

La Cupola: Re-visiting L'Avventura through 'building' and 'dwelling'

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La Cupola : Re-visiting *L'Avventura* through 'building and 'dwelling'

Abstract

This essay aims to re-consider Michelangelo Antonioni's 1960 film '*L'Avventura*' in the light of new learning about his creative practice and methodology as recounted by the architect of his Sardinian holiday villa, Dante Bini. In addition the essay will draw on the ideas of architectural theorist Christian Norberg-Schulz.

<https://vimeo.com/382780180> PW: LaCupola4

Supporting Statement

Research aims and process

"The subject of my films is always born of the landscape, of a site, of a place I want to explore." Michelangelo Antonioni

It is only in relatively recent years that it has come to light that the visionary Italian filmmaker Michelangelo Antonioni commissioned and built a quite unique and extraordinary holiday villa - *La Cupola* - on the island of Sardinia. Working closely with the architect Dante Bini, who pioneered the Binishell dome system of building, Antonioni completed the villa in the early 1970s, some say as a romantic gesture for his then leading lady and lover Monica Vitti.

At Antonioni's request the villa and its whereabouts were largely kept secret during his lifetime but at a lecture given in February 2018 Bini was able to reveal details of the intense working practice required by Antonioni in the development of *La Cupola*.

With this revealing new insight into Antonioni's creative practice and way of thinking we are afforded an opportunity to reconsider themes and characters in his films, in this instance, '*L'Avventura*'. Further to this I would like to introduce some ideas of Norwegian architectural theorist Christian Norberg-Schulz whose thinking around the significance of 'place' seems highly appropriate in this essay, given what we now know about Antonioni's motivations and approach to the build of the villa.

Drawing on the 20th century German philosopher Martin Heidegger, Norberg-Schulz suggests that the very nature of human identity is predicated on a sense of 'place' and moreover the act of 'dwelling' as Heidegger terms it, and therefore, building, is key to this process.

Norberg-Schulz states: *"The existential purpose of building (architecture) is therefore to make a site become a place, that is, to uncover the meanings potentially present in the given environment."*

While Antonioni's work has been extensively reflected on through a number of theoretical and philosophical perspectives, his films have not previously been considered in light of Norberg-Schulz's concepts of 'place', 'identity' and 'dwelling'.

The characters in '*L'Avventura*' appear rootless and wandering, often moving through spaces both built and natural without any apparent home or domestic life of their own. This disconnect from 'place', and indeed from each other, has often been referred to in Antonioni films as 'alienation' which the essay aims to explore in the context of '*L'Avventura*'. And the ideas of Norberg-Schulz will be useful here, particularly in relation to the character of Claudia and her narrative and thematic 'homelessness'.

Audio-visual form

The visual and the audio are key to the experience and understanding of both film and architecture, making an audio-visual approach to this essay particularly appropriate.

Firstly it enables the villa to be experienced through footage, stills and location audio that has been acquired by the author on a recent research visit to the site of *La Cupola*. The video essay also enables us to experience first hand Dante Bini's testimony as to Antonioni's working practice. Moreover the research and development process for the design of the villa, as recounted by Bini, required an experience and appreciation of both the sights and sounds of the natural environment of the north-west coast of Sardinia, which are also represented here in audio-visual form.

The sound design of the essay – incorporating elements of location audio and the '*L'Avventura*' soundtrack – reflect Antonioni's emphasis on the importance of sound in the creative practices of both film and building: their respective 'sonic architecture'.

The essay also applies textual analysis to '*L'Avventura*', requiring that key scenes are re-visited along with author's commentary to enable a clearer argument to be made for this particular re-consideration of the film.

Works Cited

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Biography

Peter Spence is a Senior Lecturer at Sheffield Hallam University where he teaches a number of film theory modules on the Film and Media Production BA, and is also Course Leader of the Foundation Year in Media Arts and Communications.

Peter is an award winning film-maker whose work has screened widely on the international festival circuit. His production company *Natural Cinema* makes factual productions both commissioned and independently, often with a focus on art and architecture subjects. Previously Peter has worked for the Architectural Association, the British Film Institute and in TV for the BBC and ITV amongst others.

He holds an MA Screen Arts (Producing and Directing) from Sheffield Hallam University and BA (Hons) Politics and History from Queen Mary, University of London. He is also a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. <https://www.shu.ac.uk/about-us/our-people/staff-profiles/peter-spence>