

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Themes in Antonioni's Films

Desire

Loss of Desire A key symptom of loneliness in his films is the passionless sexuality of many of the main characters, especially the women. Given that sexual desire is a natural instinct, in the fractured society of post-war Italy, it is depicted as abnormal. The film-maker himself has called this condition 'sick Eros' (*malattia dei sentimenti*). In film after film, sexuality is reduced to casual seduction or the quiet desperation of joyless sex. Examples include Giovanni's encounter with a mentally unstable woman in *The Night* and Giuliana's copulation with Corrado in *Red Desert*. However, an even more poignant illustration of this malaise is the character of Vittoria in *The Eclipse*. She separates from her fiancé Riccardo for no apparent reason, at least she is unable to articulate one. 'I don't know' she repeatedly says in answer to his question about what she wants; her lack of self-awareness is itself a symptom of disorientation. Her morose sexuality dominates the film, nowhere more explicitly than when she talks with her neighbour Anita, who also wants to know why she left Riccardo. 'We spent the whole night talking,' Vittoria says with a sigh, 'and for what?' Gazing out a window, she says, 'At times, a piece of cloth, a needle, a book...or a man, it's the same thing.' Sexual desire, the animating pulse of life, is equated with the most mundane objects in a woman's life. Eros, the classical god of sensual love, has no place in the dreary world of money-making and modernist buildings. Vittoria has been infected by the 'sick desire' that poisons society.