

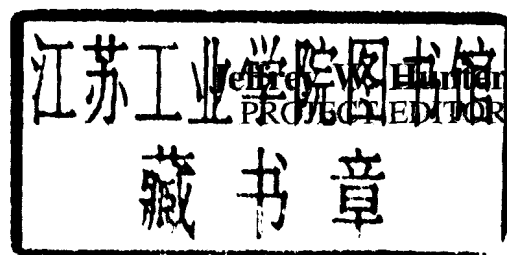
☐ Contemporary
Literary Criticism

CLC 259

Volume 259

Contemporary Literary Criticism

Criticism of the Works
of Today's Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,
Short Story Writers, Scriptwriters, and
Other Creative Writers



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ISBN-13: 978-1-4144-1935-0

ISBN-10: 1-4144-1935-X

ISSN 0091-3421 **Contact your Gale sales representative for ordering information.**

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Authors are selected for inclusion for a variety of reasons, among them the publication or dramatic production of a critically acclaimed new work, the reception of a major literary award, revival of interest in past writings, or the adaptation of a literary work to film or television.

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Each *CLC* volume contains individual essays and reviews taken from hundreds of book review periodicals, general magazines, scholarly journals, monographs, and books. Entries include critical evaluations spanning from the beginning of an author’s career to the most current commentary. Interviews, feature articles, and other published writings that offer insight into the author’s works are also presented. Students, teachers, librarians, and researchers will find that the general critical and biographical material in *CLC* provides them with vital information required to write a term paper, analyze a poem, or lead a book discussion group. In addition, complete bibliographical citations note the original source and all of the information necessary for a term paper footnote or bibliography.

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- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose

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Michelangelo Antonioni

1912-2007

Italian director, screenwriter, and author of short fiction.

The following entry presents criticism on Antonioni's career through 2008. For additional information on his life and works, see *CLC*, Volumes 20 and 144.

INTRODUCTION

Widely regarded as one of Italy's finest directors, Antonioni created a body of cinematic work that depicts the frustrations and possibilities of life and human connection in the modern world. His characters consistently fail to make meaningful contact with their environment or each other in their quest for truth, as expressed in his films through sparse dialogue, lingering tracking shots, and an emotionally detached tone. In contrast to the neorealist style characteristic of postwar Italian cinema, Antonioni's films rely on background scenery and framing techniques to convey psychological interiors, resulting in an evocative mixture of asceticism and lyricism that eludes patterns of interpretation and frustrates conventional narrative expectations. Although the cryptic aspect of his work has alienated some critics and viewers, his incisive examination of identity, perception, and communication appeals to the very essence of film as a form of artistic expression.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

The son of middle-class landowners, Antonioni was born in Ferrara, a city in the Emilia-Romagna region of Italy. During his early years he showed an interest in painting and puppetry, and he became involved with student theatre after enrolling at the University of Bologna in 1931, where he studied architecture and economics. Upon graduating in 1935, Antonioni worked as a journalist and bank teller before moving to Rome in 1939 to study filmmaking at the *Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia*. During this time he contributed film reviews to the periodical *Cinema* while working with such renowned directors as Marcel Carné and Roberto Rossellini before being drafted into mandatory military service in 1942. During his time in the army Antonioni shot a short documentary, *Gente del Po* (1943; *People of the Po Valley*), which

was not widely released until after the war. After working on a series of documentaries, he secured financing for his first feature film, *Cronaca di un amore* (1950; *Story of a Love Affair*; also translated as *Chronicle of a Love*), which veered away from the tenets of neorealism—the vaunted mode of Italian cinema at the time—and earned the director a Special Silver Ribbon from the Italian National Syndicate of Film Journalists. With *L'avventura* (1960), his artistic breakthrough, Antonioni continued to move away from the episodic, documentary style of neorealism and toward creating his singular method of elliptical, stylized, and introspective cinema. While this film has been variously translated as *The Adventure* and *The Fling*, most critics refer to it by its original Italian title. Although it was initially met with mixed reviews, *L'avventura* eventually came to be recognized as a groundbreaking work of art, establishing Antonioni as a major filmmaker and garnering him the Jury Prize at the Cannes Film Festival. His first English-language film, *Blowup* (1966), was his biggest commercial success, winning Best Film and Best Director honors from the National Society of Film Critics as well as the Golden Palm from the Cannes Film Festival. *Blowup* also earned Antonioni nominations for Best Director and, along with Tonino Guerra and Edward Bond, Best Original Screenplay at the Academy Awards. *Quel bowling sul Tevere* (1983; *That Bowling Alley on the Tiber*), a collection of ideas for possible future screenplays, won the Settembrini-Mestre Award for best book of short stories. In 1985 Antonioni suffered a debilitating stroke that left him unable to speak. Nevertheless, with assistance from German director Wim Wenders, he went on to direct *Al di là delle nuvole* (1995; *Beyond the Clouds*). Antonioni was honored with an Academy Award for Lifetime Achievement in 1995. He died on July 30, 2007; that same day, celebrated Swedish auteur Ingmar Bergman died as well. Antonioni was buried in Ferrara after being laid in state at Rome's City Hall.

MAJOR WORKS

Antonioni's films explore the alienation and neuroses of characters grappling with issues of love and identity in the modern world. A tale of erotic entanglement and guilt, *Story of a Love Affair* concerns a wealthy industrialist, Enrico, who hires private detectives to spy on his younger wife, Paola, whom he incorrectly

suspects of being unfaithful. Ironically, the investigation leads to Paola being reunited with an old flame, Guido, with whom she begins an affair. She eventually convinces Guido to murder her husband, but Enrico is killed in an automobile accident just before Guido can commit the deed. This intermingling of amatory longing and fatalism continues in *Il grido* (1957; variously rendered as *The Cry* and *The Outcry*, but usually referred to by its original title), which culminates with the suicide of a sugar-refinery worker after he discovers that his ex-lover has moved on with her life. *L'avventura* begins with a group of couples who travel to an unpopulated volcanic island off the coast of Sicily. When Anna mysteriously disappears, her friends search in vain to find her. At this point, the narrative begins to slowly drift away from the woman's unresolved disappearance, focusing instead on the burgeoning relationship between Anna's lover, Sandro, and her best friend, Claudia. Anna's fate is never explained, a fact which hangs like a specter of inscrutability over the lives of Sandro and Claudia, and the film leaves the two lovers in a state of stifled limbo. Restlessness and incommunicability haunt the marriage at the center of *La notte* (1961; *The Night*, typically called by its Italian title), the loosely structured plot of which involves the mundane social activities of a writer, Giovanni, and his wife, Lidia. The impending death of a friend, Tommaso, sets the tone for the film and serves as a metaphor for the couple's failing marriage—a reality that they evade by flirting with other people, wandering the streets of Milan, and visiting an erotic nightclub. Generally viewed as the conclusion of a trilogy that includes *L'avventura* and *La notte*, *L'eclisse* (1962; *The Eclipse*, usually referred to by its Italian title) details the doomed relationship of an isolated young woman and her practical-minded stockbroker beau. Their dissimilar personalities and worldviews accentuate the difficulty of interpersonal communication that is demonstrated throughout Antonioni's work.

The director's first color film, *Il deserto rosso* (1964; *The Red Desert*), centers on Giuliana, a wife and mother whose recently failed suicide attempt makes plain her dissatisfaction with life and her sense of isolation amidst an industrial landscape. Unable to bond with her husband, the director of a power plant, Giuliana finds herself drawn to his associate, Zeller, but even this attempt at connection proves fruitless. A meditation on the nature of reality and perception, *Blowup* involves a trendy London fashion photographer named Thomas who may have unwittingly captured a murder on film. Taken at a local park, the photo in question reveals an image that resembles a man with a gun standing over a body, but the details only become discernible after blowing up the negative. Thomas goes back to the park and locates the body, but this time lacks a camera with which to verify

his discovery. The film ends with the mysterious disappearance of both the film and the body, leaving Thomas to question his own perception of the world around him. *Zabriskie Point* (1970), Antonioni's second English-language film, taps into the counterculture zeitgeist of America in the late 1960s to tell the story of two politically radical lovers who flee to the California desert to begin their lives anew. In *Professione: Reporter* (1975; *The Passenger*) David Locke, a television journalist looking to interview guerillas in the North African desert, switches identities with Robertson, an Englishman who has died while staying at the same hotel. Taking the man's passport and appointment book, Locke begins meeting with Robertson's associates only to realize that he has assumed the identity of a gunrunner who supplied arms to political dissidents. When Robertson's clients don't receive their due shipments, they track down Locke and murder him. Locke's death is not shown on-screen, but occurs during a virtuosic, uninterrupted tracking shot that lasts nearly seven minutes, leaving the room through a window and returning to reveal his dead body. Based on Jean Cocteau's play *L'Aigle a deux têtes* (*The Eagle Has Two Heads*), *Il mistero di Oberwald* (1981; *The Mystery of Oberwald*; also translated as *The Oberwald Mystery*) features a nineteenth-century queen who falls in love with her would-be assassin because of his resemblance to her deceased husband. Shot on the relatively new medium of video, *The Mystery of Oberwald* experiments with color and theatrical camera movements while relegating the plot to the background. Reiterating themes of identity, romantic ennui, and inexplicable fate, *Identificazione di una donna* (1982; *Identification of a Woman*) focuses on Niccolo, a director whose girlfriend vanishes while he struggles to come up with a concept for his next film. He soon becomes obsessed with Ida, a young actress who closely resembles his former lover. The basic conceit of *Identification of a Woman* resurfaces in *Beyond the Clouds*, which consists of four segments held together by the story of a director named Antonioni in search of material for an upcoming project. Based on ideas from *That Bowling Alley on the Tiber*, the individual segments are interpolated with transitional passages directed by Wim Wenders.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Critical approbation of Antonioni's films peaked in the 1960s and began to wane thereafter. While *Story of a Love Affair* and *Il grido* garnered praise for showcasing the stylistic mise-en-scène and technical adeptness that would make Antonioni famous, it was not until *L'avventura* that the international film community took full notice of the director. Despite a mixed audience reaction to its debut at the Cannes Film Festival,

L'avventura is now looked upon as a classic, with scholars deeming the film an affirmation of philosopher Gilles Deleuze's theories regarding cinema's interplay of time and imagery. Critics have studied Antonioni's trilogy for its focus on the spiritual oppression brought about by an unfeeling urban landscape, paying particular attention to the filmmaker's visual emphasis on architecture. As critic Mitchell Schwarzer elucidated, "For Antonioni, modern architecture is menacing but exact; it is monotonous but exquisite. Modern architecture is Antonioni's grand metaphor for the turbulence, tedium, and sublimity that make up the age." In addition, commentators have interpreted *L'eclisse* as an extrapolation of Jean-Paul Sartre's existential philosophy, and have cited *The Red Desert* as an example of the director's unique utilization of ambiguous sound, jarring color, and chronological interference. They have likewise underscored these elements in *Blowup*, which has been compared thematically to Alfred Hitchcock's classic film *Rear Window*. Furthermore, reviewers have opined that *Blowup* functions as a meditation on the nature of film itself by probing the psychological and ontological aspects of the visual image in terms of capturing and manipulating the past. Commentator Frank P. Tomasulo highlighted the importance of silence in *Blowup*, stating: "Antonioni's silences are not dramaturgical pregnant pauses, those emotionally coded . . . moments that interrupt the free flow of chatter so common to Western theatrical traditions; indeed, *speech* in Antonioni acts as the interruption of the free flow of quiet." Of Antonioni's filmic output subsequent to *Blowup*, only *The Passenger* has established itself as a lasting work of art in the minds of most critics. Specifically, they have positively appraised *The Passenger*'s subversion of motifs borrowed from the thriller genre, and have identified an indebtedness to French cinema that they have likewise ascribed to Bergman's *Tystnaden* (*The Silence*). Additionally, film scholars have linked the concept of identity in *The Passenger* to French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's notions of ego and imagination. While reviewers have generally argued that, aside from *Beyond the Clouds*, Antonioni's late films show a decline in quality, most have agreed with Seymour Chatman's assertion that Antonioni "will be remembered as one of the greatest visual artists of the cinema."

PRINCIPAL WORKS

- Gente del Po* [*People of the Po Valley*; director and screenwriter] (documentary short film) 1943
N.U.: Nettezza urbana [director] (documentary short film) 1948

- Cronaca di un amore* [*Story of a Love Affair*; also translated as *Chronicle of a Love*; director and screenwriter; co-written with Daniele D'Anza, Silvio Giovannetti, Francesco Maselli, and Piero Tellini] (film) 1950
L'amore in città [*Love in the City*; director and screenwriter of segment entitled *Tentato suicidio*; co-written with Aldo Buzzi, Luigi Chiarini, Luigi Malerba, Tullio Pinelli, Vittorio Veltroni, and Cesare Zavattini] (film) 1953
La signora senza camelie [*The Lady without Camelias*; director and screenwriter; co-written with Suso Cecchi d'Amico, Maselli, and P. M. Pasinetti] (film) 1953
I vinti [*The Vanquished*; also translated as *Youth and Perversion*; director and screenwriter; co-written with Giorgio Bassani, d'Amico, Diego Fabbri, Roger Nimier, and Turi Vasile] (film) 1953
Le amiche [*The Girlfriends*; director and screenwriter; co-written with d'Amico and Alba De Cespedes; based on the short story "Tra donne sole" by Cesare Pavese] (film) 1955
Il grido [*The Cry*; also translated as *The Outcry*; director and screenwriter; co-written with Elio Bartolini and Ennio De Concini] (film) 1957
L'avventura [*The Adventure*; also translated as *The Fling*; director and screenwriter; co-written with Bartolini and Tonino Guerra] (film) 1960
La notte [*The Night*; director and screenwriter; co-written with Guerra and Ennio Flaiano] (film) 1961
L'eclisse [*The Eclipse*; director and screenwriter; co-written with Guerra, Bartolini, and Ottiero Ottieri] (film) 1962
Il deserto rosso [*The Red Desert*; director and screenwriter; co-written with Guerra] (film) 1964
Blowup [*Blow-Up*; also released as *Blow Up*; director and screenwriter; co-written with Guerra and Edward Bond; based on a short story by Julio Cortázar] (film) 1966
Zabriskie Point [director and screenwriter; co-written with Guerra, Franco Rossetti, Sam Shepard, and Clare Peploe] (film) 1970
Chung Kuo—Cina [*China*; director and screenwriter; co-written with Andrea Barbato] (documentary) 1972
Professione: Reporter [*The Passenger*; director and screenwriter; co-written with Mark Peploe and Peter Wollen] (film) 1975
Il mistero di Oberwald [*The Mystery of Oberwald*; also translated as *The Oberwald Mystery*; director and screenwriter; co-written with Guerra; based on the play *L'Aigle a deux têtes* by Jean Cocteau] (film) 1981
Identificazione di una donna [*Identification of a Woman*; director and screenwriter; co-written with Guerra and Gérard Brach] (film) 1982
Quel bowling sul Tevere [*That Bowling Alley on the Tiber: Tales of a Director*] (short stories) 1983
12 registi per 12 città [director of segment entitled *Roma*] (documentary) 1989
Al di là delle nuvole [*Beyond the Clouds*; director and screenwriter; co-directed with Wim Wenders; co-written with Guerra and Wenders] (film) 1995

Eros [director and screenwriter of segment entitled *Il filo pericoloso delle cose*; co-written with Guerra] (film) 2004

CRITICISM

Chris Wagstaff (essay date July 1996)

SOURCE: Wagstaff, Chris. "Beyond Words." *Sight and Sound* n.s. 6, no. 7 (July 1996): 12-16.

[In the following essay, Wagstaff traces the events and circumstances leading up to the filming of *Beyond the Clouds* and draws upon Wim Wenders's shooting diary for technical insight into the film's second episode.]

Antonioni's films require a certain kind of viewer, who is not the same as the viewer of Hollywood movies, for example. In Hollywood, a story sets up questions—Will they get caught? Will she requite his love? How did they do it? Who is the killer?—which are subsequently answered to the satisfaction of the viewer. This viewer is required to be looking out for the answers to the questions as they are posed, in a constant quest for 'What is going to happen *next*?' If we do this while watching an Antonioni film, we risk missing what is happening *now*. For example, in *L'avventura* a girl mysteriously disappears on an island, and the rest of the party search for her. The film will never answer any of the implied questions: Where did she go? How? Why? As the rest of the party search the barren island for her, the audience simply watches them as they 'look'. What is happening next, so to speak, is that they are looking, and we are watching them looking. Presumably, the important thing is what they see (or what we see them see). What they see is the island, the rocks, the sea and each other, which is not quite what they hope to see. Antonioni leaves it at that. If we wanted to get philosophical about it, we could say that reality does not offer any 'meaningful answers' to our natural emotional and spiritual needs—at least, not unless we have very concrete and well-focused needs. With Antonioni's films, you must *look* at what you are being shown. That's all there is.

Is it worth looking at *Beyond the Clouds*? Antonioni, at 83, is afflicted by the effects of a stroke he suffered 13 years ago. He cannot speak: he has a vocabulary of some ten words (among them Nothing, Away, Eat, Yes, No, Later, Never and Speak—generally to refer to the fact that he cannot). He cannot write. He can

read, he can understand what is said to him, he can draw shakily with his left hand, and with that same hand execute a few gestures. He is thus prevented from communicating verbally with people, and instead has to wait until one of those around him—all of whom are trying to guess what he is trying to get across—comes up with what he is driving at. He can then agree with it. But these handicaps are carried by a man of immense energy, intelligence and lucidity, the artist who made extraordinary films, who thinks (however difficult it may be for those on the outside to know exactly what he thinks), who feels, who desires, and who above all sees the world with an intensity and a precision that few others possess. This man has made a film. If we remind ourselves of the costs of filmmaking nowadays and the consequent need for speed, and of the amount of collaborative cooperation and of advance planning required, and then reflect on the almost insurmountable barriers to production erected by Antonioni's inability to communicate verbally, we can begin to understand the immensity of the undertaking.

As with all films, *Beyond the Clouds* has undergone transformations in the making. For years Antonioni worked on a project very close to his heart, *The Crew* (*La ciurma*), a film about a mysterious event occurring on a sailing boat in a stormy sea, for which a script was completed with Mark Peploe. Given Antonioni's preference for location shooting over studio reconstructions, the prospect of him leading a film crew out on the high seas in a force seven gale became unimaginable after his stroke. But another project had reached the stage of signed contracts just before he fell ill, a story taken from *Quel bowling sul Tevere*, his collection of 'ideas for scripts not written'. The story is called "**Due telegrammi**," scripted by Rudi Wurlitzer, about a woman working in an office in a skyscraper who learns that her husband wants to divorce her, and who tries to communicate with a man in an office in a skyscraper across the way from her. In addition, the Italian producer Felice Laudadio, managing director of the Istituto Luce, the production arm of the Italian National Film Institute (ENIC), made it a condition of his staying on at ENIC that the Institute finance Antonioni's film. Because an expensive film production requires financial guarantees, a back-up director was needed for insurance purposes, and at Antonioni's request Wim Wenders was included in the project (a friendship had grown up between the two at the Cannes presentation of *Identification of a Woman* [*Identificazione di una donna*] in 1982). Plans reached an advanced state before ENIC got cold feet and withdrew support. Laudadio duly resigned, but continued to seek support elsewhere for the project.

Meanwhile Alain Robbe-Grillet brought Stéphane Tchaladjieff, his producer, to meet Antonioni, at one of a series of seminars forming part of ENIC's *Antonioni Project* (this one at the Louvre), with the idea of Antonioni playing a part in Robbe-Grillet's own film, *La Fortresse*. Financing for this project also fell through. However, Tchaladjieff was firmly resolved to enable Antonioni to make a film, and together with Philippe Carcassonne, Wenders and his associate Uli Felsberg of Road Movies, Laudadio in Italy and the participation of Canal +, a production was finally put together, with Wenders as co-director. Antonioni would direct four episodes based on stories from *Quel bowling sul Tevere*, and Wenders would direct a 'framework' tying the stories together, each director having their own cast. Wenders' section was to be of about 20-30 minutes duration, and the whole film to be no longer than two hours. Initially, Wenders' framework would feature the figure of a Director closely based on Antonioni himself, the role to be played by Antonioni. It soon became clear that Antonioni was not keen to act in it, and Wenders developed the character in a different direction, using Malkovich, who plays a Director in one of Antonioni's episodes, but giving him voice-over reflections taken from Antonioni's own writings and declarations.

Scripts were revised and finalised for Antonioni's episodes. With an updated title, "**Due telefax,**" the story "**Due telegrammi**" was to be a central one in the film. Antonioni had found the ideal location—two facing skyscrapers at La Défense in Paris—but the buildings were not completed in time for shooting, and so together with Wenders and Tonino Guerra, he wrote a script for another episode set in Paris taken from two stories in the same collection, and called it "**Non mi cercare.**" Shooting began in November 1994, and once Antonioni's four episodes were completed, Wenders planned and shot his framework. This developed in the shooting, and became quite long. Meanwhile, during the making of the four episodes it had become clearer and clearer that Antonioni was quite capable of making his film without need of back-up (Wenders directed one sequence in the Paris episode when Antonioni came down with a bad cold).

In June 1995, the two met in Rome to view the cut that Antonioni had made of both his and Wenders' material. He had drastically cut Wenders' footage, rendering incomprehensible much of the remaining narrative material. In doing this, he was asserting his ownership over the film that he had clearly been more than competent to make. Wenders' response was, in his own words: "Why had I set out on this adventure with Michelangelo nearly two years ago? So that now we should struggle like adversaries? Had not my intention been right from the start to help Michelangelo

prove that he could make a film, his own film, maybe his last?" Some beautiful Wenders sequences remain, notably when Malkovich wanders reflectively on the wintry shore of Comacchio between the first two episodes, the wind sending the sand sweeping in thin wafery clouds across the beach. But the film as it reaches us is primarily Antonioni's, though made possible by Wenders' patience, humanity and generosity.

Released with *Beyond the Clouds* were two 'para-texts', films alongside it. One, edited down from 60 hours of footage, is the 50-minute documentary *Per me fare un film è come vivere (For Me Making a Film Is Like Living)*, shot in Super 8 and in video, directed by Antonioni's wife Enrica Fico. This chronicles the making of *Beyond the Clouds*, and is an essential key to the understanding of what Antonioni was attempting to achieve and how he achieved it. Part of its impact comes from the fact of its intense and affectionate 'look' (that of Enrica) at the creation of the artist's 'look' (that of Antonioni). The other, *Caro Antonioni*, is a fine two-hour documentary on Antonioni's career as a film-maker, made by Gianni Massironi. With a title taken from a 'letter' to Antonioni (*Cher Antonioni . . .*) written by Roland Barthes three days before he died, it alternates sequences of Antonioni's films with reflections and memories from people involved in his artistic career (actors, writers, producers). The film follows the argument put forward by Barthes that Antonioni's approach to reality is that of a true artist, one of the few working today. The film pulls no intellectual punches, and the contributions by Robbe-Grillet are among the acutest ever made on the subject of Antonioni's cinema. At the same time, the rhythm and pace of the film make it immediately accessible, appealing, and in some way appropriate to its subject.

Massironi's film entailed a co-production agreement with the Italian television network, RAI, and with the BBC, to purchase the rights to broadcast it. RAI asked for a one-hour version, which Massironi duly produced; it was televised on the night of the Oscars at which Antonioni received his homage. The French network ARTE broadcast a similar version this January, following a showing of Antonioni's *The Passenger* and Fico's documentary. Survey statistics show that, remarkably, the television audience rose for the documentary, rather than falling at the end of *The Passenger*.

The BBC scheduled the Massironi film for *Arena* this April, and asked him for a 90-minute version, which he delivered. 16 months later they contacted him, saying that his film was too intellectual for their public, and that they were more interested in Antonioni's personality than in his work, and sent him their suggested edit. This edit was unrecognisable, making a

confusion of both the argument and the chronological progression of Massironi's film and seriously distorting Antonioni's political views. Massironi, Fico and Antonioni all faxed the BBC, imploring them to restore the original design of the film, to which the BBC eventually replied that they were convinced of the value of their version, and that they were anxious not to produce a eulogy of Antonioni. However, if Massironi would give a detailed critique of each shot or sequence where he was unhappy with their cut, they would consider his reservations . . .

One further paratext exists. This is the diary written by Wenders of the making of *Beyond the Clouds*, containing his extraordinarily beautiful colour production stills and also Donata Wenders' photographs of the film's making. The diary, published in an Italian translation—*Il tempo con Antonioni* (*Time with Antonioni*)—is an irresistible document for anyone interested in how films are made, and how one sensitive, articulate artist watches another at work. Whatever a viewer might think about *Beyond the Clouds* itself, together with its paratexts it forms an unusually powerful and illuminating insight into the filmmaking of a man whose work requires a committed and alert viewer.

There are a number of different relationships film directors can forge with the viewers of their films. To take an extreme example (sticking with contemporary Italians) Bertolucci works hard to create what he calls a 'dialogue' with his viewers; he takes up a relatively humble position in front of them, wishing to give them pleasure, and to present them with ideas to which he wants them to respond in a conscious or unconscious way. Antonioni stands about as far from that position as it is possible to get. His position, if you like, is one of total arrogance (and without any trace of criticism intended). He has his vision, he films it, the viewers see the film, and he refuses to enter into any dialogue about what he may have intended to communicate—and since the standard interpretation of Antonioni is that he is the poet of 'incommunicability', one can hardly blame him. Is he to stand up and protest, "But I am communicating *all the time*, and so are my characters; it's just that what is being communicated makes you feel uncomfortable?"

In interviews throughout his career, he has been more than willing to discuss his method of filming and his technical procedures. Some of the most important things he has repeatedly said can easily be listed. The choice of location is fundamental to his filming, and he devotes great care to that choice; the filmed sequence grows out of his exploration of that location; he avoids studios because everything is controlled in advance, and no exploration is possible. He shoots

few takes, does almost no rehearsing and explains very little to the actors in advance, wishing to catch them fresh, while the organisation of the shot, the movement and placing of the actors and of the cameras (he likes to use two simultaneously), the colour and the ambient sound are all worked out meticulously in his head. It is as though by taking care of the concrete sensorial elements of the audio-visual channel, the rest (that is, the feelings) will 'arise' inevitably from it. He is impatient with conventional cinema's almost exclusive concern with narrative, with telling a story, and yet he puts immense thought (and almost unrivalled skill) into telling exactly what he wants to tell in the most succinct and economical fashion. He is intimately involved in the editing, and in this reworking of his material discovers further aspects of the world that he has shot. He uses music very sparingly, and at the editing stage goes through the film twice to choose those moments where he feels a scene needs some music; he particularly likes it when it can be diegetic—in other words, when it can be produced by the action of the scene, rather than being added on at the editing (his discovery of the singing of the monks in the church of Saint Jean de Malte in Aix-en-Provence, in the final episode of *Beyond the Clouds*, is an example).

As one becomes familiar with his films, one begins to notice his particular stance with regard to the characters he is filming. Antonioni's camera shows people looking at things or at each other. The location, the weather, the sound and the movement communicate to the viewer what the looker is feeling, but without the camera taking up the position of the looker. (In a central sequence in the Portofino episode of *Beyond the Clouds*, to which we shall return in some detail, the intensity of John Malkovich's 'looking' at Sophie Marceau is such as to make both her and the viewer feel uncomfortable, while Malkovich himself remains entirely comfortable with it.) We know how the looker perceives and feels about what he or she observes, but do not generally get a shot from the point of view of the looker; we get inside the character's emotions while always standing apart from him or her. This is very different from conventional practice, where the viewer is given a shot of the looker looking, and then of the thing that the looker is looking at (called a reverse-angle or shot-counter-shot procedure). One can read Wenders in his diary discovering it for himself:

Michelangelo has set up two cameras in the alleyway . . . Something that had been hinted at in the production meetings here becomes clear: he is used to shooting with two cameras simultaneously. It never occurs to him to create two separate set-ups. I am torn. The two cameras obviously interfere with one another; they cannot both shoot in an ideal manner, and the angles at

the editing stage cannot possibly be made to correspond . . . But, if that's the way Michelangelo has always worked, then it is pointless to suggest something else now . . .

This method undoubtedly creates a greater distance from the characters: neither . . . John [Malkovich] nor Sophie [Marceau] [*the characters are given no names in the episode—CW*] reflect the point of view of the narrator. It is exclusively Michelangelo's perspective; he stands beside the characters and does not identify with them, in fact the contrary. After analysing the problem with Donata [Wenders] I come to the conclusion that it is hardly surprising that I should find these two cameras a nuisance. I have always 'entered inside' my protagonists. Michelangelo's look is far more detached, which in all probability doesn't necessarily mean 'non-participatory'. What his cameras see is not, so to speak, seen with the eyes of anyone, but expresses an 'objective observation'. That's the only way I can explain the freedom with which Michelangelo handles the zoom. In fact, this instrument is like a red rag to a bull for me, precisely because it doesn't translate the look of the human eye, but represents a technical look. A human being must move nearer to an object to see it close-up, and a camera can do this by approaching closer to its object. No human eye can 'zoom in' on something. But over this Michelangelo has no scruples.

. . . What one sensed yesterday has today been confirmed: Michelangelo used the zoom in almost every shot; he has no inhibitions about using it all the time. One shot leaves me particularly perplexed, starting on Sophie [inside the boutique window] and zooming out to reveal John in front of the window. Since the camera is static, it cannot hide the zoom with a pan or a camera movement, and so the zoom is recognisable as such, and seems to me very abrupt. At the same time, by means of the zoom Michelangelo sets up the successive unfolding of the scene in such a fluid and surprising way that my 'aesthetic perplexities' seem to me rather out of place. It's clear that he has this type of solution to problems in his blood.

. . . Up to now he has rehearsed and set up the entire scene as a master-shot, and hence in a continuum, without any cuts. Again I wonder whether he has in his mind the next shot. Will he do any close-ups? . . . I don't have the impression that he thinks according to the mechanics of different shots which must *follow one another*. So this is why there are two cameras, and hence the angles arise from a *simultaneity*. I gradually begin to see how Michelangelo doesn't think in terms of a succession of shots. He thinks from within each single shot, or within the individual shots when he shoots with more than one camera . . . He doesn't plan in advance this spatio-temporal continuum which we call film, in the way an architect plans a building in order then to carry out the plan, but instead slowly lays one stone upon another, and in so doing he allows himself to be guided more by the reality of his scene than by a plan worked out in advance. And in the end, out of this 'empirical' method rises a complex building which is perhaps even more open to its inhabitants—and equally to the observer—than would be one that had been planned out in advance.

Later I am also struck by how few reverse-angle sequences there are in his films and how he has always

guided us through his stories with long and complicated camera movements.

. . . Later . . . In fact we have also managed to get a close-up of John, then we lose the daylight. Now we need the corresponding close-up of Sophie. As far as the light is concerned, there isn't a problem, because the window is not in the frame. But evidently these shots of faces in close-up are not to Michelangelo's taste. He was none too convinced he really needed them, and during the shot of John he even fell asleep.

The characteristic Antonionian distance from his characters, to which Wenders refers early on in the extracts, explains the sense of coolness and the inability to feel and communicate feeling that critics and viewers report about his films. Certainly, during a love-scene, a viewer who is accustomed to conventional cinema's enormous use of subjective shots (to put the viewer in the place of the character who is feeling an emotion) can easily interpret this detached viewpoint as connoting an emotional incompleteness. I think it is a 'reading' mistake; the viewer is misreading the significance of the procedure, because Antonioni is a passionate man, and his films are about passion, anguish, and the communication of those feelings between people and to the viewer.

I have quoted at length from Wenders' diary. Many people will read this article before seeing the film. Perhaps we can concentrate on a scene referred to by Wenders in such a way that viewers then going to see the film can be prepared to watch closely what happens, and decide for themselves what they think of Antonioni's procedures.

Elsewhere in this issue there is a complete synopsis. We are concerned with "**The Girl, the Crime,**" ("**La ragazza, il delitto**") the second episode, set in Portofino, which was however shot first, during a week in November 1994 (Portofino is a select, golden summer resort, and the choice of a windy, rainy November with blue-grey hues is characteristic of Antonioni). After two high, distant establishing shots of the town, the episode—in which the 'Director' meets and makes love to a murderess—begins with John walking down an alleyway, and seeing Sophie coming out of a doorway, whereupon the camera concentrates on her, while John follows her. After three brief shots, the fourth is a sequence shot as she pauses, picks a flower, smells it, and proceeds out of the frame into which John appears following her, while the fifth has her entering the frame on the waterfront, joining the owner of the boutique [played by Enrica Fico] in front of the shop, which they open; as they do so, John walks into the frame, past them along the quay into the depth of the frame, and then turns and comes back towards the shop window, the camera very slightly moving and