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«Faire l'Homme»

The Hysterical Subject and the Quest for Femininity in Antonioni's *Deserto rosso*

Mattia Mossali

Abstract • This article sets out to examine *Deserto rosso* as the site where the main female character can be said to destabilize the female identity quest that characterizes Antonioni's films of the tetralogy. I shall pursue a Lacanian reflection on the film, only to discuss how the hysteric responds to an identity she perceives as elusive either through the symptom, clearly aimed at an addressee, or through a series of virile identifications aiming to fill a lack of knowledge that she feels as her own. In this sense, Giuliana's gaze turns out to be dependent on that of the men to whom she relates, in a very peculiar manner. Giuliana, as a hysterical character, may be said to be working from within the cinematic aesthetic of the free indirect style only to disrupt it.

Keywords • Michelangelo Antonioni; Jacques Lacan; *Deserto rosso*; Giuliana; Free indirect point-of-view shot.

Ledizioni 

«Faire l'Homme» The Hysterical Subject and the Quest for Femininity in Antonioni's *Deserto rosso*

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I. Introduction

Those who are familiar with Michelangelo Antonioni's films of the early sixties, and I am alluding in particular to the four that are usually referred to as the «tetralogia dei sentimenti»,¹ namely *L'avventura* (1960), *La notte* (1961), *L'eclisse* (1962), and *Deserto rosso* (1964), will certainly remember the enigmatic character of the women's bodies moving frantically on the screen, while the camera carefully scrutinizes their obscure anxieties, portraying them quite shamelessly to the viewers.

These are films in which female characters, as Lorenzo Cuccu observed, not only perform a leading function, but also become catalysts of the director's own vision. They are figures to whom Antonioni delegates his own «modo di guardare».² And in this sense, to these women, and to their exceptional ability to *feel* the world, to suffer it, and ultimately to rebel against it, the Italian director entrusted the representation of a crucial moment of cultural and social change, working smartly to inscribe his characters' behavior into a larger commentary on gender.³

Critics have repeatedly stressed Antonioni's attention to both social and gender issues in his cinematic works. In an article aimed at delineating the appearance of a new female identity in Antonioni's tetralogy, that of «il Soggetto Imprevisto», Lucia Cardone affirms that «[l]e protagoniste, osservate nei loro comportamenti esteriori, nell'enigma di azioni che appaiono incongrue e immotivate, portano sullo schermo le tracce di esistenze femminili inconciliabili con la scena patriarcale».⁴ After having examined Antonioni's four films through the lens of Italian feminist theory of sexual difference, and reprising in particular some observations made by Carla Lonzi and Adriana Cavarero, Cardone conclu-

¹ See Fabrizio Deriu, *Antonioni, lo sguardo e l'esperimento*, «Cinema Studio», 9-10, 1992, pp. 101-107.

² Cuccu, *Antonioni. Il discorso dello sguardo. Da Blow up a Identificazione di una donna*, Pisa, Edizioni ETS, p. 35.

³ In an interview with Pierre Billard, Antonioni explains that, in his view, women are «the finer filter of reality» for their authentic way of being in the world, an authenticity that men, on the other hand, have partially lost (See Pierre Billard, *An Interview with Michelangelo Antonioni*, in Michelangelo Antonioni, *Michelangelo Antonioni: Interviews*, ed. by Bert Cardullo, Jackson, U of Mississippi P, 2008, p. 57). In this respect, one should see also Aldo Carotenuto, *La donna come specchio profondo della crisi*, in Id., *Maschile e femminile nel cinema di Antonioni*, Chiavari, Comune di Chiavari, 1996, pp. 15-21, and Marga Cottino-Jones, *Women, Desire, and Power in Italian Cinema*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, in particular pp. 119-125.

⁴ Lucia Cardone, *Il Soggetto Imprevisto e la "tetralogia dei sentimenti" di Michelangelo Antonioni*, in *Sguardi differenti. Studi di cinema in onore di Lorenzo Cuccu*, ed. by Lucia Cardone and Sandra Lischi, Pisa, Edizioni ETS, 2014, p. 143.

des that «in qualche modo, forse obliquo, la visione allargata e problematica di Antonioni [reca] i segni della differenza femminile, giacché discende dall'andirivieni mobile e inquieto delle protagoniste, dal loro modo di stare nel mondo: sono loro ad incarnare e propriamente a dare corpo al processo di liberazione dello sguardo».⁵

In what follows, I would like to problematize Cardone's assertion by looking more closely at Giuliana, the main character of *Deserto rosso*, portrayed by Monica Vitti. It is in fact my belief that the supposed «liberation of the gaze» that Antonioni would have pursued in his more mature works – an aspect that Cardone specifically refers to – may be said to have found in *Deserto rosso*'s troubled female figure an intriguing setback. The fact that Antonioni, in his tetralogy, aims at penetrating into the 'dark continent' of femininity – if it is still legitimate to use Freud's words to define it – and probing women's deep feelings and torments, seems undoubted. Yet, I also contend that when the director chooses to look at the world through the eyes of a hysterical character, as Giuliana evidently is, this same choice poses a threat to his promise of an all-female gaze and all-female perspective film, propelled by his well-known aesthetic of the 'free indirect style'. I find, in fact, that Antonioni in what is his first film in color ends up privileging, albeit obliquely, a male gaze. If we welcome Lacan's provoking proposal that I will explain at length in the following pages, the hysteric poses a question about femininity by way of a virile identification.⁶ In Lacan's words, the hysteric «plays the part of the man [*faire l'homme*]»,⁷ and thus Antonioni, in dissolving his gaze into that of the hysterical Giuliana, portrays a way of seeing that, far from placing male subjectivity «on the margins», to pick up Kaja Silverman's 1992 book title, re-affirms it quite obliquely in the center.⁸

2. Antonioni's Women

There is no doubt that starting with *L'avventura* Antonioni's interest in female figures acquired greater importance than in his previous works. I share Peter Brunette's opinion, whereby the films of the tetralogy are somehow «concerned with the difficulty of relations between the sexes»,⁹ albeit each staging peculiar storylines that make them only partially comparable to one another. In this sense, Brunette continues, Antonioni has been particularly clever in combining in his cinematic narratives a razor-sharp social and cultural critique of contemporary reality with a broader philosophical exploration of human feelings, of an almost existential type, where the sexes are depicted as «natural enemies, that they can never understand each other, and that the force of love, while irresistible,

⁵ Ivi, p. 150.

⁶ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, translated by Bruce Fink, New York, W.W. Norton, 2006 [1966], p. 523.

⁷ Id., *On Feminine Sexuality. The Limits of Love and Knowledge (1972-1973). Encore. The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XX*, trans. by Bruce Fink, New York, W.W. Norton & Co, p. 85.

⁸ Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, New York, Routledge, 1992. In this sense, one must not forget Peter Brunette's observations, whereby Antonioni's investigation of women and their identity clashes somehow with the paradox of a camera that acts as «technological stand-in for the male gaze». See Peter Brunette, *The Films of Michelangelo Antonioni*, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1998, p. 10. The critic who most has investigated the concept of male gaze in cinematic terms is, of course, Laura Mulvey, in her seminal article *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, originally published in «Screen», and now republished in many other collections on cinema studies.

⁹ Brunette, *op.cit.*, p. 31.

leads inevitably, in our fallen world, to a great deal of unhappiness as well».¹⁰ This is what the tetralogy ultimately exhibits, at least in its first three installments: on the screen, the vicissitudes of couples struggling with the hypertrophy of their sentimental life, and above all, of women who try, amidst their inner confusion, to escape their condemnation to a sick form of eros.¹¹

L'avventura revolves around the mysterious disappearance of a young woman, Anna (Lea Massari), during a boat tour off the coast of Sicily. Upon arrival to the island Lisca Bianca, accompanied by her fiancé Sandro (Gabriele Ferzetti) and other friends, Anna suddenly disappears. Moments earlier, in a brief confrontation with Sandro during which in vain she forced him to reflect on their relationship, Anna confessed that the idea of losing him made her feel terrible; however, she could no longer feel him. «L'idea di perderti mi fa malissimo. Eppure non ti sento più», says Anna, prior to her disappearance. In Cardone's view, Anna «manca al mondo per non venire meno a se stessa».¹² In this sense, if it is true, as Federico Vitella writes, that *L'avventura* depicts a middle-class heterosexual couple struggling with the hypocrisy (even to this day all too familiar) that subtends the married life, then one might also glimpse in Anna's disappearance a woman's courageous attempt to think of and embrace an idea of womanhood outside the parameters of male-imposed ascriptions.¹³

From this moment on, the film shifts to Claudia (Monica Vitti), Anna's best friend, who, during the search to find her, starts a love affair with Sandro. Claudia, however, soon proves to be no less restless than Anna: she accepts Sandro's flattery, but at the same time she constantly questions him about the nature of their love, which eventually turns out to be no less sick than the one between Sandro and Anna. The closer she gets to Sandro, the more Claudia senses that it is not her that he wants. For him, she is just a replacement – initially the replacement for Anna, whose ghostly presence somehow haunts

¹⁰ Ivi, p. 32. In this sense, as Peter Bondanella annotates, one aspect «of Antonioni's originality is his exceptional sensitivity to the philosophical currents of the times, his ability to portray modern neurotic, alienated, and guilt-ridden characters whose emotional lives are sterile—or at least poorly developed—and who seem to be out of place in their environments. If the perfect existentialist film could be imagined, it would probably be one of the works in Antonioni's trilogy, or possibly *Red Desert*». See Peter Bondanella, *Italian Cinema from Neorealism to the Present* (New Expanded Edition), New York, The Continuum Publishing Company, 1998, p. 211.

¹¹ The Sick Eros theme deeply informs Antonioni's cinematic aesthetic, as he himself admits: «This preoccupation with the erotic would not become obsessive if Eros were healthy, that is, if it were kept within human proportions. But eros is sick; man is uneasy, something is bothering him. And whenever something bothers him, man reacts, but he reacts badly, only on erotic impulse, and he is unhappy» (quoted in Seymour Chatman, *Antonioni: Or, the Surface of the World*, Berkeley, U of California P, 1985, p. 56). On this same theme, one should read Frank P. Tomasulo and Jason Grant McKahan, *Sick Eros: The Sexual Politics of Antonioni's Trilogy*, «Projection», 3, 1, 2009, pp. 1-23.

¹² Cardone, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

¹³ Federico Vitella, *Michelangelo Antonioni. L'avventura*, Turin, Lindau, 2010, pp. 161-164. As is known, Anna's mystery is never resolved. On this specific narrative choice, Vitella writes: «Ciò che un produttore italiano della seconda metà degli anni '50 non avrebbe potuto assolutamente approvare era ovviamente l'uscita di scena della protagonista nel bel mezzo del racconto: una trovata da pazzi, appunto. Ma si badi bene, il problema non era tanto la sparizione della protagonista, quanto il fatto che dopo la sua sparizione l'istanza narrante se ne disinteressasse a vantaggio di altri eventi e di altri personaggi, lasciando lo spettatore senza alcuna spiegazione risolutiva. Dunque non il mistero in sé, ma il fatto che il mistero non venisse sciolto» (p. 82).

their relationship, and then an even broader pretext Sandro uses not to think about other obscure wounds in his existence, mostly ego-disruptive, such as the failures of his professional life as architect manqué. Take, for instance, the scene in which, before making love with Claudia, Sandro closes the shutters of his hotel room window, which not by chance has a view on the cathedral of Noto whose architectural grandeur is unbearable to him. As Chatman illustrates, what Sandro ultimately lusts after is not Claudia, «but Woman, any woman, which is just his name for 'distraction from meaningful work'». ¹⁴ Eros, for him, is nothing more than an opportunistic drive, a way to sustain the recitation of his identity.

Utterly immersed in Antonioni's visual description of Claudia and Sandro's fraught relationship, I kept returning to something Freud once wrote about man's so-called debasement of amorous life. In his 1912 short article titled *The Most Prevalent Form of Degradation in Erotic Life*, we read that «When the original object of an instinctual desire becomes lost in consequence of repression, it is often replaced by an endless series of substitute-objects, none of which ever give full satisfaction». ¹⁵ Claudia expects a form of satisfaction that Sandro is unable to give, mostly because they have assigned to love a different meaning. The epilogue is the site in the film where woman's disillusionment as a response to the metonymic character shaping man's desire can be said to find its most meaningful representation. After having betrayed Claudia with a prostitute, Sandro sits in tears on a bench in a deserted piazza. Claudia approaches him from behind, and without ever crossing his gaze, hesitant, puts her hand lightly on his head. To those who were tempted to glimpse in this scene a final gesture of forgiveness, Antonioni pointed out that it is not forgiveness that is at stake here, but rather the recognition of «a mutual sense of pity», the only sentiment that now binds the lovers. ¹⁶

La notte provides no exceptions and «takes up problems at the other end of the love spectrum, those of a long-term couple». ¹⁷ Marcello Mastroianni stars as Giovanni Pontano, an ambitious novelist that is too caught up in his narcissistic anxiety about affirmation to attend to the malaise of his wife, Lidia (Jeanne Moreau). During the cocktail party for the launch of Giovanni's new book, Lidia observes her husband from afar; she walks around the room in a state of boredom, listening here and there to excerpts of other guests' conversations, without ever interjecting herself. Lidia appears elusive, unwilling to participate in the «celebrazione della creatività maschile». ¹⁸ Even after witnessing Giovanni's flirtation with Valentina (Monica Vitti), the younger daughter of the Milanese industrialist who hosts the party, Lidia does not feel a hint of jealousy. Despite her good intentions, Lidia simply does not love her husband anymore.

The final sequence, where the camera follows Lidia and Giovanni walking away from the party across a golf course, is key: «Se stasera ho voglia di morire», says Lidia, «è perché non ti amo più». And moments later, to Giovanni that tries to rebut – «Se dici questo, se vorresti già essere morta, vuol dire che mi vuoi ancora bene» – Lidia confesses that what she feels for him is only pity («È solo pietà»), a word that should resonate quite

¹⁴ Chatman, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

¹⁵ Sigmund Freud, *The Most Prevalent Form of Degradation in Erotic Life*, in *Sexuality and The Psychology of Love*, ed. and with an introduction by Philip Rieff, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1997, p. 58. For further elucidations of Sandro's behavior in *L'avventura*, from a Freudian perspective, see Chatman, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-7).

¹⁶ See Michelangelo Antonioni, *A Talk with Michelangelo Antonioni on His Work*, in *L'avventura, a film by Michelangelo Antonioni*, ed. by George Amberg, New York, Grove Press, p. 224.

¹⁷ Chatman, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

¹⁸ Cardone, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

powerfully in viewers' ears at this point. Worthless, then, is Giovanni's extreme attempt to cling to his wife in a very last sexual encounter while still on the golf course – the film abruptly ends at this scene – since not even that can heal a couple that seems to be already defeated.¹⁹

A much more definitive farewell opens *L'eclisse*, which is probably the most ambiguous among Antonioni's films of the tetralogy. In the opening scene, after yet another night spent arguing, Vittoria (Monica Vitti), a Roman translator in her twenties, ends her relationship with Riccardo (Francisco Rabal), giving up the ease of a life by his side. Vittoria begins to wander around Rome; she becomes part of the urban landscape, the contemplation of which runs through the entire span of the film. As Giuliana Bruno notes, this choice is of particular importance since it contributes to depicting the stratification of Vittoria's unconscious, along with the instability and wandering of her desire, which translates into circulation and restlessness.²⁰

In her incessant wandering, Vittoria eventually meets Piero (Alain Delon), a young broker who is quite the opposite of her. She casually flirts with him, in the hope that, through Piero, she may rediscover the passion of which she has been emptied. One afternoon, after making love, Vittoria and Piero promise each other to meet at the usual rendezvous. But when eight o'clock arrives, viewers are left with an almost eight-minute shot of streets becoming depopulated as night approaches. There is no sign of the two lovers, who will both miss the appointment. What other better way to render on screen the nature of solitude that shapes modern human relationships? A consequence, perhaps, of the modern capitalist society that pushes each subject to search for ever new, more immediate, but also more superficial forms of pleasure. In this sense, *L'eclisse* portrays nothing but «the eclipse of feelings», as Georges Sadoul aptly suggests, an eclipse that may be said to define sexual intercourse in the age of mechanical reproduction, where One enjoys without the Other, or better yet, where One enjoys himself through the Other, locked in a form of onanistic pleasure.²¹

¹⁹ Antonioni himself makes the following point about the difference between *L'avventura* and *La notte*: «In *L'avventura* they [the lovers] communicate only through this mutual sense of pity; they do not speak to one other. In *La notte*, however, they do converse with each other, they communicate freely, they are fully aware of what is happening to their relationship. But the result is the same, it doesn't differ. The man becomes hypocritical, he refuses to go on with the conversation because he knows quite well that if he openly expresses his feelings at the moment, everything would be finished. But even this attitude indicates a desire on his part to maintain the relationship, so then the more optimistic side of the situation is brought out». See *A Talk with Michelangelo Antonioni on His Work*, in Antonioni, *Michelangelo Antonioni: Interviews*, cit., p. 34.

²⁰ Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotions. Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film*, New York, Verso, 2007, p. 6. More precisely, Bruno observes that «In Antonioni's cinema, the architectonics of character is topophilically dislodged onto architecture and landscape, where it dwells and moves. In all four films of his sixties's tetralogy, we experience a transfer of the interior realm onto spatial configurations. Such an architectonic travels from Claudia's erratic search in *L'avventura* to Lidia's nocturnal rambling in *La notte* (1961) to Vittoria's erotic meandering in *L'eclisse* [...] to Giuliana's view of *Il deserto rosso*» (p. 97). On the theme of space and gender roles in Antonioni's more mature films, one should see also Clara Orban, *Antonioni's Women, Lost in the City*, «Modern Language Studies», 31, 2, pp. 11-27.

²¹ In this sense, I would disagree with Chatman's assertion that, in Vittoria, we find «anything like healthy sexuality». It is true that Vittoria, unlike the predecessors, knows how to «take pleasure in life's simpler beauties: the sight of rustling trees, billowing clouds, a calm provincial airstrip, flagpoles swaying in the breeze, and even, to Piero's chagrin, a man passing in the street» (see Chat-

While recollecting very succinctly the first three films of the tetralogy, an insightful book came to mind. I am referring to Stanley Cavell's 1981 *Pursuits of Happiness*, a very brief reference to which may help to illuminate the unique and maverick nature of Antonioni's representational rhetoric.

In it, Cavell focuses on some Hollywood's dialogue comedies of the thirties and forties, notably *The Lady Eve* (Preston Sturges, 1941), *It Happened One Night* (Frank Capra, 1934), *Bringing Up Baby* (Howard Hawks, 1938), *The Philadelphia Story* (George Cukor, 1940), *His Girl Friday* (Howard Hawks, 1940), *Adam's Rib* (George Cukor, 1949), and *The Awful Truth* (Leo McCarey, 1937), to reflect on the philosophical repercussions of a new cinematic genre that he renames «comedy of remarriage». What the comedies in question share is the choice to organize the plot around couples facing a sentimental crisis: after having experienced distance and having been on the verge of breaking up irreversibly, lovers attempt to reunite, but only on condition of a change of pace, which is, only after a period of solitude during which lovers were given the chance to reflect on their being together and feel the negative effects of their reciprocal absence. It is no coincidence that all these comedies begin with the separation of the spouses to end then with a re-marriage, or at least with a newfound equilibrium, propelled by a brand-new ideal of life together. As Cavell beautifully explains, «only those can genuinely marry who are already married».²²

What these films thematize, in short, is not so much alternative solutions to marriage, or more suitable narrative forms to describe interpersonal relationships in a society that has evolved and emancipated, but rather the reunion of the spouses, the strengthening of their relation that has experienced and escaped the threat of separation.

As should be clear at this point, nothing could be further from what Antonioni explored only few years later, in Italy, in his films created in the early sixties. Although *L'avventura*, *La notte* and *L'eclisse* take as a point of departure the separation of a couple, or in any case an agonizing lack of communication between the lovers, the Italian filmmaker then pushes such an incommunicability toward decidedly different outcomes. It is true, as Chatman has argued, that Antonioni centers his storylines each time on the experience of «a woman who has been disillusioned by a lover but who continues to muster the courage to seek and speak the truth».²³ However, far from proposing an attempt to re-establish a union, or to reconfigure the emotional structures that had shaped married life and were destabilized by crisis, the films seem instead to revolve around a gradual, excruciating even, *amorous dissipation*, which affects first and foremost the female characters, and their identity.

What else, if not this, does Vittoria mean, in *L'eclisse*, when she affirms that «Qui è tutto una gran fatica, anche l'amore?» Vittoria, Anna, Claudia, and Lidia are all «erotic nomads», as Bruno aptly writes.²⁴ And if they are like this, I would add, it is because, be-

man, p. 59), but this is nothing but the symptom of her addiction to social and relational dynamics typical of the capitalist age. In commenting on *L'eclisse* and his female character vis-à-vis *Deserto rosso*, Brunette argues that «Vittoria [...] is the opposite of Giuliana. She's calm, well-balanced girl who thinks about what she is doing. There is absolutely no symptom of neurosis [and I would add, of rebellion] in her». But he also specifies that, in his view, «In *The Eclipse*, the crisis has to do with emotions» (see Brunette, *op. cit.*, p. 81).

²² Stanley Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness. The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage*, Cambridge, Harvard UP, 1981, p. 127.

²³ Chatman, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

²⁴ Bruno, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

fore developing a relationship with a man, they still chase their chance to develop a relationship with themselves, outside and beyond the parameters of male-imposed ascriptions. I am invoking Robin Norwood's observations here, when in her *Women Who Love Too Much*, she writes that «No one can ever love us enough to fulfill us if we do not love ourselves, because when in our emptiness we go looking for love, we can only find more emptiness».²⁵ In this sense, among the many merits of Antonioni's tetralogy is its acute portrayal of women's attempts to come into consciousness through an as stubborn as it is painful confrontation with the male counterpart, that is, with a man that serves, in Lacan's words, «as a relay so that a woman becomes this Other to herself, as she is to him».²⁶

Antonioni's female characters confront one other on the issue of love and on their being in relation to the Other. As Orban writes, these are women that «demand to know about love, or at least to define the end of love»,²⁷ and in so doing, they are ultimately given a chance to know themselves better, to experience a form of amorous independence that ultimately contemplates the possibility «di restare da sole, di passeggiare, di dire 'non ti amo più' e di pretendere di sentirselo dire, di perdere tempo, di entrare in dialogo con le cose toccandole, di entrare nel paesaggio, di giocare, di cantare, fino ad arrivare addirittura a sparire o, più terribilmente, a perdonare».²⁸

What I am trying to communicate here is that a proper quest for femininity infuses Antonioni's more mature works. In them, a new model of woman emerges, antithetical to the female standards of Italy in the fifties, not only from a mere aesthetic point of view, but above all for the sensitivity his female characters incarnate. Antonioni's women, caught in their relationship with a male counterpart, understand that love has to do first and foremost with their own being. It is not only a matter of emotions: love, besides an act, is thought and ultimately knowledge, self-knowledge.

It is not accidental, I think, that the Italian director chooses to end his career with *Il filo pericoloso delle cose*, the third and final segment of the 2004 anthology film *Eros*, which was produced in the years of his illness. On the screen, of course, yet another couple, «senza più niente da dirsi». Cloe (Regina Nemni) and Christopher (Christopher Buchholz), during a vacation at a resort on Lake Burano, in Tuscany, suddenly come across the sensual Linda (Luisa Ranieri), a young woman who lives in a crumbling medieval tower not far from the beach. The plot is predictable: Antonioni is reworking here some of the major themes that have made the films of the tetralogy a worldwide phenomenon, portraying among other things the perils of sexual desire and a certain hypocrisy of married life. It comes as no surprise, then, that Christopher at some point cannot resist the lure of a sexual encounter with Linda, but also cannot give up his old and self-reassuring relationship with Cloe. As already said, Antonioni is not exactly exploring new territories, yet his narrative offers a very intriguing twist just when viewers are about to lament a sense of predictability: in the final sequence, after Christopher leaves to return to work to Paris, Cloe and Linda meet «in the neutral, primordial space of the beach».²⁹ The two women are completely naked, one in front of the other, and let themselves go in a sensual

²⁵ Robin Norwood, *Women Who Love Too Much*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1985, p. 177.

²⁶ Lacan, *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, cit., p. 616.

²⁷ Orban, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

²⁸ Simona Busni, *Tra lo sguardo e la pelle: le donne di Michelangelo Antonioni*, «Arabeschi», 12, 2018, web, last access: 28 November 2022, <<http://www.arabeschi.it/tra-lo-sguardo-e-la-pelle-le-donne-di-michelangelo-antonioni/>>.

²⁹ Murray Pomerance, *The Dangerous Thread of Things*, in Id., *Michelangelo Red Antonioni Blue: Eight Reflections on Cinema*, Berkley, U of California P, 2011, p. 130.

dance that seems to seal an enigmatic bond between them, finally free from the interference of any man, who will prove once more unable to approach female mystery.

Critics such as Lorenzo Cuccu acknowledge Antonioni's peculiar attitude toward standing in front of the world «come ad una realtà da decifrare».³⁰ But, from the detour we have taken, it seems that this same attitude may be said to have found its most challenging testing ground there where Antonioni intersects and dissolves his gaze into that of subjectivities perceived as disturbing *par excellence*, namely, in the gaze of women whose posture, and difference, the filmmaker tries to render on screen, while preserving at the same time their mysterious character, for instance, by embracing for each film oblique and indiscernible endings, such as that just mentioned.

Hence, a pressing question arises: What about this specifically female difference, if the attention now is shifted to Giuliana of *Deserto rosso*? With no doubt, Giuliana deserves a place apart among Antonioni's female characters. Viewers in this case are faced not only with the experience of a woman who is deeply dissatisfied with her married life, like her notable predecessors, but above all with «a neurotic who just manages to hold on to sanity».³¹

Antonioni's concern about the nature of vision touches its peak with *Deserto rosso*. Millicent Marcus writes that «When Antonioni has Giuliana ask her friends, “What should I do with my eyes, what should I look at?” [this is the question that torments Giuliana the most] he is raising his visual style to the level of a full-fledged thematic concern, and is making Giuliana its embodiment within the film». This is certainly true, yet, unlike Marcus who chooses to overlook the analysis that goes into defining the clinical nature of Giuliana's neurosis, I believe instead that this specific aspect cannot go unmentioned for the repercussions it has precisely on Antonioni's quest for femininity.³² Indeed, one might ask, by choosing as visual receptor a neurotic, possibly a hysteric, whose point of view does Antonioni really express?

3. *Deserto rosso*, a threat

Deserto rosso tells a very simple story. Monica Vitti stars as Giuliana, a troubled wife and mother, married to Ugo (Carlo Chionetti), head of a factory in the Ravenna area. From one of the very opening scenes staging a conversation between Ugo and Corrado Zeller (Richard Harris), a visiting engineer on a mission to recruit some laborers to export to Patagonia for the launch of a new plant, viewers immediately learn that Giuliana is recovering from what her husband refers to as a car accident – even though those same viewers soon intuit that it was more likely a suicide attempt. The film, then, closely fol-

³⁰ See Cuccu, *La visione come problema. Forme e svolgimento del cinema di Antonioni*, Rome, Bulzoni, 2017, p. 137.

³¹ Chatman, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

³² Millicent Marcus, *Italian Films in the Light of Neorealism*, Princeton, Princeton UP, 1986, p. 192. This is what Marcus writes precisely: «If Giuliana's neurosis were presented as a specific clinical condition attributable to concrete causes and susceptible to a given psychiatric treatment, we would dismiss her vision as just one more pathological symptom, rather than a viable model for Antonioni's own aestheticizing approach» (p. 197). Regarding the sources consulted by Antonioni concerning the psychiatric culture of those years, one should read Ruggero Eugeni, *La modernità a disagio. Michelangelo Antonioni e la cultura psichiatrica italiana tra gli anni Cinquanta e gli anni Sessanta del Novecento*, in *Michelangelo Antonioni. Prospettive, culture, politiche, spazi*, ed. by Alberto Boschi and Francesco Di Chiara, Milan, Il Castoro, 2015, pp. 49-68.

lows Giuliana, tireless in her movements and peregrinations, and her gradual involvement with Corrado, with whom she starts a love affair.

The reception of this film has raised conflicting critical positions. Commenting on *Deserto rosso* in the years immediately after its release, Lino Micciché, for instance, noticed in the last episode of the tetralogy «i sintomi di un discorso che ormai girava su se stesso in una pericolosa *impasse* ispirativa», lamenting in particular its continuous temporal and narrative disruptions, as well as Antonioni's predilection for a certain dramatic artificiality of the shots.³³ Conversely, in a chapter of his more recent *The Cinema of Economic Miracles*, Angelo Restivo has referred to *Deserto rosso* in terms of an extremely significant moment of transition, to be lodged between *L'eclisse* and *Blow-up* (1967), where the Italian cineaste has deepened the reflections around the use of the free indirect point-of-view shot (*soggettiva libera indiretta*) already underway in his previous works, while simultaneously moving forward, «toward something new».³⁴ Restivo is here building on an argument expressed years earlier by Pier Paolo Pasolini, who, in his heartfelt attempt to defend the film from the numerous criticisms following the victory of the Golden Lion in 1965, insisted on identifying in *Deserto rosso* the epitome of a new cinematic aesthetic. Its innovative aspect has to be found in the use of a free indirect point-of-view shot that would allow both the director and viewers to step into the character's shoes, an artifice that Giorgio Tinazzi, for instance, referred to as «subjective camera».³⁵ More precisely, according to Pasolini, with *Deserto rosso* Antonioni finally manages to free himself. Pasolini contends that, in it, the director «non appiccica più, come aveva fatto nei film precedenti, la sua visione del mondo a un contenuto genericamente impegnato (la nevrosi da alienazione): ma guarda il mondo attraverso gli occhi di una malata [...]». Attraverso questo meccanismo stilistico, Antonioni ha liberato se stesso: ha potuto finalmente vedere il mondo coi «suoi occhi,» perché ha identificato la sua visione delirante di esteticismo, con la visione di una nevrotica».³⁶

For *Deserto rosso* Antonioni does abandon the strict formalism characterizing some of his earlier efforts, from *Cronaca di un amore* (1950) to *Le amiche* (1955) and *Il Grido* (1957), and opts for a cinematic narrative form that fully embraces the female character's perspective, working smartly with color too to render Giuliana's emotional scenario on the screen. However, it seems to me that Pasolini, while redefining the literary technique of the indirect discourse in cinematic terms, does not make much of the fact that Antonioni's identification with a woman clearly suffering from a neurosis ultimately undermines his entire project of a cinematic quest for female identity. As I said before, from the point of view of the visual grammar, Giuliana's neurosis carries with it an intriguing problematic that should lead the viewers to ask themselves: whose point of view is expressed here?

³³ Lino Micciché, *Il cinema italiano degli anni '60*, Venice, Marsilio, 1975, p. 239. A similar opinion was expressed by Cesare Musatti, curator of the translations of Freud's works in Italy for the publishing house Boringhieri: more precisely, referring to Antonioni's need to defer the action by proceeding «a rallentatore», Musatti speaks of a delay that «quando è eccessivo, può anche diventare fastidioso». See Cesare Musatti, *L'ultimo Antonioni dinanzi a uno psicologo*, «Cinema Nuovo», 219, 1972, pp. 339-340.

³⁴ Angelo Restivo, *The Cinema of Economic Miracles. Visuality and Modernization in the Italian Art Film*, Durham, Duke UP, 2002, p. 126.

³⁵ Giorgio Tinazzi, *Antonioni*, Florence, La Nuova Italia, 1976, p. 100.

³⁶ Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Empirismo eretico*, Milan, Garzanti, 2000, pp. 179-180.

Cardone is right when she affirms that Giuliana, observed in both her relationship with her husband and her relationship with Corrado, and in that with her son, would incarnate, albeit neurotically, another example of «soggettività femminile imprevista» that distances herself «dal dettato della coniugalità e della maternità tradizionali». ³⁷ At the same time, however, Giuliana brings the emergence of the «Soggetto Imprevisto» to the side of illness and mental disorder, thus to a side where, say, the signs of her *difference* are more complex and nuanced. What I want to suggest is that Giuliana's 'unforeseen' character emerges this time in her ability to sabotage somehow the quest for female identity that Antonioni had been pursuing since his previous installments of the tetralogy. Giuliana's gaze, in fact, turns out to be dependent on that of the men to whom she relates, in a very peculiar manner. Giuliana, as a hysterical character, may be said to be working from within the cinematic aesthetic of the free indirect style only to disrupt it.

4. Giuliana, or the Hysterical Subject

At this juncture, a theoretical elucidation is in order. At the beginning of the twentieth century, hysteria understood as «that infamously resilient somatic illness without organic lesions» ³⁸ died out. The term is no longer listed in the official *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, and this is because hysteria is no longer considered a syndrome of clinical relevance. Nevertheless, as Patricia Gherovici convincingly argues, «the termination of the entire disease form was rather a semantic suppression than the real elimination of the illness». ³⁹ This is why, even in recent times, there has been a resurgence of the question of hysteria, both among feminist scholars, for whom hysteria is a means to denounce the relegation to the margins of female subjectivity inherent the dominant patriarchal culture, ⁴⁰ and among art historians, such as Georges Didi-Huberman, to mention probably the most notable, who, in his 1982 book *Invention of Hysteria*, has emphasized the close relationship between the development of photography and of the clinical category of hysteria. ⁴¹

My analysis of *Deserto rosso* is informed by Lacan's thinking on hysteria as it is developed in particular in his *Seminar XVII, L'envers de la psychanalyse (1969-70)*, dedicated to the theory of the four discourses at work in psychoanalysis. In it, Lacan clarifies that, in his lexicon, hysteria is not so much a neurosis but rather a discursive structure illustrating the functioning of social bonds that order both individual and collective life. More precisely, as Slavoj Žižek and Bruce Fink help to understand, Lacan discusses hysteria as an example of a very peculiar relationship between a subject and a so-called master, whereby «The hysteric pushes the master – incarnated in a partner, teacher, or whomever – to the point where he or she can find the master's knowledge lacking [...]. In ad-

³⁷ Cardone, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

³⁸ Elizabeth Bronfen, 1998. *The Knotted Subject. Hysteria and Its Discontents*, Princeton, Princeton UP, 1998, p. xi.

³⁹ Patricia Gherovici, *Where Have the Hysterics Gone? Lacan's Reinvention of Hysteria*, «ESC», 40, 1, 2014, p. 47.

⁴⁰ See, for instance, Evelyn Ender, *Sexing the Mind. Nineteenth-Century Fictions of Hysteria*, Ithaca and London, Cornell UP, 1995, and Elaine Showalter, *Histories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Culture*, New York, Columbia UP, 1997.

⁴¹ Georges Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria. Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière*, trans. by Alisa Hartz, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 2004.

dressing the master, the hysteric demands that he or she produce knowledge, and then goes on to disprove his or her theories».⁴²

Lacan's original contribution is in identifying the hysteric's discourse with a «unique configuration with respect to knowledge».⁴³ But, and this is the key aspect, it is not knowledge in itself that interests the hysteric: no predetermined form of knowledge, such as that defining the discourse of the Master and University, can satisfy the hysteric; nor does the hysteric aim at an encyclopedic form of knowledge, similar to the medical one that she has challenged by placing herself before doctors as an insurmountable enigma. Rather, a form of oblique joy crosses the hysteric only when she proves able to put knowledge in check. Following Lacan's proposal, the hysteric demands to know the truth about her own being, an understanding that constantly eludes her. Better yet, the hysteric is always engaged in the search of such a knowledge that can tell the truth about sex, her sex, only to simultaneously protest this same interpellation. Her somatic manifestations are nothing but ways in which the hysteric poses questions, ways in which the hysteric asks insistently: Who am I? Am I a man or a woman? And again: What does a woman want? This is how Lacan reinterprets the metaphorical nature of the hysterical body.⁴⁴

The hysteric, in this sense, does recognize a lack in her knowledge, and to resolve it, demands that a master offer her some answers. To fulfill her desire to know, the hysteric turns to men via a virile identification. After all, one might ask, how else would it be possible for the hysteric to grasp what is desirable in a woman if not by embracing a male gaze herself? This is what Lacan means when he says that the hysteric «plays the part of the man»: obsessed by her desire to penetrate what she perceives to be a very elusive essence, the hysteric borrows men's gaze, but only to then challenge those same men in a position of knowledge and authority by revealing their flaws. This is the double movement defining the hysteric's riddle.

Returning now to our main topic of discussion, it seems to me that *Deserto rosso* masterfully portrays such a dialectical movement, on both a narrative and cinematic level.

Giuliana, like the patients at the Parisian Salpêtrière hospital, those that a young Freud observed during the Tuesday lessons held by Charcot, offers her body for viewers to interpret. Not by chance, Giuliana asks insistently «Che cosa ho?» only to turn out to be «malata di niente». Take, for instance, one of the initial sequences of the film, in which Giuliana suddenly wakes up from a nightmare, feverish. After covering her shoulders with a shawl, she gets up and goes into her son's room, who continues to sleep, only to turn off his robot toy. Giuliana finds it impossible to get back to bed, and therefore, in the next sequence, viewers see her from behind as she starts to go downstairs, but suddenly stops. Agitated, she comes back up, and after sitting down on a chair on the landing, she takes a thermometer to check her temperature, once more, but there is no fever. It is at this point that Giuliana starts to assume contracted poses, more and more rigid, under her husband's eyes, who in the meantime has gotten up too, and looks at her from their bedroom door.

This sequence is key insofar as, within the frame of the screen, just as in the clinic-theatre of the Salpêtrière, Antonioni stages a very intriguing triple gaze: that of the husband who, like a perfect master, looks at Giuliana and investigates her behavior in an at-

⁴² Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject. Between Language and Jouissance*, Princeton, Princeton UP, 1995, p. 134.

⁴³ Ivi, p. 133.

⁴⁴ The Italian reader can refer to Roberto Cavasola, *L'isteria, la depressione e Lacan*, Macerata, Quodlibet, 2013.

tempt to satisfy his desire for dominance; then Giuliana's, that while indulging in the male gaze in the hope of finding clues of her too elusive identity, simultaneously rebels against any man's answers to her questions, in an attempt to prove man's knowledge as always partial and inconsistent;⁴⁵ and, last but not least, viewers', since they, too, witness to such a staging, coating the hysteric's body with even further meanings.

Unlike Freud's hysterics, however, Giuliana speaks. Giuliana, in her own way, attempts to explain how she feels. This is what we see in another crucial scene, the one staging Giuliana's dialogue with Corrado. It is telling that she confides precisely in him. What brings her so close to Corrado is the uncomfortable feeling of glimpsing in him the same malaise that troubles her, the sharing of a sensitivity not easily definable. Unlike Ugo, who is a too «well-adjusted person who remains in touch with the world through [...] business or technical values»,⁴⁶ Corrado may be said to incarnate instead a more depressive personality; he is a man who eventually admits he does not know how to live, the same way Giuliana does not know what to look at. «Tu dici “Cosa devo guardare?”, io dico “Come devo vivere?”. È la stessa cosa», this is how Corrado rephrases the questions that torment Giuliana.

After showing him the store that she wants to open to start her own business, Giuliana then follows Corrado on a trip from Ravenna to Ferrara. Together they visit Mario, a worker to whom Corrado wants to offer a job in Patagonia. Once at Mario's place, while waiting for him to return home, greeted by his wife, Giuliana begins to recount the story of a young girl she claims to have met in the clinic where she was hospitalized after the suicide attempt. It is not difficult for viewers to intuit that Giuliana is talking about herself, in the third person. She describes a woman «che vuole tutto», a woman that does not know how to make a choice, a woman whose eyes rest on everything, causing her tremendous suffering. According to the doctor, the cure would consist of learning to want only one thing, or at least, one thing at a time: «Lei deve imparare ad amare una persona, o una cosa, suo marito, suo figlio, un lavoro o un cane», these are the doctor's words that Giuliana faithfully reports, «ma non marito, lavoro, alberi, cane, fiume...»

Precisely this scene has inspired Anne Carson, Canadian poet and refined classicist, to write a sequence of poems dedicated to Antonioni's films with Monica Vitti, now reunited in her 2005 collection *Decreation*. «Kant's Question About Monica Vitti» and «Ode to the Sublime by Monica Vitti» in particular are proper odes to *L'eclisse* and *Deserto rosso* respectively, a tribute to the mastery with which Vitti has been able to visually translate Kant's theory of the sublime, guided by the suggestions of Edmund Burke, whom, according to Carson, the actress had certainly read.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ As Gherovici well illustrates, «When the hysteric exposes the insufficiency of the answer offered by the Other (whatever the answer may be), the hysteric makes visible the place where the other is lacking, a lack that the hysteric is in fact occupying as the insurmountable enigma. Identified with the other's lack, the hysteric can fantasize becoming the Other's lack. This is a double gesture: on the one hand, it uncovers the Other's lack, yet on the other hand, the hysteric offers herself completely as a plug to cover up the void in the Other» (*op. cit.*, p. 59).

⁴⁶ Chatman, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

⁴⁷ Anne Carson, *Decreation*, New York, Knopf, 2005. For an analysis that takes into account the influence of Antonioni on Carson's poems, as well as on the photographic series *Untitled Film Stills* (1977-1980) by Cindy Sherman, both read in Deleuzian terms, I refer to Alessia Ricciardi's article, *Becoming Woman. From Antonioni to Anne Carson and Cindy Sherman*, «The Yearbook of Comparative Literature», 56, 2010, pp. 6-23.

Carson insists on the word *everything*: «I want everything», so the speaking voice of one of her odes (that most likely is reproducing Vitti's voice) claims. Carson, in other words, insists on the fact that Giuliana lusts for everything: in her store she would love to sell ceramics, but also many other items, all those things that one may sell, if possible; and again, if she could go on a trip, Giuliana says, she would take all her belongings with her. Yet, it is somehow inevitable that such a desire eventually ends up revealing its reverse, the precipice of nothingness along which the hysteric slips, trapped in her delirium of omnipotence. It is not accidental that, at some point, Giuliana confesses that she often misses the floor under her feet. She sees herself walking along a «piano inclinato»; this is how she feels. So ideal is her way of experiencing desire, the hysteric ends up missing what she really wants.

In Lacan's view, dissatisfaction is one characteristic, if not the main characteristic, shaping hysterical desire, to the point that the French psychoanalyst even goes so far as to speak of a «*jouissance* of being deprived» in reference to the hysteric's discourse.⁴⁸ It is a dynamic that emerges even more clearly when one considers the way the hysteric relates to the Other, namely, in the specific case of *Deserto Rosso*, the relationship that Giuliana establishes, or better yet, refuses to establish, with Ugo and Corrado.

As Carlo Di Carlo notes in his pivotal study on *Deserto rosso*, in the entire film there are only two love scenes, both disturbed and abruptly interrupted, the first starring the couple Giuliana-Ugo, the second Giuliana-Corrado. «Entrambe le scene», writes Di Carlo, «ubbidiscono ad un rituale contrastato e faticoso, dovuto alla resistenza nevrotica di Giuliana».⁴⁹ And in fact, there is nothing erotic or arousing about these scenes; the camera itself seems uncomfortable in its attempt to film the lovers, and rather insists on the way Giuliana's arms and legs contract, while they get carefully scrutinized by way of a close-up.

I want to focus here in particular on the love sequence between Giuliana and Corrado, which takes place almost at the end of the film, for it is particularly representative, I believe, of the *dérobade* stratagem Colette Soler has traced as peculiar feature of hysteria.⁵⁰

In hotel room 309, where Corrado is staying, Giuliana foments her lover's desire only to then evade it. Here is precisely the point in the film where the difference that separates hysteric from woman arises. Lacan is peremptory on this point: «L'hystérique n'est pas une femme».⁵¹ The hysteric's *jouissance* is not the woman's. While a woman, once in front of a man, assumes the position of *objet a*, that is to say, she voluntarily embodies that which causes desire in him, the hysteric instead, when in the same position, remains somehow paralyzed, for she fears that that position may transform her into a mere object of enjoyment under man's control. This is why the hysteric prefers 'to be' a man rather than 'to belong to' a man, even for the time of one night, an aspect that leads Massimo Recalcati to affirm that «Nell'intento di preservarsi come soggetto del desiderio di fronte alla presa del godimento maschile, l'isterica sceglie di rinunciare al proprio godimento».⁵²

⁴⁸ Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book XVII. The Other Side of Psychoanalysis (1969-1970)*, trans. by Russell Grigg, New York, W. W. Norton, 2007, p. 99.

⁴⁹ Carlo di Carlo, *Antonioni. Il deserto rosso*, Bologna, Cappelli, 1978, p. 31.

⁵⁰ Colette Soler, *La hysteria, su lengua, sus dialectos y sus vinculos*, trans. by Montserrat Pera and Matilde Pelegri, Barcelona, Curso, 2002, pp. 157-213.

⁵¹ Lacan, *Le Séminaire Livre XVIII. D'un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant (1970-1971)*, Paris, Seuil, 2007, p. 155.

⁵² Massimo Recalcati, *Jacques Lacan. La clinica psicoanalitica: struttura e soggetto*, Milan, Raffaello Cortina, 2016, p. 325.

The impossibility of having desire and *jouissance* coalesce is precisely what distances hysteric and woman. They both certainly want to be desired, and seduction is the trick to which they resort to achieve that end. But, if a woman wants to be desired in order to enjoy (she wants to enjoy the Other, namely, she demands to enjoy the phallus by making part of her pleasure depend on that, as Vittoria does with Piero in *L'eclisse*, for instance), the hysteric on the contrary wants to be desired, for the desire of the man makes her exist. Indeed, if she does not occupy a privileged place in the Other's desire, the hysteric feels nothing – although eventually the Other's desire always turns out to be somehow disappointing to her. I suggest that we can see this same strategy in Giuliana's behavior with Corrado. Giuliana lends herself to Corrado's desire; she certainly wants to awaken it, but only to interpret it, and ultimately learn something about herself out of it. Hence the questions she asks before and after the sexual intercourse: «Chi sono io? Perché ho sempre bisogno degli altri?» which could be translated as «Cosa è una donna? E che cosa vuole?» although these are always mostly rhetorical questions, precisely because the statement 'You are...' is something the hysteric cannot tolerate. As Gherovici writes, no answer can satisfy the hysteric's riddle, insofar as «The object of the hysteric riddle, contained in the statement "You are..." is inevitably dropped as a lost object, as an *objet petit a*. Paradoxically, the only answer to the question is no answer at all, silence».⁵³

5. Conclusion

What remains then of Antonioni's quest for female identity, when this same quest in *Deserto rosso* is entrusted to a hysteric's gaze? This article set out to examine *Deserto rosso* as the site where the main female character can be said to destabilize the female identity quest that characterizes Antonioni's films of the tetralogy. To illuminate my argument, I pursued a Lacanian reflection on Antonioni's 1964 film, only to discuss how the hysteric responds to an identity she perceives as elusive either through the symptom, clearly aimed at an addressee, or through a series of virile identifications aiming to fill a lack of knowledge that she feels as her own. In both cases, the hysteric resorts to a performance – and how else should one interpret, if not in terms of a performance, the scene in which Giuliana, Ugo, Corrado, and other friends are locked in a hut, in the middle of the sea, engaged in group effusions that Giuliana herself wanted to initiate? Hysteria, in this sense, becomes a proper strategy that a subject may stage to feed the belief that there is a knowledge, an essence of femininity, which escapes women themselves. In order to understand what eludes her, the hysteric renounces the feminine position, and rather tries to question the man, his point of view, his gaze. In other words, she relies on an apparently perfect master, but only to prove his answers, too, as always incomplete and inconsistent. As Lacan points out, the hysteric «wants the other to be a master, and to know lots of things, but at the same time she doesn't want him to know so much that he does not believe she is the supreme price of all his knowledge. In other words, she wants a master she can reign over. She reigns, and he does not govern».⁵⁴

In this sense I contend that Giuliana does incarnate what we may call a hysterical subject. As Hélène Cixous has written, recalling Lacan's proposal, «It is said that the hysteric 'makes-believe' the father, plays the father, 'makes believe' the master. Plays, makes up,

⁵³ Gherovici, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-59.

⁵⁴ Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book XVII. The Other Side of Psychoanalysis (1969-1970)*, cit., p. 129.

makes-believe: she makes-believe she is a woman, unmakes-believe too... plays at desire, plays the father... turns herself into him, unmakes him at the same time». ⁵⁵ So does Giuliana, in particular when she makes Antonioni believe to have captured her gaze, a gaze through which he aims to disclose something about femininity. In turn, through her gaze, Giuliana wants to do nothing more than unmask the insufficiency of any definition, confining femininity to the ineffability that belongs to it.

⁵⁵ Hélène Cixous, *Castration or Decapitation?*, «Signs. Journal of Women in Culture and Society», 7,1, 1981, p. 47.