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QUADERNI DEI RESTAURI
THE FILMS RESTORED AT THE CINETECA NAZIONALE



LA DIRECTED BY MICHELANGELO
ANTONIONI
NOTTE

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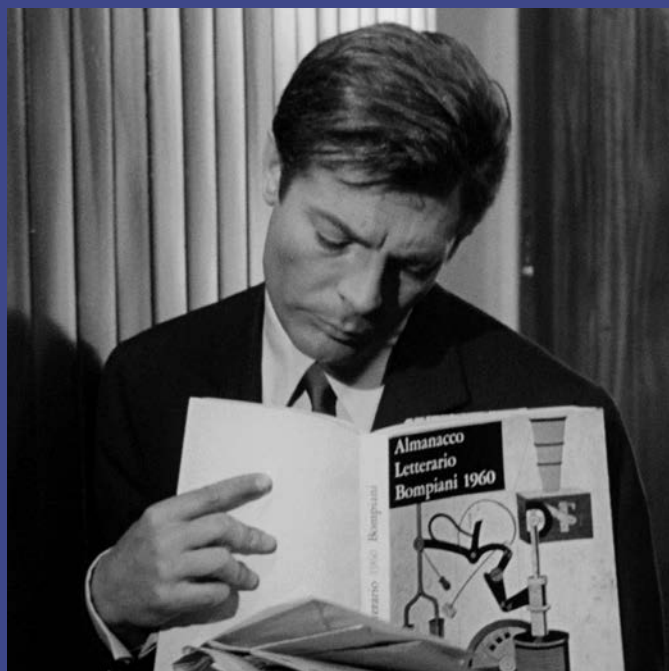
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Mastroianni/Pontano: the monotony of an existential crisis

The Journey to the End of the Night of Michelangelo Antonioni

Franco Bernini

I had been told about it as a heap of all that I didn't like in film: stories of rich people who get exhausted among tired social rituals, and the main character was a writer in a crisis, no less.

As it turned out, this wasn't the case. Because what makes a huge difference is *how* a story is told. I perceived it when I unwillingly went to the cinema for *La notte*. The disturbing music during the title credits alone, the descent down the walls of the Pirelli skyscraper to street level, were things that intrigued me. Then when in the opening scene Giovanni Pontano, the writer, along with his wife Lidia visits their dying friend and behaves ignobly, which horrifies himself, I realized that there was no self-complacency – on the contrary, it was the account of a true dismay beyond all roles, all classes.

What won me over, soon afterwards, was Lidia's wandering alone through Milan, up to the outskirts, Sesto San Giovanni, possibly tempted to look for trouble, certainly seeking a past that cannot come back. Ah, those women (Lidia here, Valentina further onwards) forever sporting high heels, even on the most impervious grounds, wearing those slinky dresses, apparently demure, dangerously sensuous, and yet just as much disoriented. Impossible not to fall for them.

From then onwards, it was easy to spend the day together those two restless spouses, follow them into the night in the villa of an industrialist who has too much money and the rare gift of an ironic woman for a wife. Everything blows out there, within the apparent respect of social ways – the men always in a suit, no drunks around. We are let in into a space which is the lack of meaning of life, where all the guests, when the couple arrives, are intent on greeting a horse that, unlike humans, should go to bed early not to pick bad habits.

From then on, potentially catastrophic events are lurking each minute. Lidia and Giovanni lose sight of each other on purpose in a room filled with glasses and reflections (screens, as our smartphones would be today) with each of them pursuing betrayal with composure and resolution.

Husband and wife are depicted with the same accuracy. They are followed step by step while they tread on dangerous paths (Orson Welles would reproach Antonioni about this

slow progression, but that's the beauty of it). She lets a certain offhand hunk, Roberto, take her away, he hovers around Valentina, the host's daughter, who shows off how alien to that crowd she is, and yet nests in there. In her seeming absent-mindedness, Valentina consciously attracts. She is the one who conducts the game, she appears, disappears, wrongfoots.

It is a long night during which anything can happen and does not. Not coincidentally, but because unostentatiously some precise choices are made. Lidia and Giovanni will go back to chasing each other, hiding, and going after each other again. Then dawn suddenly appears behind Valentina (an image that strikes and surprises, even though we know that sunrise is inevitable). It can't be different, anyway: the light is offered by a goddess who dismisses husband and wife saying, "You have really worn me out tonight." It transpires what kind of game was played.

Giovanni and Lidia (he still wearing his suit and tie, she her high heels), instead of returning to their car, walk in a meadow, enter into a wood, as if they were attracted to that nature from which they have refrained so far, being city animals. Here the writers win hands down (the film was co-written by Ennio Flaiano and Tonino Guerra, along with Antonioni, but at that time I wasn't even aware of the existence of screenwriters, not to mention of this prominence).

Lidia takes a love letter from her purse. She reads it for her husband. It's about her waking up in a bed, it's about the fact that the night, a happy one, seems to last forever being close to her. Giovanni gets irritated and jealous. He wants to know who wrote the letter. "You did," answers Lidia.

There is in this situation, in this dialogue line, all the greatness and burden of the things we did and lost, by mistake, by forgetfulness, or in haste. This doesn't mean we cannot resuscitate them. It's something that concerns us all. Becoming aware of this, it's the film's gift for us.

Antonioni, Woody, and the last glance on Monica

Mario Sesti

“Antonioni arrives today, but if he were to have a look at the films that come to Lido from all over the world, he wouldn’t find traces of or heirs to the architecture of his images, in which characters and objects interplay like silhouettes and outlines in a contemporary art painting, or like sounds and noises in a Boulez or Stockhausen concert. He wouldn’t find the infinite reiteration of frames that beams, doors, windows, and balconies outline in his shots as if multiplying the screen’s borders, like two opposing mirrors, *ad infinitum*; he wouldn’t find traces of the sensuous designer’s elegance with which he portrayed bodies of film stars, male anatomies, and colours and contours that were fashionable in those years. For the cinema of today, he is such a cumbersome father that he can only receive devotion or admiration: yet, Antonioni carved out early technologies (in the eighties, he was the first who brought a film made with electronics, *The Mystery of Oberwald*, to Lido) when his grandsons holstering their Mini DVs or shouldering their Sony Cinealta Digital, now swarming through Venice or Los Angeles, still hadn’t set foot in a movie theatre.” Thus wrote a reporter who in 2002 commented on the retrospective dedicated by the Venice Film Festival to the film director. He was still alive, but an invalid, as was Monica Vitti, who already had left all kinds of stages due to an even more severe medical condition. Now that they have both disappeared, their return to Lido in one of the films of the trilogy that has left a deep, indelible mark on the modern era of cinema, it is worth going back on an almost unparalleled human and esthetical, artistic and sentimental bond across the pathos of distance.

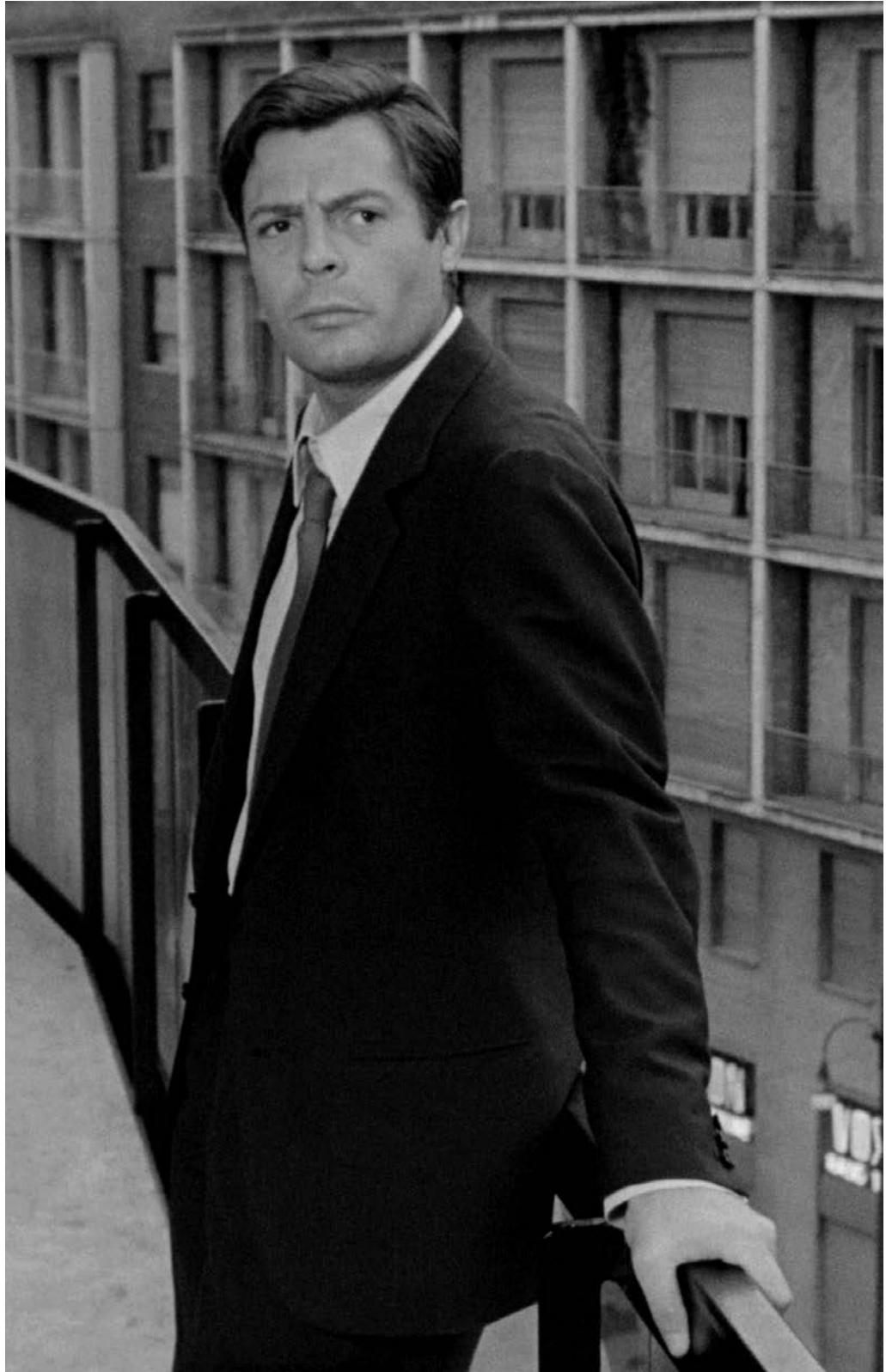
“Monica Vitti is inextricably intertwined with Antonioni’s sentimental pessimism, she is an icon of sensitivity forsaken in a world of lost feelings and alienating beauty,” reads one of the most chic film dictionaries (David Thomson’s *A Biographical Dictionary of Film*). Thomson presents a suggestive scan of Vitti’s characters in *L’avventura*, *La notte*, *L’eclisse*. In fact, photos from news stories about the couple (he in white shirt and a minuscule tie knot, she wearing a men’s trench coat or looking bronzed, barefoot, with an unbuttoned blouse and her hair swirling on her neck and forehead) convey a feeling of ease with success, talent, and their sentiments.

La notte, possibly the most literary among his films, is scattered with quotes from James Joyce (the short story “The Dead” cherished by Antonioni, which he always imagined turning into a film that John Huston was to make); from Hermann Broch (*The Sleepwalkers*, a huge book that Vitti’s character undertakes reading); from Musil (from *The Man Without Qualities*, with a character towards the end quoting “Our time is vile and anti-philosophical; it lacks the courage to say what’s of value and what isn’t. As for democracy, simply put it means, ‘Take things as they come.’”) It is the film in which Mastrianni is a writer who is offered a position in the industrialist’s company for him to tell to his employees and the world; and in which Vitti and Moreau for most of the time are seen with the same black evening dress, the same thin straps that frame the naked skin of the décolletage like slender ink brackets: they are almost a feminine double, two opposed mirrors multiplying *ad infinitum* their haughty, seducing image which flusters the film’s sidereal and alienating world with a physical and sensual presence - which makes them seem a sort of representatives of a different species. More than anyone Antonioni, in post-war Italian culture, was the director who became the lodestar of international arthouse film: not coincidentally, from Wim Wenders to Wong Kar Wai, all the filmmakers capable of inventing and owning a style have considered him as a crucial point of reference. His passion for the form of images, his gaze filled with amazement, curiosity, and attention towards women, and his capacity to crop out bits of our contemporary world and show it on the silver screen as if it were an enigmatic, inexhaustible, menacing, and fascinating planet have given substance to a unique adventure made of films that are mental and sensory experiences. But his creativity in images and sounds, always willing to explore the landscape of contemporary taste (from fashion to architecture, from music to painting, from the Swinging London to Mao’s China, from the desert of affluence to the secret of feelings), could always rely – in its early evolutionary phase – on the objection of tenderness or nostalgia, cheerfulness or anxiety, that the emotional intelligence of an actress like Monica Vitti could bring in his shots at any moment: beginning with those in *La notte* where she bursts into the film tossing objects across the floor, something that she had seen Antonioni himself and Flaiano do. (Can we really imagine the two, during breaks from screenwriting, on their knees, throwing cigarette cases or lighters or what else from one end of a room’s floor to another?)

Traces of obvious influences of Antonioni’s cinema in current films are not easily found; conversely, impossible not to find evidence of unconditional admiration in the cinema of the past. I saw Woody Allen in person pay homage to him: leaning toward him and telling him how much he loved his cinema. It was 1999 and I introduced *Red Desert* at the MoMA in New York after curating its restoration for Mediaset (the print at MoMA

was so damaged that they called it *Yellow Desert*). Antonioni had been in a wheelchair for years; he could only move one arm and express himself by moving his head. In the afternoon, we had gone through all the floors of the Guggenheim with Enrica Fico and Antonioni, who pushed for skipping Renoir or Picasso to see Mondrian or Kandinsky. With a quick movement of the arm, he would invite us to neglect the former, and halt in contemplation before the latter. That evening, we took him at Café Carlyle to listen to Allen playing the clarinet with his band. Between a piece by Jelly Roll Morton and one by Louis Armstrong, Allen, in a white shirt, holding his clarinet, came close to our table to shake hands with him. For some reason I could not explain, there was Liv Ullman too that night. When Allen came to our table, she did too. We were at the Carlyle, in the place where Allen had been playing for over thirty years. The same room painted in warm hues, with a magenta dominance, featured in a scene from *Hannah and Her Sisters*. The next evening, at the screening of the restored film, Gena Rowlands and Sidney Lumet, among others, also showed up. Monica Vitti didn't. Her disease was already a serious nuisance, and after thinking it over, she decided not to embark on this trip; instead, she recorded a video message, with the help of Claudio Trionfera. It may be the last time she appeared in front of a camera – and it was to apologize for not being there, with us, at the MoMA. She was on a terrace, wearing glasses and a sort of voluminous peach-coloured scarf. Sitting by the side of Antonioni, that evening, I had the privilege of intercepting between the two, between her, once again on a screen, and him sitting in the dark in the audience, perhaps the last glance.

CONVERSATIONS



Marcello Mastroianni with Milan of the early sixties in the background

Antonioni's perfect shots

A conversation with Marco Bellocchio

by Mario Sesti

“It was the early sixties: more exactly, right after *L'avventura*. On one side, in Italy, there were the young filmmakers who were very much taken with the French nouvelle vague. Godard, Truffaut, Resnais. On the other side, there were the masters of the post-war period: Visconti and Fellini. It's not like we disregarded them (Fellini, for me, was an extraordinary discovery, years later), but the Italian counterpart of the research conducted in French cinema was Antonioni, especially for the extraordinary rigour of his style. When you are young, very young, that counts a lot. It's not like it doesn't count now. It does. But for me then, Antonioni represented that purity which I deeply admired in auteurs like Bresson and Godard:” before becoming the leading director of the Italian nouvelle vague, Marco Bellocchio has loved and also studied Antonioni. Not only as a passionate spectator and aspiring filmmaker, but also as a student. “At the end of the courses which I took at the Slade School of Fine Arts, 1963-64, I chose precisely a dissertation on Bresson and Antonioni. I also managed to interview him, for this reason. I remember meeting him in Piazza del Popolo. We sat on the edge of the fountain in the centre of the square and I asked him a few questions. Antonioni, as you probably know, didn't talk much, but after this encounter he invited me on the set of *Red Desert*, where I had the opportunity to see him at work. I was 23 years old.”

Digging deeper in what you said, when you mention style, we could agree that it is precisely about the feeling that we have when we watch one of his shots - that everything, from image composition, to the style of lighting, to the costumes, the hairdos, from the fashion to the architecture, is dominated by a gaze and an intentionality that are absolute.

It's not like we no longer do this kind of work, we do it, but on a much more cursory level: being quick is somewhat mandatory in these days, like, for example, using a 'blinking' editing style. Then, instead, there was this slowness, there was an all-embracing idea of film directing. As they used to say back then, Antonioni used the actors just like puppets. He was the anti-Stanislavsky, that is, his film directing was completely at odds with the idea of encouraging acting as a form of identification in the character. Something that, as far as I am concerned, can look like a contradiction: I like actors. But he, his actors, made

them move in an extremely geometric, precise and rigid way, with dialogues which were also the object of a few jokes, but were nonetheless a revelatory mix of surprising truths. In *La notte* there is a shot that I still like very much, a tracking shot on the car during a sudden summer rainstorm, with water pouring and the two characters sitting in the car. It's Moreau and a man who attempts flirting with her. They move like dark silhouettes inside the car cabin : we see their lips move but can only hear the rain pouring down. And the opening scene as well, when Mastroianni visits a friend and fellow writer, and is almost sexually assaulted by a patient. Those were perfect expressive moments, the shots were perfect, they looked like the result of an absolute expressive research. Another beautiful scene is the swimming pool scene, just ahead of the car scene I mentioned earlier, during which everyone jumps into the water. The images get charged with grotesque registers too, breaking the sense of iciness, coldness, abstract beauty that are Antonioni's trademark. Let's remember that Antonioni loved Rothko and Informalist painting.

Speaking of nouvelle vague, in the film there is Jeanne Moreau who'd become famous with Malle's Elevator to the Gallows for her nocturnal walks. Antonioni repropose her metropolitan wandering and, in some ways, the film also establishes a sort of face-off of two icons, she and Vitti, both examples of modern cinema taking shape on both sides of the Alps.

In reality I know that Moreau wasn't at all satisfied with her work in the film: she didn't like Antonioni's approach towards the actors, whereas Mastroianni was the genius who adjusted to anything. In any case, there was a strong correlation between what happened in Italy and in France. *L'avventura* was unbelievably successful over there, remember?

Godard, in Contempt, has a character say that a good film should be an Antonioni film shot by Hawks. According to Truffaut, instead, Antonioni was "important" but "boring." I discovered and loved him thanks to *L'avventura*, *L'eclissi*, *La notte*. I also remember fairly heated discussions with Grazia Cherchi and my brother Piergiorgio who were on the cultural frontline with a then important magazine, *I Quaderni piacentini*. What didn't convince them was the lack of social commitment in his films, the detachment from everything, and I believe this political stance was shared by a large area of left-wing radicalism. I, instead, thought that beauty should have its own symbology, and still do. I think that underneath the cold surface, throughout Antonioni, transpires a constant pulse of passion, even if a restrained one.

Tuning in the vision: the face and light

Beppe Lanci

For the Cineteca Nazionale, the National Film Archive at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia (where I am the Artistic Director of the course in Cinematography), I am often involved in the colour correction of the films that are restored. The actual restoration is conducted by the Cineteca technicians, but when we get to the final step, which once corresponded to the printing, a cinematographer surveys the process, almost frame by frame, before producing the definitive digital file. On various occasions, I followed the colour correction in the restoration of films which I had signed as DoP, such as Nanni Moretti's *Red Wood Pigeon*, the Taviani brothers' *Good Morning Babylon*, or Andrei Tarkovsky's *Nostalghia*. At other times, I surveyed films cinematographed by colleagues like Giuseppe De Santis' *Under the Olive Tree*, photographed by Piero Portalupi; the Taviani's *Night of the Shooting Stars*, photographed by Franco Di Giacomo (and awarded Best Restored Film at Venezia Classici 2018); and Antonioni's *La notte*, photographed by Gianni Di Venanzo. It is an extremely interesting assignment, because it lets a cinematographer of the present into the work done by a colleague in the past – in the case of *La notte*, Gianni Di Venanzo. You can finetune with his vision, discover his methods of lighting, his technique, the things he was more interested in and those he cared less for, the way he combined faces and locations, the precautions he took for photographic continuity. In *La notte*, in a context of a freewheeling approach – for which Di Venanzo was known – I took notice of a painstaking care in lighting the close-ups, which intrigued me, with shots in which the light is in the service of the actors. For the third character, Monica Vitti, Di Venanzo resorted to a more slanted, more contrasted light, which he didn't for Jeanne Moreau. Because the face of Vitti, who was younger, could stand this kind of light. And perhaps because her character, Valentina, only appears at night, in the lengthy night sequence in which the light effects are emphasized.

(texts collected by Silvia Tarquini)

An unforgettable debut: *La notte* according to Maria Pia Luzi

Domenico Monetti

La notte is your debut in film. Can you tell me how you were chosen by Michelangelo Antonioni?

I was very keen on working with Michelangelo Antonioni. I went to his home already at the time of *L'avventura* to inquire whether there was a part for me. He answered no. At the time I had a great deal of initiative and would never let go. I didn't lose heart. When I was told he was going to do *La notte*, I rang the famous bell and he opened the door in person. I asked him if he could hire me for the film. He didn't say. At that point, I heard a voice asking who it was. That was Tonino Guerra, who was writing the script. He asked Michelangelo, "What does she want?" and Antonioni said, "She wants a part in the film, which might be there if we hadn't promised it to another girl." The actress in question was Rosy Mazzacurati. Luckily, Tonino insisted. "No, look, she is better for the part. We'll find something else for Rosy." Thus, I managed to join *La notte*. I remember Antonioni saying, "I don't want to see you until the production company calls you to sign the contract." As soon as I signed, I left for Milan, where the film was set. The clinic scene was filmed in the Pirelli skyscraper. I remember going to the hotel where the crew was staying, and I began to work in the film.

What was the experience like? Did you retain pleasant memories?

Very. I got along with both Antonioni and Marcello Mastroianni, a true gentleman. And I got along very well with Monica Vitti. It was she, by the way, requested by Antonioni, who chose the famous black nightgown that appears in the clinic scene, worn by the sick woman who I played: Vitti was nice and helpful. So we filmed this scene in which I got slapped a lot by the nurses, based on what the script said. At a certain moment that scene was cut; at times depending on the version there is an almost integral scene, whereas in other versions they left just a tiny bit. I don't know whether the version you restored is the uncut or not.

Before La Notte, you worked a lot in theatre...

Yes, *La notte* was my debut in film. Stage acting has always been in my life, before, during, and after Antonioni. I also worked a lot in television.

After La notte, did you keep in touch with Antonioni?

We were in contact for a film, the one on location in the US...

Zabriskie Point...

Precisely. But then nothing more. I lost my initiative. I didn't call back. And I devoted myself to the stage and the television. In TV, I had several roles: announcer, host, and actress.

What was Antonioni's approach in directing actors?

A very good one. He was very patient, at ease with me. I was on a scene with Mastroianni. Antonioni directing us was extremely pleasant. With me, he was very kind and thoughtful: I was a shy, naïve young woman, and I felt somehow embarrassed and ashamed for the scene I had to do, for example that of the kiss. Instead, Antonioni was very understanding. I remember very well Mastroianni saying to Antonioni, "Look, she would give me a kiss me for real, but not in front of everyone." Marcello Mastroianni was an exquisite person.

The words of Flaiano, the challenge of emotions, the jealousy of Vitti

*A conversation with Enrica Fico Antonioni
by Luca Pallanch*

Almost forty years of art and life with the film director whose gaze has deeply influenced modern cinema: Enrica Fico met Antonioni after *Zabriskie Point* and stood by him until the final shots of his films and of his insatiable thirst for adventure and curiosity for the images and the world: “With him, I learned to see.” The Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia, on the occasion of the restoration of *La notte*, invited her to discuss the film and the relationship that Antonioni had with it.

How do you evaluate La notte in the career of your husband?

If I were Kubrick, I’d rank it among the top ten films in the history of cinema. But since I am not Kubrick, I rank it very high; it’s one of the films I like best, especially because the presence of a great screen-writer such as Ennio Flaiano is palpable. I have rewatched the film recently, and I was struck by the texture of words, all the dialogues.

The literary references...

In my opinion, Flaiano’s support was extraordinary. Michelangelo perhaps was not used to being supported by a writer as important and strong as Flaiano. This can be perceived in *La notte*, and it is a decisive contribution, besides the cinematography, the actors, and the way of moving them, placing them in Michelangelo’s trademark landscapes. What struck me when I rewatched it a few days ago was the depth of speech.

Tonino Guerra co-wrote the script...

However, Tonino was more of a poet and was more cinematic than Flaiano, who made a different use of words: something that struck me positively.

It is an extremely modern film that deals with the theme of men-women relationships under its many forms.

There is an autobiographical element, even though Michelangelo denied making autobiographical films ’til death. I am positive about this; I was with him for thirty-six years. He was adamant about not placing too much importance on feelings; he didn’t want to

succumb to them. He would look down on them, like Marcello in *La notte*, who however gives in to female power in the end.

In some way, Mastroianni was Michelangelo's alter ego in the film. One would not tend to think of him in these terms, on the grounds of the two having very different personalities. True, but nothing is left of Marcello there. He is much more similar to Michelangelo; I believe there is much of the latter even though he denied this at the time and in later years. Toward the end of his life, he no longer denied that there was some autobiography in what he did, also because cinema served to understand himself and his emotions. He needed not to be subdued by feelings, especially by love, passion. He looked at them from a distance, just like he always positioned the camera in the position of a witness, at a high angle, without feeling. He had learned Godard's lesson: camera positions are a question of morality. He would set up three cameras: two reacted to feelings, the third didn't. This was positioned at a high angle, proving that he had an extraordinary technical mastery in filmmaking, unlike many directors. It was very difficult to line up a shot with three cameras, but with two you're bound to miss something. Michelangelo didn't want to miss anything and therefore he set up a third camera that was immune to emotion.

Cold.

Yes, cold, a witness.

What did Antonioni think of La notte?

He loved it, like the whole trilogy [*L'avventura, La notte, L'eclisse: editor's note*]. He would rewatch his films as if he hadn't made them. He would identify with someone who sensed, who created, who foresaw the camera movements, the dialogues, the actors, the movements, the light, the locations, far from himself. He had the decency of not confusing himself with his self, of not talking about his self. He watched them as if someone else had directed them!

He watched them as a viewer.

Yes. Once, we saw *Red Desert*. He was already no longer talking. At the end he placed a hand on his forehead as if to say, "I must have been insane to make this film!" He rewatched it as a viewer, indeed.

Did you go over the films frequently?

Very frequently, because he liked to rewatch them with his audience.

Not on TV, you mean?

Also on TV, because he often watched television, especially at night, as he didn't sleep.

On the other hand, his films run always at night. He enjoyed them greatly. He was very happy about his films – of course, not when he was making them. He was never happy down to the last detail, he would always add something during editing, or the music, which was the last thing he added. When the film wrapped, a few months later, or years later, then he was content with what he had done.

Did he rewatch them all or was there some film that touched him more emotionally?
The only one that he has never considered as entirely his own was *The mystery of Oberwald*. It was an experiment and he had fun making it, but Cocteau's text was not his cup of tea.

What did he feel rewatching the actors after so many years?

Especially about *La notte*, he told me that he had entertained a particular relationship with the actors, because Monica Vitti was very jealous. Michelangelo filmed most of the time with Jeanne Moreau who was the lead; Monica's part was smaller. There was tension on the set for this reason. Michelangelo could not afford to pay much attention either to Jeanne Moreau or to Marcello Mastroianni – in fact, Jeanne has been angry towards Michelangelo for a very long time. They met again when Michelangelo went to Cannes to get back the Palme d'or that had been stolen from his house at Collina Fleming, in Rome, along with the Oscar, the Lion, and the Golden Bear. All the film festivals gave him another one. We went to Cannes to receive the new Palme, Jeanne gave it to him. In that moment, thanks to me, who wanted to meet her and that the two talked to each other, they reconciled. Jeanne declared that the making of the film was very difficult because Michelangelo would not talk to her and she thought that that was the way he was, that was his approach to the actors. In reality, it was a consequence of Monica's jealousy. I can say this because it is a known fact. Jeanne used to say, "He only made me walk: I walked for kilometres and kilometres!" Michelangelo always had his actors walk. All the screen tests which I have seen consisted first of all of walking back and forth, back and forth. Through that silent walk he managed to understand what the actor was like in the shot, including their height and gait.

The Posture

And the posture. And then he made them talk. Michelangelo was an architect and a painter. His first approach was to compose the shot from a figurative point of view. Therefore, the actor must fit in the shot. First he would choose the actor, then he would go location scouting, after that he would place the actor in the chosen location, and at last, in case, he would change the script based on the actor and location. This was Michelangelo's way.

White on white: the inventions of Tonino Guerra and the world of Antonioni

*A conversation with Andrea Guerra
by Luca Pallanch*

Having composed the music scores of over 40 films, Andrea Guerra has collaborated with directors such as Ferzan Ozpetek and Luca Guadagnino, Riccardo Milani and Carlo Verdone among others. He has lived since his childhood with his father Tonino – a writer, screenwriter, and poet – in a familiar landscape in which masters of cinema like Fellini, Tarkovsky, and Antonioni were habitual figures. What follows is his recollections of the long, important, and unique relationship of his father with the director of *La notte*.

What was the relationship between Michelangelo Antonioni and your father, Tonino Guerra, like?

Speaking of Michelangelo and Tonino, we speak of a friendship, not just the work they did together. What they did was modern for their times: for the themes, for the outlook on femininity, for the originality of the locations, often the set of city stories. They would nurture work and play at the same time. They had a lot of fun together. They would make contests anywhere: in Piazzale Clodio, in my father's house in Rome, one would take the lift, the other would run on foot and see who arrived first. Or they played with stones, all the time. They entertained an active relationship with the times they lived in. I remember asking my father about *Blow-Up*, "How did the idea come up?" "Look, Andrea, we were with Michelangelo. In Italy it seemed you could only tell stories about mafia or the pope, that is, religion or political violence – we looked around, went to London, and we realized what was really changing: the result was that portrait." In *Zabriskie Point*, the relationship became a bit stifling, because Tonino liked to work alone as well, take a break for reflection. He loved structure and to come up with an important idea with a snap, a high note that could carry the film. Also because it was the director who made the film, there was no point discussing all the ins and outs, all those dialogues. Tonino needed his pauses. But he was besieged by these film directors who wanted, perhaps, to write a conventional script. He told me, "I was so tired that I needed a break. I took the jeep, I rode into the desert, and found a hillock from which someone was extracting, maybe, coal. I went in, and I heard a loud noise. I came out and there was Antonioni with the helicopter

calling me, ‘Tonino, Tonino!’” Michelangelo had seen the tracks of the jeep wheels and had followed them. It was an amusing friendship. I heard many of these anecdotes.

Unlike what his films seem to suggest, Antonioni was a funny and ironic person. Absolutely, a man with great irony. He was like a gentleman with that slightly British irony. I too feel like there is a sort of ‘dodecaphony’ between what his films represent and what he was like. He was playful, cordial, and had style. It’s from the two friends that Tonino’s relationship with Almodóvar began, because the Spanish director believes that the beauty of a mystery like *Blow-Up* is unique. Then a publisher sent a book of Tonino to Almodóvar’s address, and he discovered Tonino as a poet. He wrote him a letter, declaring he was a fan. Dad told me, “Almodóvar wrote to me...” “Did you reply?” “Yes, with a telegram,” “What?” “For a change!” This is how these guys played. In his autobiography, Almodóvar defines himself as a director-screenwriter, he makes this distinction; about Tonino, he says that he is a screenwriter-poet.

Did your father ever think of being a director?

You think I never asked him? In the end, he never wanted to betray words. I, as a composer, never wanted to betray notes.

Did you meet Antonioni?

I was little, but I knew well Antonioni, Tarkovsky, and especially Angelopoulos. I also met Fellini a few times. To see them work was fairly impressive, for the exchange of ideas, the politeness, for how the comment of another was accepted with enthusiasm. They would delete pages of script this way...

What was your impression rewatching La notte?

The film was released in 1961, the year I was born, therefore I’ve gone over it with curiosity. I don’t belong much in its world, but at the time it made a sensation because there was a way of making films that was completely different. What struck me is the visuals, that certainly were to influence many directors to come; think of Wenders, Wong Kar-wai, Kim Ki-duk. I saw extraordinary images and shots. I imagined the shock in the heads of less the audience than of film critics and fellow directors. Antonioni describes a certain world, a social class, an intellectual bourgeoisie, but what still blows our minds sixty years on is the stylistic perfection ahead of its times. Tonino used to say, “I was the one who suggested to Antonioni the white-on-white colour scheme,” i.e., an actor wearing a white shirt against a white wall. They reasoned on everything. It was another cinema.



“Antonioni would look down on feelings; he didn’t want to succumb to them, like Marcello in *La notte*, who however gives in to female power in the end” (Enrica Fico Antonioni)



Early-sixties Milan in *La notte*





Footage from the film before and after the restoration

COMPILATION 1 • SNAPSHOTS



Jeanne Moreau as Lidia Pontano in the film

Gianni Amelio

(film director and screenwriter)

At the time of *Red Desert*'s release, a French critic wrote that its title could have been, like for Totò's films, Antonioni in Colour. He may have been right, or not. I grew up with Antonioni in b&w, and I am still attached to those films of his. On an official occasion, with the master sitting in the front row, I said that my generation would not have existed without his cinema. I wasn't lying. My films are more indebted to Antonioni than I even realize myself. Secret fascinations unwittingly come to the surface. *La notte* came after *L'avventura*, one of the films of my life. At the time, I was overwhelmed by it. Antonioni had honed his language to the point of exhaustion; style was at the centre of everything, but it wasn't stifling, just purified from all naturalistic residues. The *primum movens* of *L'avventura* is still also narrative, while in *La notte* it is contained in the tension of a non-story, in the absolute expressivity of the naked image. Words, as we see in the last sequence, pour out all over themselves, foreshadowing another ending – that of *L'eclisse* – where the human presence wanes and no one misses it.

Angela Prudenzi

(film critic, programmer)

Against a cracked wall; across a glass pane; down a tree-lined avenue: Lidia and Valentina, the leading characters of the magnificent *La notte*, stand out in urban architectures and real landscapes to demonstrate their powerful presence already in visual terms. One, the successful writer's wife, the other, his object of desire – only seemingly distant. Obsolete models of a vain upper class that Antonioni tears off convention, making them – as he often did in his films and above all in the trilogy on modernity and its discontents – subjects that reach an awareness to become irreversible in the coming years. Lidia and Valentina are women of the future, just like the girlfriends of the film with the same name. Female figures carrying the burden of the identity crisis that was to corrode individual certainties, interpersonal relationships, love bonds. Lidia is immersed in the crisis; Valentina perceives it like a cold caress on her skin in spite of her twenty years of age. Both are lost and in search of their selves, while dealing with the male universe. Giovanni gropes around between the two, driven not by reason but by an instinct that makes him ready for sexual intercourse right when desire manifests itself. The man does not know how to wait, vs. the women who prolong intellectual and physical dialogue. During a long night in which Antonioni outlines an emblematic Milanese dolce vita, the feminine and the male are locked in an unequal fight. Giovanni, a Mastroianni already seen in a crisis in Fellini's masterpiece *8 ½*, wanders, directed by both women towards consciousness – which will be dilated until it fails. Not even in front of proof of defeat – being read the letter that he doesn't remember writing – does he succumb. On the contrary, he reacts in the only way he knows, throwing himself passionately on the body of his wife, regardless of her pushing him away. An unbridgeable gap that the film director highlights, often placing them at a distance from the man's desiring gaze, whereas when they are close, their questions remain unanswered. A mysterious world that Antonioni invites us to explore; at the very moment in which he does so, acknowledging women's moral and yet non-judgmental superiority. This is a quality that manifests itself as a welcoming disposition that has nothing maternal about it; rather, it belongs in the eros sphere. Lidia, the French Moreau, muse of the nouvelle vague, and Valentina, the Italian Vitti with her nonstandard beauty and Antonioni's inspiring part-

ner, are sentient beings free to experience or not experience sexuality, and therefore to turn away. Lidia rejects the hunk she meets at the party, Valentina dismisses Giovanni. And yet, there is an instant in which their desire emerges unbearably, when at the end of the film, as Valentina takes care of rain-soaked Lidia, they get close. At that moment, they also welcome Giovanni among them, giving substance to a three-piece erotic dance. A jolt of possible life outside the box that makes separations all the more bitter.



Jeanne Moreau and Monica Vitti (as Valentina Gherardini)

Laura Delli Colli

(film critic, journalist, curator)

The first curiosity is aroused by that strange game played by Valentina – a surprisingly brunette Monica Vitti in sixties’ style – who throws her powder compact across the black-and-white tiled floor as if it were a giant piece of chequers. A bizarre game in the dead of *La notte* for which Alberto Arbasino was to harshly criticize the film a few years later, picking on Vitti’s character: “How to define a young woman who plays all those irritating games on the floor?” Yet, Michelangelo Antonioni, the film director, and Tonino Guerra, the screenwriter (along with Ennio Flaiano and Antonioni himself), had done nothing but evoke the game that the two, with Monica, had played for weeks making a stone slide on the two-tone floor of the apartment in which they had been writing the film a few weeks earlier. The game was symbolically attuned to the women who starred in the film: Vitti and Jeanne Moreau, Valentina and Lidia, like the floor of that salon, symbolize the black and the white in Giovanni’s sentimental mirror. With Mastroianni playing the writer bored by his own bourgeois success, the latter is torn between the surprise derived by the levity of a rich and evanescent twenty-year-old and the deep disaffection of his wife Lidia – an intense Moreau – in the awareness that their marriage is coming to an end. Between two distant women and an absent man, the film explores the feelings of a couple at the end of the line exposing the temptation of a betrayal that, at dawn, in a glimpse of lucidity, is to confirm the truth of a broken marriage. Lidia confesses to Giovanni, a Mastroianni bored by the rituals of success, “I wish I didn’t exist anymore, because I can’t love you anymore,” but Valentina tells him, “Love is something wrong which burns all bridges.” “Dialogues on existential emptiness between people who suffer from a malady without knowing what that is,” was Pier Paolo Pasolini’s commentary. “Just like the bee does not know it’s a bee, the rose does not know it’s a rose, the savage does not know he’s a savage.”



Monica Vitti tossing objects across the floor for fun, in a game that is the sentimental mirror of a couple in a crisis



Jeanne Moreau and Marcello Mastroianni as Lidia and Giovanni: existential crisis and the broken marriage

COMPILATION 2 • IN REAL TIME



A close-up of an unusually brunette Monica Vitti

Jeanne Moreau

“Michelangelo has never felt the need to create harmony on his set, which was indispensable for Truffaut. We were shooting in Milan; I didn’t speak Italian very well. Nimier had had a French script done. Every now and then, Fellini would come over and add fuel to the fire. I had come from Paris with my own costumes, Chanel clothes. But under the pretext that they suited best Monica Vitti’s character, they confiscated them from me. My relationship with her was not simple. Mastroianni and I felt forsaken, and I was a controversial actress. It was palpable that something was going on in the studio.”

(Jeanne Moreau, in Marc Lambron, Un’attrice non ha età, *Il “Venerdì” di Repubblica*, 20/11/1998)

“It wasn’t an easy set. It was a critical period between Antonioni and his legitimate wife, but those are personal matters which I talked about and then I regretted, because it’s none of our business. What counts is the result of our encounter, i.e., a beautiful film. [...] The relationship of Antonioni with his actors is practically non-existent.”

(Jeanne Moreau in Catherine Spaak, Jeanne Moreau: ‘Punto sul rosso e sulla regia’, in *Corriere della sera*, 5/11/83)

“Actually, it is a nightmarish memory. A grey, freezing memory. [...] Among other things, the worst was to find out that Antonioni was incapable of showing – and therefore feeling? – any emotion. People would barely speak on the set. The only ones who did so – both feeling unhappy – were Mastroianni and I...”

(Jeanne Moreau in Jose Luis De Vilallonga, *Femmes*, Editions Stock, Paris 1975)

Monica Vitti

“After *L’avventura*, when someone cried enthusiastically at the masterpiece, began the struggle to go ahead. I soon received new job offers, other normal films, money. But all I could do was reject everything. At the time, I believed I couldn’t do anything outside of his world, and mine, of our stories, of our cinema that originated from our life. In Valentina as well, the girl of *La notte*, there was me. Even though I lacked the weight of her bourgeoisie, there was the playful element. In terms of invention, in terms of change in reality, I believe playing games is the most important thing of my life. The game that Valentina plays with Mastroianni’s character was a game that we did during the film preparation to relax. In Michelangelo’s house there was a lobby in white and black marble. We would play with stones – him, Tonino Guerra, and I – to see who got closest to a given point.”

(Monica Vitti in Maria Pia Fusco, Io e Michelangelo, quando eravamo soli contro tutti, *la Repubblica*, August 14, 1981)

“After *L’avventura*, *La notte* was the second film with Michelangelo. The lead actors were Jeanne Moreau and Marcello Mastroianni. There were the ideal conditions to work well: we were obliged to film at night, in Barlassina, a beautiful golf club near Milan. It wasn’t chosen for the characters to play golf, but Michelangelo liked the place, the green, and the cold quiet of man-made landscaping. The small valleys were fake, like the ponds and hills. So well-kept because it didn’t belong to anyone. Slightly sad. You felt that the landscape was secondary, the important thing was the hole. I used to observe the players’ attention, concentration before the stroke. It was soothing. The shooting began at sunset and ended in the morning. We came back at sunrise. It lasted one month. It’s not bad to go to sleep when everyone else wakes up. It is a way to avoid encounter, problems, the light. With *La notte*, Michelangelo and I won the Silver Ribbon in 1962. The film went on to win the Golden Bear at the Berlin film festival, the David di Donatello award, and other awards as well.”

(in Monica Vitti, *Sette sottane*, Sperling&Kupfer Editori, Milan 1993)

“I liked many things about Valentina’s character: she was ironic, curious, and didn’t take herself seriously. What I didn’t have was her detachment from things and the weight of her social class. Perhaps, I have more fun when I play a working-class woman that lets herself be ‘eaten’ by reality. However, I was fascinated by Valentina: I saw her like a fire burning underneath the ashes. Because it’s not like in Antonioni’s films there are no passions; but they are examined, dominated, and controlled. It’s somehow the way Diderot wished the actors were: feel emotions without ever lose control of them. Michelangelo’s characters are fiery but afraid, possibly disappointed, but ready to fall in the vortex, which they can’t live without.”

(Monica Vitti, in Franca Faldini and Goffredo Fofi, ed. by, *L’avventurosa storia del cinema italiano 1960-1969*, Feltrinelli, Milan 1981)

“I remember Jeanne Moreau as a fascinating woman, a very good actress (she was dubbed for her Italian wasn’t perfect), full of life. A woman who had had a thousand adventures, love stories, passions, and interests. ‘A Frenchwoman,’ my mother would say. *La notte* was justly filmed at night, a luxury that only Antonioni could afford: in his films, the cold is cold (*Red Desert*, 17 degrees below zero), the snow is snow, the fog is fog, an island is an island, the sea is the sea. The location: a golf club, La Barlassina, an endless clover green. It was a full immersion in darkness, without ever having to do with the world, with reality. During the day we would sleep, at night we worked. It was the ideal not to be distracted, to be focused, to make a good film.”

(Monica Vitti, in Laura Delli Colli, *Monica Vitti*, Gremese, Rome 1987)

Marcello Mastroianni

“I admired him greatly, I accepted *La notte* with enthusiasm. But then I didn’t like the script. I found the existential crisis of this writer Giovanni Pontano (I disliked him so much that he is one of the few characters whose name I remember) not credible. The story was told in cartoonish terms; the dialogues were conventional; Vitti’s character shifted everything, it seemed like a photostory to me: but expressing doubts about Antonioni was pointless, the atmosphere was tense; Jeanne Moreau and I found ourselves together in a marriage of the oppressed, or shipwrecked. If I dare say it, it is to show how much faith I had put in it: and I still think that in *La notte* story and dialogue don’t work, while the images are amazing.”

(Marcello Mastroianni in Lietta Tornabuoni, Mastroianni: ‘Perché non vincerò l’Oscar,’ *Corriere della sera*, 01.03.1978)

Michelangelo Antonioni

“One of the questions people ask me most often is why my films are so slow. I try to give my stories a cadence that is the cadence of life itself, sometimes rushed, sometimes stagnant. I know, it is difficult for a viewer, who goes to the cinema to be entertained, to feel involved in my story that is not based on the conventional mechanism of events but on an inner one. For this reason, *La notte* too may seem like a slow and boring film. But if the viewers manage to overcome this semblance of boredom and let themselves be caught in it, then perhaps they will discover that there is another rhythm in the film, one that is no less dynamic than that of mainstream films: it is a rhythm that concerns feelings, their unfolding along the lines of the story. Isn’t that how it happens in life? Aren’t our acts, our gestures, our words, the consequence of a psychological and sentimental movement taking place within us? And why should we order the natural disorder of human nature, that is, give it a tight and artificial rhythm? Certainly, such a film requires greater participation from the audience. But so does reading a book, books too have pages that are not easy to read – sometimes the most beautiful.”

(Michelangelo Antonioni in *I film del giorno*, by Federazione Italiana Circoli del Cinema, 1962)

“In *Story of a Love Affair* I played this game with Lucia Bosè many times. She thought it was over, I would tell her from behind «don’t stop,» she continued, and I continued shooting. This way, I could capture spontaneous motions for the screen which perhaps I would not have been able to provoke in a different way [...]. All this work laid the groundwork for the results obtained in *La notte*. From then on, I mean [...], I believe I have come to strip myself, to free myself of many things, which at the time were also formal concerns. I say formal not in the sense that I absolutely wanted to achieve certain visual results. It’s not that. I never worried about that. Instead, I have always been con-

cerned with trying to give a greater suggestion to the image through a particular visual commitment, so that an image composed in a particular way helped me to say what I wanted to say with that shot, and helped the characters themselves to express what they had to express; moreover, it also created a relationship between the character and the background, that is to say, what lies behind the character. I think, as I said, that I really got rid of all that. In a way, my latest film, *La notte*, was a revelation for me. With regard to actors, I have my own ideas, I don't know whether right or wrong. Today, taking stock of my work with the actors, I can say that I worked in a certain way because I did not feel like working in a different way, because I felt it was right, because I realised that I was achieving certain results which I could not achieve through another system. On top of this, I am not like those directors, like De Sica and Visconti, who can make the actor 'see' the scene, act it out. This is something I wouldn't know how to do because I can't act. However, I think I know what I want from the actor. For me, an actor does not have to understand. This is the big difficulty I always face at the beginning of my relationships with actors, especially with certain foreign actors. If it were right that an actor must understand, the best actor would be the most intelligent actor; which is not true; reality often shows us that the opposite is true. The more an actor strives to understand the meaning of a scene, the more he or she tries to make sense of a certain line, a sequence, the film itself, the more he or she places obstacles between their own natural spontaneity and the making of those scenes. Apart from the fact that in doing so they become in a way a director of themselves. And that is a detriment, rather than an advantage. Now, I find that an actor should not be urged to make their brain work, but their instinct, in whatever way. The relationship between actor and setting is crucial because obviously I rely precisely on the setting, whether natural or artificial, for particular psychological moments, so that each scene reaches its greatest effectiveness, its greatest suggestion." (Michelangelo Antonioni on a meeting at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia on March 16, 1961. Leonardo Fioravanti, the CSC director, conducted the debate. Full text published in *Bianco e Nero*, no.s 2-3, February March 1961, now in Michelangelo Antonioni, *Fare un film è per me vivere*, Marsilio, Venice 1994)

"The smallest object, the smallest painting hanging on a wall, the tiniest detail in each set design was chosen by me and me only. The set designer proposes, but I choose. Each and every element in a film serves to convey something. It is indispensable not to leave out anything, to control everything at the maximum possible level." (Michelangelo Antonioni in André S. Labarthe, *La notte*, *France observateur*, February 23, 1961)

Tonino Guerra

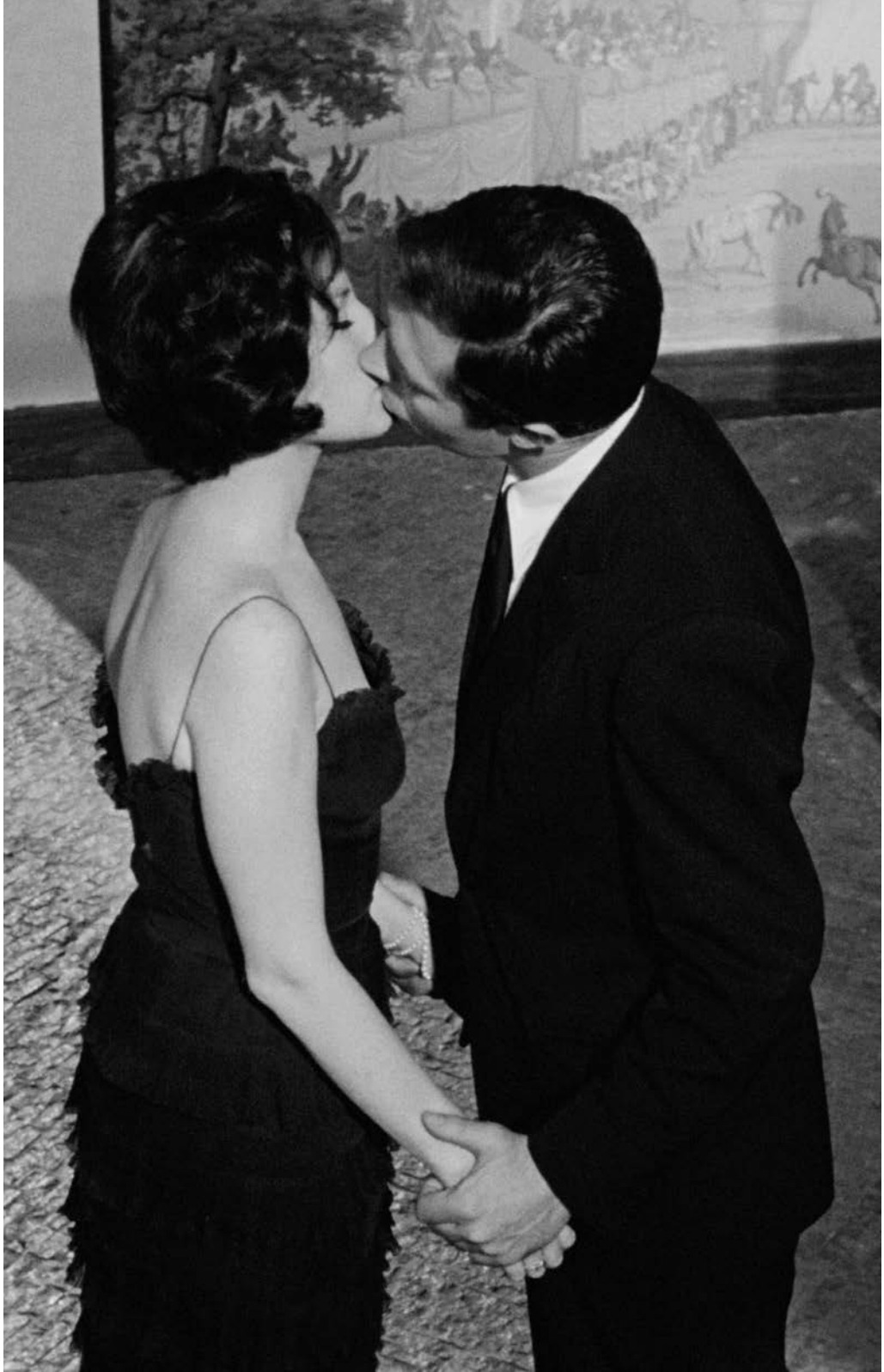
“In Antonioni’s films, words are just a commentary on the images, a background, so to say: everything relies on them. So we rehearse lengthy dialogues, we retouch them until we become familiar with the way of speaking of the leading characters. In the end, even the nicest lines disappear, those that seemed the most suggestive, and the script looks so desolate, apparently, that some layperson who is more linked to literary values may find it sloppy and remain bewildered. This happens only because Antonioni, evidently, intends to destroy in speech precisely the literary suggestion, retaining only the cinematic effect. I daresay, something to discover beyond images still remains, like certain meanings that confer a mysterious quality or emphasize particular aspects of the story, as after all happens on a written page.”

(Tonino Guerra, in F. Faldini e G. Fofi, ed. by, *L’avventurosa storia del cinema italiano 1960-1969*, Feltrinelli, Milano 1981)



“Lidia and Giovanni lose sight of each other on purpose in a room filled with glasses and reflections”
(Franco Bernini)

COMPILATION 3 • CRITICS' VIEWS



“In her seeming absent-mindedness, Valentina consciously attracts. She is the one who conducts the game, she appears, disappears, wrongfoots” (Franco Bernini)

ANTHOLOGY

“If *L'avventura* [...] may have been the director's ‘hottest’ film, *La notte* may be more settled, more structured, more elaborate, without ever letting through the weight of the idea or construction, the abstraction of the symbol [...]. No detachment or coldness there, just the lucid analysis of absurdity, of the inner contradictions of an era, conducted by someone who, admittedly, is in it up to his neck. This is his anti-hero novel:” Sadoul was right in asserting that Antonioni's characters are constantly ‘downplayed’: his apparent detachment is just discretion. Antonioni intends to show without demonstrating: events, psychologies, and plots must not force the reader into dramatizing the story either: the drama only takes place within [...]. This is Antonioni's true modernity and style; he is on a par with today's poetry and narrative, and we are reminded of Proust and Joyce, Musil and Gide, if not also the French *nouveau roman*. His anxiety is to find a new way of looking at things; his effort aims at looking at the essence, at anti-decoration, underneath the ‘veneer’ – at returning their meaning to gestures, facts, rhythms. The ‘story,’ a superfluous construction, is no longer needed; the ‘story’ lies in the details, in the non-constructed, in the facts and things. [...] So we've now possibly got to the core of *La notte*'s complex theme – the detachment from reality. Its release at the same time as Moravia's *Boredom* is certainly not coincidental, with the novel being an impressive work as well, bearing undeniable similarities with Antonioni's film.

(Giorgio Tinazzi, *Quaderno del Centro cinematografico degli studenti dell'Università di Padova*, 1961)

La notte is the story of a crumbling marriage. But soon we notice that the word ‘story’ clashes; it is not suited to the nature of the film. We could call it an investigation, or, if the scientific term becomes the director's impassive but involved lucidity, a spectroscopy. Antonioni has partially given up the landscape, which in the previous films (*Il grido* and *L'avventura*) had a crucial role, possibly because while in those two the journey was also a physical one, here is only spiritual. Moreover, *La notte* appears more structured: there is more understatement in the narrative, there is a hint of nervous perspicuity in the dialogues, which may have benefited from Ennio Flaiano's contribution; however, once

more we have to reproach the filmmaker for his old intolerance of a film's logical construction.

(**Morando Morandini**, *L'Osservatore Politico Letterario*, no. 3, 1961)

Jeanne Moreau, a magnificent actress, engaged all her face's limber expressiveness in conveying the swirl of restless thoughts that occupy the character's soul, possibly the most full-bodied and complex among those created by Antonioni. The progressively clearer crisis that is growing in Lidia is followed with extraordinary, delicate finesse by a director who captures every glance, every voice, every silence: it is incomprehensible to still blame Antonioni of intellectualism, speaking of *La notte*, with his manifest commitment to visualize everything, to translate even the most fleeting attitude or sentiment into images, subtracting descriptive psychology from all forms of lyrical Romanticist intuitionism and objectivising it with constant, absolute rigour. Just think of two passages of pure cinema, such as Lidia's solitary wandering through Milan and the car ride in the rain; or of the bathroom scene, admirable in its freshness and sobriety; or of the well-tuned lightness of the dialogue between the spouses in the *tabarin* during the dance act. Around her, Milan, depicted by the filmmaker with typical capacity of giving to a documentarily concrete cityscape its own poetic, autonomous personality. So far, *La notte* is the highest and most balanced moment of Michelangelo Antonioni's industriousness.

(**Vito Pandolfi**, in *Film 1961*, Feltrinelli, Milan 1961)

La notte is wholly resolved in the pained and relentless inner monologue of Lidia, one of Antonioni's most exemplary autobiographical characters. This work, possibly the peak and the most rigorous in the filmmaker's creative arc, re-echoes themes and motifs of *L'avventura* but without the intellectualist stretching found in the reverse murder mystery and without irritating polemical emphases. Antonioni seems to go back to telling 'stories of love affairs,' but he does so after ten years of experiences, attempts, probing [...]. His language is now more mature, his style self-assured and recognizable, or rather unmistakable: his vocation for analysis and his inclination towards essayistic forms of storytelling aspire to contend with the highest expressions of contemporary literature. Here, chronicling one day made of states of mind, disquiet, with the characters' disheartened, tormented dragging, he pursues and achieves in film the dissolution of all conventional narrative fabric; without hesitation, he burns all residue of cinema as entertainment. To the breakdown of the disintegration of the texture of society and relationships, a breakdown achieved and suffered through the discoveries and reactions of a female character, corresponds the break with and rejection of an organic and upward narrative method [...] as well as the choice of loose, open-ended forms.

(**Adelio Ferrero**, *Cinestudio*, no. 5, November 1962)

While the Viscontiesque world takes on proletarian semblances and the Felliniesque does phantasmal substances, the world of Antonioni is a clear-cut middle-upper class world. [...] Possibly unconsciously, Antonioni has identified the turning point of the sixties as a lasting bourgeois victory, that is, the decline of the proletarian palingenesis and the triumph of capitalist productivism [...]. He is interested in the ‘winner’ because he wants to X-ray the ‘malaise’ descending from the apparent spreading of dominant ideology [...]. He analyses the ‘winner’ because he believes that their dark evil will infect the ‘loser’ too, thus inflicting a double defeat, with that evil becoming the general status of society. [...] However, Antonioni makes up for what seems ideologically precarious with an intensity of inspiration that, in terms of expressive maturity and poetic depth, was unparalleled in those years: the only instance, along with the cinema of Godard, of ‘writing’ about malaise that, being its ‘form,’ is equally the aesthetic mode of that ideology. (**Lino Micciché**, *Il cinema italiano degli anni '60*, Marsilio Editori, Venice 1975)

With ambivalence and ennui, Michelangelo Antonioni targeted the institutions of modern Italy, reserving both contempt and awe for his bourgeois subjects. In *La Notte*, he examines the fledgling relationship of Giovanni (Marcello Mastroianni) and Lidia (Jeanne Moreau) during the span of a single day. The couple has long settled into a mood of ambivalence and contempt, staying together out of habit more than anything else. The difficulty in discussing the work of Antonioni is that his characters thrive on contradictions, and are often pursuing goals and hungers that will ultimately leave them empty. All that they endeavor seems to be a pointless interlude in the face of a world crumbling under the weight of their own mortality and man-made destruction. Antonioni’s upper-class characters, with their abundance of leisure time and mobility, are plagued by the fear of their futility, and a crippling fear of truly living. *La Notte*, in particular, portrays a lavish upper class who thrive on sin and decadence. The party that they attend is over the top, but nonetheless does very little to inspire any life in his *La Notte* characters. (**Justine Peres Smith**, in *The Moreau Files: La notte*, *Vagues Visages*, March 13, 2015)

Michelangelo Antonioni was a cinematic cubist. Fragmenting time and space, the Italian master created a potent new language for storytelling, and in the process charted a topography of modern ennui. His work’s glamorously broody visual surfaces might have been mimicked in perfume commercials — they were hardly the only artistic invention to be co-opted by advertising — but no one has quite duplicated the way he built poetic depth from narrative shards. [...] Lidia’s journeys through Milan and its outskirts are not without incident and yet resound with an aching hollowness. As a solitary perambulator, Moreau has a singular magnetism. A few years earlier, Louis Malle tracked her

Parisian wanderings in *Elevator to the Gallows*, but where those scenes were drenched in sex and longing, here she's driven by their absence. There's a futility bordering on despair in Antonioni's interplay of past, present and future, evident in the character's gestures as well as in the cityscape that surrounds them.

(**Sheri Linden**, *Los Angeles Times*, September 15, 2016)



“The relationship between actor and setting is crucial because obviously I rely precisely on the setting, whether natural or man-made, for particular psychological moments, so that each scene reaches its greatest effectiveness, its greatest suggestion.” (Michelangelo Antonioni)

DOCUMENTS

Dominance, instability, missing sound: Notes about a complex teamwork on a months-long restoration

Sergio Bruno

The 4K restoration of *La notte*, curated by the CSC – Cineteca Nazionale in collaboration with Compass Film S.r.l., was conducted in the framework of the celebrations for the 100th anniversary of Marcello Mastroianni. The work was executed at the Cineteca Nazionale's Digital Lab. The negative footage of this film is lost, therefore we had to conduct an accurate survey of the existing film elements to find the best source for the restoration project. Luckily enough, as was usual at the time, a negative was used to print a preservation fine grain master. This represents the closest element to the original, especially in terms of cinematography. This intermediate positive, however, featured damages that came to light after the scanning. The main ones were a brown dominance, probably caused by the type of emulsion, and picture instability, due to defective film printing which caused a sort of vertical and horizontal shift. More flaws of a certain import were: a varying glow in the scenes throughout the film, possibly a consequence of an inefficient treatment in dye fixing; many continuous, black and white, scratches on most of the film; and a rain of white stains and traces of cement. We worked for months dealing with this damage by means of ad-hoc software which, thanks to particular tools, allows returning the image to its pristine quality. Recovering the film's correct photographic tone was an extremely complex and delicate phase in the restoration process. To create the film's atmosphere, in which the relationship of characters and surrounding space is crucial, Antonioni relied on one of the major cinematographers in Italy, Gianni Di Venanzo. From cinematography's point of view, the film seeks a depth of field in which the black and white is implemented through a finely calibrated chiaroscuro lighting. The fine grain master that we chose presented a fair level of photographic information; therefore it was a good starting point for the restoration. Such a complex intervention required

the collaboration of another master of cinematography, i.e., Giuseppe Lanci, who has supervised the grading and colour correction phases throughout, working by the side of Digital Lab's technicians. The hardest part was to retain the right balance in the image all the while respecting the filmmakers' choices in a story that takes place from the morning till the dawn of the next day.

To restore the soundtrack we compared various elements, including the original soundtrack negative which was not lost, unlike the original footage. However, initially we thought of importing the sound from a double-band print which, on the other hand, was flawed both in the master and in the film duplication: this resulted in distorted and poor sound. Therefore, we used as our main source the soundtrack negative; portions from a positive helped to make up for the damage found in the latter. With its silences, its outdoor noises, and Giorgio Gaslini's jazz music, sound in *La notte* plays a fundamental role in the advancement of the story. The restoration made an effort to respect this characteristic, working solely on the physical problems of the film stock without altering the general tone. Whenever possible, missing sound was recovered, like the helicopter noise in the hospital scene in which the main character and the sick woman kiss. The soundtrack negative was damaged in this point; we imported the sound from a positive held in the archives of the Cineteca Nazionale into the restored soundtrack. Based on the film review file, the production company was obliged to cut some scenes, replace a dialogue line, and shorten two sequences (the hospital scene with Giovanni and the patient on the bed, and the final scene with the protagonists lying on top of one another). Throughout the reconstruction of the uncut film version, the Cineteca Nazionale made an effort to locate the cut footage. Regrettably, we only found cutouts from positives, and only partially relating to the two deleted scenes; on top of this, they were heavily damaged and therefore not viable. All the other elements available (prints and duplicates) have the same length as the fine grain master, a circumstance that confirms what is declared in the censorship's file, that is, the negative was cut and the film was released in the censored version, now restored by the Cineteca Nazionale.

Gianni Di Venanzo: from the Centro Sperimentale to the leaden dawns of Antonioni

Silvia Tarquini

The cinema of Antonioni of those years cannot be discussed without including the contribution of Gianni di Venanzo's cinematography to image composition and form: real light sources in the foreground, obsessive flashing, reflections of bottles, glass walls, mirrors – therefore image doubles – exteriors at night with true lighting performances, hallways seen in depth of field, slanted lights and shadows that redefine the volumes, the lines, the architectures, reversal between characters and background (with foreground characters kept in shadow and backgrounds lighted), the latter being almost his signature.

To prove the technical and expressive wealth of Di Venanzo's cinematography, suffice to compare the impressive tour de force of light contrasts in *8 ½* and the exploration of the endless nuances of greys in the night scenes of *La notte*, up to the final scene, the “leaden dawn” requested by Antonioni and achieved by the printer Enzo Verzini through a specific treatment in the processing baths.

Di Venanzo's name is still a legend, but let us focus on how he came to be considered the father of the post-war revolution in cinematography. He was born in Teramo in 1920; at 22 years of age, he was cameraman assistant in Castellani's *Un colpo di pistola*. The previous year he had been a student at the recently established Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia; he soon dropped out for the set. He was by the side of Aldo Tonti on Visconti's *Obsession*, and of Ubaldo Urata on Rossellini's *Rome, open city*; in 1945, he was among the filmmakers of the documentary *Days of Glory*, in which he films the execution of three Nazi Fascists; then he was in the crew of Otello Martelli on the set of *Paisan*, still Rossellini, and of *Tragic Hunt* by De Santis.

In 1948, he debuted as camera operator on Visconti's *The Earth Will Tremble* by the side of Aldo Graziati, who had an extraordinary talent for still photography and had been discovered in France by Visconti. Di Venanzo was camera operator on René Clair's *Beauty and the Devil* and on De Sica's *Miracle in Milan*. 1949 through 1950, he was the DoP of eight short films and, in 1951, of his first feature, Lizzani's *Achtung! Banditi!* Zavattini's theories about “flash film,” “character shadowing,” and cinema as a “hole in the wall” pushed towards a revolution in lighting. Di Venanzo met Zavattini to make *Love in the City*, in which he cinematographed all the segments and worked with the

young and the very young Antonioni, Risi, Fellini, Maselli, Lattuada. From 1950-51 the Italian film industry began to replace the famous *bruti* – high-powered spotlights up to 5000 and 10000 watts – with lower-power light sources such as photofloods/photospots (500 watts) and mercury lamps – a transition in which Antonioni and Serafin played a crucial role - easily positioned and useful for rendering different settings «returning a face to the landscape.» Di Venanzo reputedly invented a wooden frame which allowed mounting the photofloods around the camera.

In the 1950's and 60's, he went on to collaborate with Fellini, Rosi, Zurlini, Pietrangeli, Monicelli, Puccini, Fulci, Losey, Bolognini, Petri, Wertmüller, Comencini, Maselli, and four times with Antonioni. He was the DoP on *The Girlfriends*, *Il grido* (a film in which the element of fog helps to characterize the use of diffuse light), *La notte*, and *L'eclisse*. After making *8 ½* and *Juliet of the Spirits* with Fellini, Di Venanzo died an early death by hepatitis while shooting Mankiewicz's *Masquerade*, which his disciple Pasqualino De Santis, then camera operator, was tasked with completing.

For further information, see: *Esterno giorno. Vita e cinema di Gianni di Venanzo*, ed. by Dimitri Bosi, Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia, collection Cineteca directed by Orio Caldiron, 1997; Gerry Guida's profile on the blog Artdigiland, 26.09.2020.



Milan in *La notte*, the mirror of an existential crisis, of a couple in crisis, and of a world on the verge of change

Night and Jazz Owls

Fabio Melelli

La notte is one of the earliest Italian films in which jazz becomes the sole protagonist of the music score. Not an absolute beginner: before that date, music of African-American origin could be found in films made recently, such as the *Ignoti* diptych, composed by Piero Umiliani, or Dino Risi's *The Widower*, whose score was signed by Armando Trovajoli. Antonioni himself, with his regular collaborator Giovanni Fusco, had scattered jazz notes throughout his early documentaries of the late forties. However, in *La notte*, jazz music almost acquires the status of a character, becoming a sort of chorus to complement action: no longer a melodic commentary or a trivial counterpoint to the images, jazz constructs an acoustic space in which the characters get lost in their self-destructive drive, with no more points of reference, estranged from the surrounding world. The merit goes to Giorgio Gaslini and his Quartet, whom Antonioni invited to play live on the set. Fore-shadowing certain solutions adopted by Sergio Leone with Morricone, Antonioni means for the characters to listen to the same music as the audience will listen to. He left the musicians free to improvise and had the cast and the crew immersed in an atmosphere of music notes which embeds psychological overtones in the action and gives the images, which abound in long takes, a syncopated, alienating rhythm for a strong dramatic effect. On the other hand, at the dawn of the sixties, jazz was experiencing its golden season in terms of popularity, and film was to appropriate it with two international masterpieces such as *Elevator to the Gallows* and *Naked Alibi*, whose scores were composed by Miles Davis and Duke Ellington respectively. However, as in all the films in which music plays a non-simplistic role, in Antonioni's film silences and noises are just as important – the noises of an ultramodern metropolis seemingly indifferent to the humankind that lives in it. In fact, the first part of the film, which takes place by day, is basically without music, except for the title credits. These run on a score between electronic and concrete music, almost reminiscent of a sci-fi movie overture, with pop music songs played by a Tannoy in a kiosk. In *La notte*, in fact, music is almost exclusively diegetic, in a perfect synaesthesia with the film's apparently plotless story.

