an extraordinary love scene. The rapid cuts and constant rearranging of the composition of the two lovers serve to do more than just provide the audience with a closer view of the characters during this pivotal scene. Antonioni, through his montage, is playing with notions of filmic intimacy through a repetitive reordering of the juxtaposition between diagetic and extradiagetic space, between absence and presence. The lovers are never statically positioned together, but in much the same way as Antonioni has his lovers constantly speaking to each other's backs, such as in the scene of the argument between Sandro and Anna on the island just prior to her disappearance, he never allows these two lovers to share the screen in a moment of sentimental connection even though this is the scene that represents their union. It is a juxtaposition of the intimacy of presence and the immensity of absence, of the characters moving periodically into and out of the shot. Though they are supposedly connecting in this scene through the act of lovemaking, visually Antonioni creates a form of separation for the viewer, in which Sandro moves in and out of frame and the two faces of the lovers are barely shown together. It stands in sharp contrast to the later scene in the hotel room in Palermo when Sandro throws Claudia down onto the bed in a violent gesture before trying to force himself on her. As he tries to get her to submit, the camera's eye rests on a view of the two of them lying together on the bed, allowing their disconnect, which is pronounced here, to be illustrated explicitly. When they are happy together, though, the camera refuses to allow the viewer to see them statically in any position of union for too long, always emphasizing the disconnect more than the connection. This separation is further pronounced in relation to the division of the sexes in the sequence following the joyous love scene when the camera follows Claudia alone and isolated in a town of hyper-realistically aggressive men who stalk and encircle her.

In the love scene, landscape was used less directly than in relation to the earlier scenes analyzed in this discussion. At first, it works to frame

the moments of their joy through shots of the sky and coastline in modes that resemble the shots of the two lovers perched on the cliffs of the island. However, landscape in the joyful love scene begins in agreement with the mood of the human figures, which is one of ecstasy, joyful immensity. This positive element of immensity is replaced as the characters make love on the ground by an immensity imbued with something more ambiguous and disconcerting. This is the immensity of absence. There is always some kind of absence in those shots, whether it is the absence of Sandro's face among the overwhelming presence of Claudia's, or the absence of Claudia's face as it is replaced by the presence of a view of her back. What does it say to a viewer when the most joyful moments of a couple on screen are relegated to shots that never allow both of the faces of the couple to coexist on screen for any amount of time that can ground their happiness as unifying? It hints at a host of implications that will be played out later on in the film. Their love is here shown to be as immense as its earliest moments hinted it would be, evidenced in the epic view of the two lovers perched on the cliffs in the scene previously discussed. But this is not immense in the sense of a grand passion, or more importantly, of a deep intimacy. It is an immensity of separation that contradicts the intimacy to which their lovemaking should be witness.

The question that this paper has been wrestling with but has until now not mentioned asks whether or not the immensity of infinite space is always alienating or if it can possibly lead to intimacy extended.[16] The conclusions that have been made concerning *L'avventura* would point to the impossibility of such an extension. Whether or not this is true outside the universe of the film is irrelevant to this discussion. Whether or not this is true to the world of *L'avventura* is. The immense chasm of doubt into which man was plunged as a result of the advances of modern science and epistemology to which Eliot alludes in his essay on the metaphysical poets[17] is the same chasm that Antonioni alludes to when he described, in his now famous statement at the Cannes film festival of 1960, the instability of man when faced with the "scientific unknown" and the "moral unknown"[18] that have been created as a result. As the parameters of knowledge increase, creating with it an increasingly larger space of uncertainty similar to what happened after the dissolution of the Ptolemaic universe, one must look to what happens to, ". . . the correspondence between the immensity of world space and the depth of inner space" (Bachelard 204–5).[19] The result, according to Antonioni, is the idea of the diseased Eros he made famous in his statement at Cannes. To this artist, as evidenced in *L'avventura*, intimacy has been struck by a sickness as a result of the immensity of a moral and scientific unknown.[20] By the last shot of the film, the immensity of Mount Etna looming in the background is completely dominated by the jutting presence of the wall that fills up half

of the frame. Set against the foreground of two characters involved in an intimate moment of despair, pity, and sympathy, the possibility of whatever the ancient volcano could ever symbolize in a film is cut off by a positively intrusive element in the composition, the wall.[21] In relation to everything that has come before in this film, there is no reason to have expected its placement in this final scene, pointing to the possibility that the depths of Antonioni's unknowns have led these characters to an impasse, with their view of the horizon now menacingly obstructed.

I began this article by referencing the disappearance of Anna, because any serious discussion concerning the meaning of this film and why the director manipulates images of intimacy and immensity in the way in which he does must eventually return to her disappearance in order to fumble at an answer. What Antonioni said concerning this scene began this paper, and it bears being restated. In discussing another scene that was later cut from the film in which the other characters discuss Anna's disappearance, he says:

> Dopo un silenzio uno dice: <<Forse è soltanto annegata>>. Claudia si volta di scatto: <<Soltanto?>>. Tutti si guardono sgomenti. Ecco, questo sgomento è la connotazione del film.

This dismay refers to what has been called, "the disappearance of the disappearance of Anna" (Brunette 31). The fact that such an event such as the disappearance of a friend, which should be so important to the characters on a purely humane level, and which is just as important to the viewer as a spectator, can be forgotten and discarded by the film in preference of a new focus on the relationship between the lost woman's best friend and lover is more than just disconcerting. It is distracting and inconceivable, at least it was before this film. Towards the end of *L'avventura* Claudia barges into Patrizia's room in search of Sandro. She confesses to her that she fears that Sandro has run away with Anna, but even more disconcerting is the notion that only a few days prior, she says, she felt she could have died at the very thought that Anna might be dead. Now she cannot even cry and fears that Anna is alive. She then says this line, which perhaps points to why Antonioni removed the above-cited scene from the final cut. She says: "Tutto sta diventando maledettamente facile . . . persino privarsi di un dolore." This "easy" or "simple" bears with it the same connotation of devaluation as what dismays the characters in the scene that was cut. That she "simply" drowned, as though Anna's friends could find relief in such a solution, is dismaying. "Simply" comes across as a reductive solution that eliminates their need to keep up the search, which functions as a form of relief despite the fact that this means that their friend has died. But it also points to the ability of these characters to "simply" anesthetize their pain in preference for something "hideously" simpler,

something both "easy"-er and less complex, a shallow simplicity. The dismay comes about due to the desire for such a solution, but it also comes about at the very notion, which is inherently untrue, that such an answer could be so easily arrived at. There is nothing simple in the loss of a loved one, unless one's inner space has been so disillusioned and corrupted that one can no longer recognize how immense the loss is, because a life should be an immense space.

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NOTES

[1] Taken from *I film e la critica* (146).

[2] As quoted in: Lefebvre, Martin. "Between Setting and Landscape in the Cinema."

[3] This is a notion that has been discussed at length by many critics of Antonioni. One such example comes from: Gandy, Matthew. "The Cinematic Void: Desert Iconographies in Michelangelo Antonioni's *Zabriskie Point*" (316). See also, Céline Scemama-Heard, *Antonioni, Le désert figuré*.

[4] Lefebvre posits such a reading when he writes, "At moments, Antonioni's stories seem to evaporate, letting the landscape emerge: his stories are somewhat like the character of Anna in *L'avventura*, who mysteriously disappears from a desert island and from the film itself . . ." (38).

[5] Chatman also states that as a result of this technique, "this place is important quite independently of the immediate exigencies of plot . . ." (125–6). While it is true that the plot is not immediately dependant upon the space for its continuation, the relevance of the space is not independent of the plot, which is as important to the creation of significance in the film as the use of space.

[6] Similarly, Peter Brunette describes Antonioni's use of panning from a landscape shot to include a human figure, "as if the human being were merely a second thought . . . rather than the center of creation" (37).

[7] Italo Calvino's observation concerning these characters' modes of self-expression is relevant here: "*L'avventura* ha per tema le capacità di scelta e realizzazione d'un comportamento coerente fuor dal mare di gesti e impulsi e parole casuali, sbadati, contraddittori, della gente . . ." (136). Quoted from *I film e la critica 1943–1995*.

[8] Hence my inability to wholeheartedly accept Lorenzo Cuccu's notion that, "Antonioni riesce davvero a rendere 'concreta', oggettiva . . . quella sua immagine della realtà . . ." (*La visione come problema* 199–202).

[9] Pasolini says that, "il cinema è fondamentalmente onirico per la elementarità dei suoi archetipi . . ." (175–76).

[10] Ara H. Merjian discusses Arnheim's comparison at length in her article, "Middlebrow Modernism: Rudolf Arnheim at the Crossroads of Film Theory and the Psychology of Art" (176).

[11] Louis Seguin sees the influence of Antonioni's appreciation of the visual arts as contributing to a tendency to petrify landscapes in his films: "Cette nature est en effet extérieure par principe, elle ne s'unit à rien, ne reflète rien" (15–16). I, however, side with views such as the one expressed by Maya Tourovskaïa: "Le monde extérieur, ce qu'on appelle le fond, est souvent chez Antonioni la projection du monde intérieur de l'homme qu'il étudie . . ." (17), as cited in *Antonioni, Le désert figuré.*

[12] This comes from Derrida's discussion of Kant in *La verité en peinture,* which Lefebvre discusses in his article (39).

[13] This is one of Antonioni's, "*piani lunghi e profondi*—nei quali i personaggi si dispongono spesso su linee che *si sfuggono*, così come evasivi sono, altrettanto spesso, gli *sguardi, perduti nel fuori campo* . . ." (26). This observation from "Il cinema di Antonioni" by Lorenzo Cuccu and Carlo di Carlo beautifully illustrates the complex interplay at work between man and landscape, as the intimacy of the gaze slowly dissipates into the immensity of a spreading landscape.

[14] Another species of film that does this is of course the Western.

[15] Speaking of the island: "L'hostilité du paysage, par son aspect illimité, ses reliefs qui cachent on ne sait quoi, cette mer mouvementée, devient une menace, en tant qu'il représente non un obstacle mais <<une absence>>, similaire à celle que ressent le personnage" (Scemama-Heard 20).

[16] In *The Poetics of Space,* Bachelard points to the possibility of an intimacy extended in the works of Baudelaire (190).

[17] "Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results" (232).

[18] This citation is taken from the liner notes to the edition of the film from the Criterion Collection, 2001.

[19] Bachelard uses this phrase somewhat differently in a discussion of the immensity of a desert landscape as related through a person's "inner intensity."

[20] William Arrowsmith brilliantly summarizes the juxtaposition of this sick Eros to the landscapes of the film when he writes that, ". . . the debility of Eros reveals itself against a background of informing immensity" (35).

[21] Lino Micciché's comment in his essay "Le coppie di Michelangelo Antonioni" is relevant here: ". . . l'oggi della coppia attuale è inquinato, condizionato, disturbato, in qualche misura impedito da elementi dello ieri appena trascorso, o da fattori di una lateralità parallela e in qualche modo alternativa . . ." Quoted from *I film e la critica* (10).

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