

authority between Pope and Bishops, which fact is of importance from the point of view of reunion, and enquires whether the absence of a violent reaction against Byzantium comparable to the Reformation in the West may be due to the greater freedom accorded to the local Churches in the East. His remarks are echoed by the Patriarch who complains that although Rome has left their rites to the Eastern Catholics attempts have been made to latinize them in everything else, and that although the recent Popes have been scrupulous in their observance of the Union agreements, departments of the Curia have at times unjustifiably exceeded their powers. Both are agreed that though the Truth is one, it can be expressed in different ways. This was recognized and acted on by the Council of Florence.

The genuine difficulties of reunion are illustrated by the history of the Bulgarian Union (G. Eldarov, *Die Union der Bulgaren mit Rom: zur hundertjährigen Gedenkfeier*, in *Ostkirchliche Studien* vol. 10 (1961), No. 1, pp. 3-27). In the Ottoman Empire, the Bulgarians who had no Patriarch of their own, were subject to the Oecumenical Patriarch not only in ecclesiastical, but also in some civil matters. It was one aspect of the national revival in the nineteenth century that they were anxious to rid themselves of Greek ecclesiastical domination. An attempt was made to achieve this by union with Rome. The vicissitudes of the Bulgarian Catholic Church show the difficulties of reunion. Mistakes were made on all sides, both the Russian government and some Polish émigrés interfered, and the first hundred years have not been easy.

W. A. STEINER

Heard and Seen

L'AVVENTURA AND ITS PUBLIC

The ambiguous reception of *L'Avventura* poses a number of questions of wider application than the future of the cinema. At the premiere the audience laughed and jeered. The film has since received enormous acclaim, but in the provinces performances are still punctuated by the heavy feet of those who walk out, while among educated people there are very many who are bored by it, and perhaps a majority who have to see it twice or three times before they can at all appreciate what it is.

'*Pour la recherche d'un nouveau langage cinématographique.*' So goes the citation of the special jury prize. We are, as cinema goes, unused to directors who speak to us quite so uncompromisingly in the terms of their own art. That is to say, we expect support from other conventions with which we are more

familiar, such as the novel or the stage play. Usually we get it. The English film industry is still producing films which are in their basic nature illustrated scripts. In *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* the camera is present in order to record certain goings on. The excellencies of the film owe quite as much to recent developments in English theatre as to anything which might have happened in the last thirty years in cinema. Indeed there is no attempt at a properly cinematic art. It is not surprising then that so many of our canons of film criticism have been formed in, and are applicable to, other art forms. For example, when people say of a particular sequence in *L'Avventura* that it 'moves much too slowly', do they not really mean 'this would be intolerable if seen on the stage'? Are they not failing to use their eyes and their finger tips and their hearts in the particular ways demanded by cinema, at least by this cinema? And what can one say of those who talk of its 'beautiful photography' as though it could be a mitigating factor, abstractable from its content? Antonioni is relatively inarticulate under interview: he does not easily *talk* about his films. He does not work from any definitive script, still less from somebody else's script. The dialogue in his films is sparse and fills a definitely secondary position. He starts work each morning without even a mental script; that is to say he goes to work without any clear idea of what he is going to do. All this adds up to the suggestion that he expresses himself and also *thinks* in terms of *the visual image as it appears on the cinema screen*. This has its own unique possibilities. It has the immediacy of painting in a dimension which painting does not possess, for it is human beings who are on this screen. It also supplies the possibility of using images in the fullest sense as symbols; which is to say that many of Antonioni's shots are used in the same way as, for example, the Paschal Candle in the Christian liturgy: they have the same stillness, and if seen with the fully open eye they produce the same sort of reverberations in the mind and body of the beholder. It is in these terms that we can talk about Antonioni's tendency to hold a shot longer than we are accustomed to; and it is in these terms that we may seek to understand the fact that at least half his audiences are neither moved by him, nor entertained.

A frequent criticism of the film is that it has no structure. But what sort of structure are you looking for? I would maintain that it has as tight a structure as a novel by Lawrence or a painting by Cézanne or the work of any other considerable artist you care to name. It is a pessimistic film: it is about a man, and a civilization, which has lost its touch. How could a film which is about *this* exhibit structure in any previously recognizable sense? Lost its touch, lost its touch. When we say 'lost its touch' the phrase has almost no meaning. It takes the film to say what it means, in the drifting clouds and the drifting sea and the drifting emotional relativity of the people concerned; seen against the background of an architecture which stands nearly always as a symbol of what human activity can be: stands, if you like, for a principle of 'structure'. It is about a man who has lost touch with the creative possibilities of his life, and who expresses this loss in a sort of sexual impotence. When Anna, who early

in the film loses herself as the only escape from a dead relationship, says to him in despair, 'I can't *feel* you any more', he is at first nonplussed and then moves up to her with what is almost a leer and asks 'Didn't you feel me yesterday?' and she rounds on him with disgust, for that is just the point: he is trying to make his penis a substitute for a basic potency of personality, a basic power to love and create, to be *felt*. This is made clear in the dialogue later on, but it is also unmistakably clear in the relationship with Claudia, which starts during the search which they make together for the missing Anna. It is the Marxist criticism of the whole quality of life in a capitalist society. Standing on a tower in Noto against the architectural achievement of an earlier culture which worked, he talks about himself to Claudia. It is hardly necessary, we know it all already. As a student he lived in a garret and dreamed of being a great architect. Now he has two flats and works out the trading figures for other men's buildings. It is precisely the non-creative activities which are found to be economically valid: so the student idealism turns to the destructive bitterness which tips up the ink on a student's drawing book, a student like himself only ten years younger, and destined, so we are to assume, for the same sterile disappointments.

It is in this metaphysical context that we are to see the shifting seas and weather, the despairing relativity of the relationships. There are no absolutes: moral, psychological, or physical. Above all, there are no absolutes of personality: that is the adventure. Here in the terms of film is Pound's image: 'And all the rest of her a shifting change. A broken bundle of mirrors'. Even Claudia making faces at herself in the glass has this sort of tragic connotation: there is no communication because there is nothing stable to communicate with. 'I can't *feel* you any more'; and two hours later (film running time) and with a different girl the phrase is echoed: 'You feel like someone different'. Sandro's reply is that she ought to be pleased: what an adventure for her. It is this bitter, ironic use of the word adventure which is the title of the film. Love making starts nearly always from despair. From the modern white elephant which they come across and wander around, a building which by its lack of relevance and human meaning deeply frightens them, Antonioni cuts straight to the frenzied love scene on the hillside. Only once does it start on a basis of hope, and this incident is representative of his work. Again there is the use of architecture. The classical architecture of Italy is used in the film as a touchstone. It steadies the movement, it is the absolute against which we see the drift and relativity which the film is about. In this incident they climb a tower in Noto. By mistake Claudia clangs one of the great bells. We wait anxiously for something terrible to happen, but instead from the other side of the town a bell clangs back. Excitedly Claudia replies, and a sort of conversation is started across the roofs of the town. The film cuts: in the bright morning sunlight a van comes down the street. It is a political van, and as it comes bundles of leaflets are cast exuberantly out on either side: communication again, generalized, debased perhaps, but communication. The van stops, and the loud-speaker blares into a popular song which is taken up inside the hotel bedroom

by Claudia. Perhaps it is the most beautiful dance of joy the cinema has given us. Communication has been achieved and she can't believe it can ever be broken again. 'Tell me, when you go out without me, that you will kiss my shadow on the wall'. But already he is dissatisfied and frustrated, and presented with his face the dance comes to a stop.

The response of those who are bored by *L'Avventura* takes two basic forms. The first is that 'nothing happens'; and people who feel like this (that nothing happens) would rather do anything than sit through the film a second time: it is a real persecution to them in a way which negative art could not be. The second is this: Sandro's vicissitudes are of no interest, they are such boring people. The suggestion is that we knew these people existed, that they form a small aristocratic clique, and that their useless lives are of no interest to us.

I have suggested that a great deal does in fact happen, though the movement of event is different in kind to that in, on the one hand, a Western, and on the other *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*; and though the story is told in terms of acting and camera work which owe little to other creative conventions. It is possible that in his reverberative use of image, in his use of image as symbol, Antonioni makes demands on us which we are particularly unequipped to supply. To respond to a symbol we must be capable of a certain unguarded receptivity. The symbol must be allowed an entry into us, must be allowed to set up its own activities, sometimes very complex ones, in our minds and hearts, in our whole bodies. We are not used to this sort of thing. We move much too fast for it, we are in a sense much too intelligent for it (it bypasses the conceptual workings of the mind at least in so far as it is not at first concerned with words). We have not been asked to do it since the disappearance, as a major social conditioner, of the Christian liturgy. The complaint then that nothing happens can perhaps be re-phrased thus: 'This is in a language which I do not understand and am not prepared to learn. Why should I learn it? I am all right as I am'.

But I think there is more here than an age long philistinism. The defensive response goes deeper, is extended into this dimension: they are such boring people. And here is the fallacy, for it is in the connection with each other of every varied aspect of capitalist society that the Marxist criticism consists. The people who say this are likely to be more like Sandro than they care to admit. A friend suggested that the H Bomb is as present in *L'Avventura* as in *Hiroshima Mon Amour*. Certainly the H Bomb is no more horrifying a symbol of nihilism than the existential hole in the middle of *L'Avventura*: 'We are no longer capable of love, only of a sort of shared pity'. Both are concerned with a fissure in society which extends from an external world expressed in the dropping of a bomb on Japan or the organization of the stock exchange in Rome, into the deepest structures of our personal lives and relationships.

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