



L'avventura

When Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'avventura* arrived in 1960 – amidst a tumultuous reception in Cannes that saw some disturbed audience members wanting to throw something at the screen – cinema was already changing in fundamental ways.

The makers of individual, handmade films that had been institutionally kept out on the fringes (Stan Brakhage, Shirley Clarke, Norman McLaren, to name but three) were starting to draw more viewers and critical attention. The narrative feature film underwent a revision, from inside the *nouvelle vague* (Godard's *Breathless*) and out (Agnès Varda's first films, Alain Resnais's *Last Year in Marienbad*). Meanwhile the Italian film world had already seen the old codes of neorealism swept away – much of it Antonioni's own doing – and had moved towards a post-neorealist cinema liberated from melodrama and political ideologies, perhaps best exemplified in 1959 by Ermanno Olmi's first feature *Time Stood Still*.

A new, maturing modernity became widespread in cinema. The years 1959 to 1960 can be identified as a world-historical moment for film. In line with the development of lenses, film stocks and new and smaller cameras (including a more ubiquitous use of 16mm), the modernism that took hold showed yet again the time lag after which cinema typically comes to embrace changes that have occurred first in other artforms: for instance, the radical overhaul of jazz by bebop; the transformation of the sound world of music by such figures as Edgard Varèse and Harry Partch; the abstract-expressionist movement in painting from Pollock to Rothko; the 'new novel' invading literature (on which *Marienbad* drew, courtesy of a script by novelist Alain Robbe-Grillet).

In this exceptional moment, some of cinema's old props were being kicked away, including Hollywood's genre formulae, the three-act narrative structure, the privileging of psychology, the insistence on happy and 'closed' endings. But what did it mean to free oneself of the securing laws and traditions of genre, its capacity for creating worlds and codes? What did it mean to reject a storytelling architecture that had served dramatists well since Aeschylus? What kind of moving-image experience with actors could exist beyond psychology – which, after all, was still on the 20th century's new frontier of science and society? What if endings were less conclusive, or less 'satisfying'? These are the questions Antonioni confronted and responded to with *L'avventura*, the film that – more than any other at that moment – redefined the landscape of the artform, and mapped a new path that still influences today's most venturesome and radical young filmmakers.

For some that film would instead be *Breathless*. Godard's accidental discovery of the jump cut (courtesy of his editor) helped him rejig a more conventional yet sly imagining of the crime movie into a piece of radical art, a way of fracturing time as important as Picasso's and Braque's Cubist fracturing of space and perception. It's also arguable that Godard had the more immediate impact, especially through the 1960s, since his taste for pop-culture iconography, graphic wordplay and politics positioned him a bit closer to the centre of the period's cultural zeitgeist than Antonioni (despite the Italian's subsequent ability to capture swinging London and The Yardbirds in

1966's *Blowup*, and Los Angeles counterculture in 1970's *Zabriskie Point*). Even a movie with huge pop figures and crossover attraction like Richard Lester's *A Hard Day's Night* (1964) would have been unthinkable without the example of Godard.

Yet I'd argue that *L'avventura* and Antonioni's subsequent films – perhaps most importantly *L'eclisse* (*The Eclipse*, 1962) – have exerted a greater long-term impact. One of *L'avventura*'s many remarkable qualities to note now is its staying power – its ability to astonish anew after repeated viewings. Many great films are of their moment, yet lessen over time. Here, the entrance of Monica Vitti, with her classically hip black dress and sexily tousled blonde mane, amounts to an announcement that the 60s have arrived; a lesser work with her in it would be no more than a key identifier of that moment.

It's the film's subtle straddling of an older world and a new one still in the process of defining itself – reflected immediately and perfectly in composer Giovanni Fusco's opening title theme, alternating between nostalgic Sicilian strummings and nervous, creeping percussive beats – that establishes its rich, unending landscapes of physical reality and the mind. This is part of the film's timelessness, within an absolutely contemporary / modern setting. The early images of *L'avventura* trace a parting of the generations, as Anna (Lea Massari) – seemingly the film's central character – tells her wealthy Roman father that she's going away on a holiday to Sicily with girlfriend Claudia (Vitti), then seen very much on the periphery of the action, tagging along. But after Anna inexplicably disappears during a boat trip to an uninhabited island, it is Claudia who moves to the centre of the narrative – and into the affections of Anna's architect boyfriend Sandro (Gabriele Ferzetti) – as attempts to find Anna gradually peter out.

What makes *L'avventura* the greatest of all films, however, is its assertion, exploration and expansion of the concept of the 'open film'. This had been Antonioni's great project ever since he started out as a filmmaker after an extremely interesting career as a critic (like Godard). His early documentaries, such as *The People of the Po* (*Gente del Po*, 1947), and his earliest narrative films, such as the astonishing *Story of a Love Affair* (*Cronaca di un amore*, 1950), suggest an artist pulling against what he perceived as the constraints of neorealism towards an openness based on a heightened perception of constant change – a dynamic that was for him the fundamental quality of the post-war world.

Robert Koehler, *Sight and Sound*, August 2011

L'AVVENTURA (THE ADVENTURE)

Directed by: Michelangelo Antonioni
Production Companies: Cino Del Duca, P.C.E. - Produzioni Cinematografiche, Société Cinématographique Lyre
Produced by: Amato Pennasilico
Production Manager: Luciano Perugia
Unit Production Manager: Angelo Corso
Unit Managers: Enrico Bologna, Fernando Cinquini
1st Assistant Directors: Franco Indovina, Gianni Arduini
2nd Assistant Director: Jack O'Connell
Script Supervisor: Elvira D'Amico
Screenplay: Michelangelo Antonioni, Elio Bartolini, Tonino Guerra
Story: Michelangelo Antonioni
Director of Photography: Aldo Scavarda
Camera Operator: Luigi Kuveiller
Stills Photography: Enrico Appetito
Editing by: Eraldo Da Roma
Art Director: Piero Poletto
Costumes: Adriana Berselli
Make-up: Ultimo Peruzzi
Hair: Mario Mandini
Negatives: Dupont
Prints & Processing: Istituto Nazionale LUCE
Music by: Giovanni Fusco
Sound Recording: Claudio Maielli
Sound Re-recording: Fonolux
Sound Mixing: P. Ketoff, F. Ancillai, N. Renda

Cast

Gabriele Ferzetti (*Sandro*)
Monica Vitti (*Claudia*)
Lea Massari (*Anna*)
Dominique Blanchar (*Giulia*)
Renzo Ricci (*Anna's father*)
James Addams (*Corrado*)
Dorothy De Poliolo (*Gloria Perkins*)
Lelio Luttazzi (*Raimondo*)
Giovanni Petrucci (*Prince Goffredo*)
Esmeralda Ruspoli (*Patrizia*)
Enrico Bologna
Franco Cimino
Giovanni Danesi
Rita Molé
Renato Pincioli
Angela Tommasi Di Lampedusa (*the princess*)
Vincenzo Tranchina
Jack O'Connell (*old man on the island*)*
Professor Cucco (*Ettore*)*
John Francis Lane *

Italy/France 1960

143 mins

* Uncredited

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Metropolis Sun 1 Jan 17:55 (+ intro by Bryony Dixon, BFI Curator);

Sun 15 Jan 14:40; Mon 30 Jan 16:30 BFI IMAX

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Get Out Mon 2 Jan 18:40; Fri 6 Jan 17:50

Pierrot le Fou Tue 3 Jan 18:10; Wed 4 Jan 20:30; Thu 19 Jan 20:30

My Neighbour Totoro (Tonari no Totoro)

Tue 3 Jan 18:20; Sun 22 Jan 10:00 BFI IMAX; Sat 28 Jan 13:40

A Man Escaped (Un Condamné à mort s'est échappé)

Tue 3 Jan 18:30; Sat 28 Jan 20:30

Black Girl (La Noire de...) Tue 3 Jan 20:30; Thu 12 Jan 18:15 (+ intro)

Ugetsu Monogatari Tue 3 Jan 20:50; Tue 17 Jan 20:30

Madame de... Wed 4 Jan 14:30; Fri 20 Jan 18:10 (+ intro by Ruby McGuigan, Cultural Programme Manager)

Yi Yi (A One and a Two...) Wed 4 Jan 18:40; Sun 22 Jan 14:00 (+ intro by Hyun Jin Cho, Film Programmer, BFI Festivals)

The Shining

Fri 6 Jan 20:10; Tue 10 Jan 20:10; Sat 21 Jan 20:30 BFI IMAX

Spirited Away (Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi)

Sat 7 Jan 12:10; Sun 22 Jan 12:30 BFI IMAX

Tropical Malady (Sud pralad) Sat 7 Jan 13:50; Mon 9 Jan 20:40

Histoire(s) du cinema Sat 7 Jan 16:30

Blue Velvet

Sat 7 Jan 20:30; Fri 20 Jan 20:35; Tue 24 Jan 21:00 BFI IMAX

Sátántangó Sun 8 Jan 11:15; Sat 21 Jan 13:30

Celine and Julie Go Boating (Céline et Julie vont en bateau)

Sun 8 Jan 14:45; Sat 21 Jan 17:00

Journey to Italy (Viaggio in Italia)

Sun 8 Jan 18:20; Mon 23 Jan 14:30; Fri 27 Jan 20:50

Parasite (Gisaengchung) Mon 9 Jan 17:50; Wed 18 Jan 17:30 BFI IMAX

The Gleaners and I (Les glaneurs et la glaneuse) + La Jetée

Wed 11 Jan 20:30; Mon 23 Jan 18:10

A Matter of Life and Death Thu 12 Jan 20:40; Sun 22 Jan 11:30

Chungking Express (Chung Him sam lam)

Thu 12 Jan 20:45; Tue 17 Jan 20:50; Sat 21 Jan 14:15

Modern Times Fri 13 Jan 17:45; Sun 22 Jan 13:10

A Brighter Summer Day (Guling jie shaonian sha ren shijian)

Mon 16 Jan 18:30; Sat 28 Jan 16:00

Imitation of Life Wed 18 Jan 20:30; Wed 25 Jan 14:30; Sun 29 Jan 12:30

The Spirit of the Beehive (El espíritu de la colmena)

Thu 19 Jan 18:00; Sat 28 Jan 13:50

Sansho the Bailiff (Sansho Dayu) Fri 20 Jan 17:45; Thu 26 Jan 17:50

Andrei Rublev Thu 26 Jan 18:40; Sun 29 Jan 17:20

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