



"The Eclipse" ("L'Eclisse")

Director: Michelangelo Antonioni

Screenplay: Michelangelo Antonioni

Music: Giovanni Fusco

Released 1962

With Monica Vitti, Alain Delon, Francisco Rabal, and others

While the first credits appear on the screen, we hear the well-known pop singer Mina sing "Il twist." It is a cheerful number, presented with gusto and playful exuberance. This music ends abruptly in the middle of the credits, to be replaced by an atonal and dissonant composition by Giovanni Fusco. The contrast between the two pieces is sharp and significant. It indicates an opposition that runs through the entire film--that between the ordinary and familiar on the one hand, and the strange and unsettling on the other. The traditional harmonies and predictable rhythm of the twist represent what people are used to; popular music is what average consumers enjoy and feel at home with. Modern symphonic music, by contrast, is innovative and upsetting; dissonance in particular expresses some sort of alienation and is experienced as disturbing. Throughout "L'eclisse" there is a fundamental contrast between seeing the world as something ordinary and familiar on the one hand, and as something mysterious and strange on the other. For Vittoria (Monica Vitti), the protagonist of the story, it is the alien nature of things that comes increasingly into view. Fusco's atonal music, although only minimally used, is a powerful means to invoke the haunting strangeness of the world.

In the early morning hours Vittoria and Ricardo (Francisco Rabal) find themselves in Ricardo's modern, well-furnished apartment--emotionally exhausted and mostly silent. The lovers are in the last phase of their break-up. They have talked all night, and they have reached a point where nothing more can be said or done. Ricardo, dejected, anxiously looks at Vittoria--or spitefully turns away from her, morosely staring at nothing. Vittoria walks around in the apartment, gazing wonderingly at art objects, books, and pieces of furniture. The only sound that persists throughout this morning scene is that of an electric fan in the living room.

We see Vittoria walking toward her own apartment through Rome's modernistic EUR district. The streets are quiet and empty. The wide-open spaces and the non-traditional architecture evoke feelings of an alien world, of humans beings lost in a strange landscape. A car stops beside Vittoria, and Ricardo gets out. He insists that he accompany her home; he is desperate. When they reach her apartment he invites her for breakfast, but Vittoria declines. "I'm not hungry," she says with some emphasis. Hiding his desperate craving for love under an awkwardly nonchalant demeanor, Ricardo offers a final farewell and walks away. Vittoria enters her modern apartment and goes to the window. In the silence of the early morning she becomes absorbed in watching the wind move the foliage of some distant trees.

In a taxi Vittoria arrives at the Borsa, the Rome Stock Exchange. She emerges into the hectic commotion of rushing people, honking cars, and the general bustle of a traditional downtown business district. The architecture is historic. In contrast to the previous scene, people and buildings are crowded together in narrow spaces. Inside the Exchange brokers are yelling, gesticulating, telephoning, and rushing frantically back and forth. Bells are ringing; on the electronic board stock prices are flashing and changing. For an outsider like Vittoria the scene is a mad pandemonium. Slowly she makes her way through the crowd. She is looking for her mother who regularly attends the Borsa sessions as a private speculator. When Vittoria spots her, the mother (Lilla Brignone) is totally absorbed by the dealing on the trading floor and the changing numbers on the board. The mother whispers something to a young trader, Piero (Alain Delon), who immediately rushes to a telephone. There an older trader happens to be giving a buy order which Piero overhears. Piero, pleased to catch this bit of insider information, runs off to tell his boss (Louis Seigner) about it.

Eventually Vittoria succeeds in getting her mother's attention. It is a very distracted attention, however, because the mother is thoroughly preoccupied by her gambling and the frantic communications that dominate the whole scene. Her conversation with Vittoria is absentminded and bare of cordiality or joy. Piero joins them and perfunctorily introduces himself to Vittoria. A loud buzzer quiets the traders, and a manager announces that one of their colleagues has died of a heart attack. He asks for a moment of silence. For a full minute one hears nothing but the sound of ceiling fans and the ringing of distant telephones. The traders do not show any genuine emotion; the minute of silence is a formality. Piero whispers to Vittoria that huge sums of money are lost during such breaks. As soon as the minute has passed, the deafening clamor of the trading floor erupts once more, and everybody is involved with new vigor in the hectic activity of buying and selling. Vittoria's mother has a hard time tearing herself away from the trading. When she finally joins her daughter outside, Vittoria realizes that she will not be able to have the heart-to-heart talk with her mother for which she has come downtown.

In the evening Vittoria is chatting with her neighbor Anita (Rosanna Rory) and Anita's friend Marta (Mirella Ricciardi) in Marta's apartment. The apartment is decorated with large pictures of African landscapes, hunting rifles, trophies, native artifacts, and other memorabilia from colonial Kenya. Marta was born and raised in East Africa, and she does not feel at home in Rome. She shows Anita and Vittoria various books and

photographs, and then plays a record with exciting drum beats for them. Vittoria (according to the script) "experiences a great sense of grandeur, of freedom, of nobility"(1) while taking in the sights and sounds of Africa. She tries on native clothing and jewelry and paints her face black. She dances to the music, playfully brandishing a spear. Nowhere in the film does she look more exuberant and relaxed than in this scene. Marta, however, becomes annoyed and tells her friends to "stop playing Negroes." Her further remarks reveal that she has a violent racist contempt for black Africans, and that she is rather afraid of the armed uprising that she expects the natives to stage against their European exploiters.

There is a noise at the door; they discover that Marta's dog has run away. The poodle has joined a whole pack of dogs that are roaming through the night. Marta and Vittoria chase after them. Eventually Vittoria finds herself alone on top of a hill where the wind is rattling the loose wires of a row of flag poles. Fascinated she stands in the dark, looking at the flagpoles and at an Olympic statue, while attentively listening to the strange sounds of the wind and the wires. Nothing happens. She is alone and alert, and the things around her present themselves with an otherworldly intensity.

Next day we see Vittoria and Anita in the backseats of a small air plane. Anita's husband and a co-pilot are delivering the plane to Verona. Vittoria deeply enjoys the aerial views, the radiant light, the clouds that they traverse, and finally the wide and tranquil space of the airfield. Again, nothing happens, but Vittoria is serenely absorbed in the sensuous perception of such every-day things as a tune in the juke box, a couple of waiting passengers, and the view of the distant foothills of the Alps. Away from the emotional pressures and the hectic commerce of Rome, she spends a long time quietly looking at things.

Back in Rome Vittoria witnesses a severe downturn at the Borsa. The crash causes an intensified pandemonium of screaming, telephoning, running, and crying. Vittoria's mother is in hysterics: "It's always the Socialists who spoil everything that goes on here." She rubs salt on her thigh to protect herself against further bad luck.

Piero joins Vittoria at a bistro, all the while making telephone calls. He barely finds time to gobble down the food he has ordered, or to pay real attention to the woman in whom he has obviously found an interest. "Don't you ever stand still?" Vittoria asks him. Piero looks astonished. "Why should I stand still?" he asks. He has no idea what Vittoria means.

In the evening Piero rudely gets rid of a date and drives in his Alfa-Romeo to Vittoria's apartment. Vittoria is working on a translation when she sees him outside. She tries to hide in another room. A drunk (Cyrus Elias) walks by and spots her. He shouts a friendly hello and staggers on. When Piero realizes that Vittoria is home, he asks her to let him in. Although she likes his witty come-ons, she declines with a laugh. At that moment the drunk steals Piero's car and drives off at a very high speed. Piero curses and goes off in search of the police.

Next morning the Alfa-Romeo is pulled up from a small lake while Piero is watching in a crowd of onlookers. Vittoria joins him. She tells him that she is glad that he has called her. It turns out that there is a dead man in the car. Vittoria is disturbed by that, but Piero is only concerned about possible damage to the Alfa.

They stroll in the direction of Vittoria's apartment. In the middle of a zebra crossing Piero tells her that he will kiss her when they reach the other side of the street. He kisses her briefly when they get there, but Vittoria pulls away. "I am going," she tells him. Walking hesitantly away she tears a small piece of wood off a fence and throws it into a barrel of water that stands on a construction site. At night she calls Piero, but does not speak when he picks up the phone.

During one of the next days Vittoria goes to the corner where they had kissed; she has a date with Piero. While she is waiting she looks around--at the nearby streets, at the few people who pass by, at the building under construction, and at other sights of the neighborhood. In spite of the ordinariness of the environment, everything she sees seems to have an intense presence. She looks at the piece of wood that floats in the barrel. It is the very ordinariness and triviality of these things that makes them look strange, and that captures her attention. Piero finally arrives, lights a cigarette, and tosses the empty match book into the barrel, where it is seen floating beside the piece of wood.

They drive to his parents' apartment in a historic section of Rome. The apartment is decorated with ponderous furniture, expensive carpets, and traditional paintings and family portraits. Piero, however, has no interest in or relation to any history or tradition. His life is that of a present-day money maker, and he just uses his parents' place as a "love nest" for meeting girl friends. Vittoria has mixed feelings about getting involved with him—because, in part, of the one-dimensional, predictable life he lives. Still, after some hesitation and playing around, Vittoria and Piero end up in bed making tender love to each other.

Some days later the two lovers lie on the grass in a park, talking about their feelings. They are in a pensive mood. They are strongly attracted to each other, but they do not know how to conceive of their relationship. Piero mentions marriage, but Vittoria has no interest in it. Piero wants to know whether they could at least "get along," but even about that Vittoria is not certain. "I wish I didn't love you," she finally tells him, "or that I loved you much more than I do."

On a still later day they make love in Piero's office while the business is closed. They seem to have a good time. They are passionate and relaxed, and they clown around in high spirits. When it is time for Vittoria to leave, they agree to meet again soon--that same evening, in fact, at the corner where they usually meet. They also agree to meet the next day, and the following day—"forever." Although there is an element of anxiety in Vittoria's face, it looks as if the couple had found to each other in a happy ending sort of way. They kiss tenderly and part. After Vittoria has left, Piero remains in an unusually thoughtful mood. Vittoria, too, is pensive as she leaves the building. Wonderingly she looks at a huge tree. As on the morning when she had left Ricardo, she is absorbed in watching the wind moving the leaves.

When evening comes, neither of the lovers appears at their meeting place. The last seven minutes of "L'eclisse" consist of a series of shots that show the area where the pair used to meet, but not the lovers themselves. No more mention is made of either Vittoria or Piero. The same anonymous people as usual pass by at the familiar corner. The bus stops as usual and passengers get off. Water slowly runs out of a leak in the barrel in which we see the match book and the piece of wood. A man looks at the headlines of a paper: "The Atomic Age," we can read, and "The Peace Is Weak." The streets become deserted; night is coming on. The building that is under construction stands empty; the straw mats of the scaffolding move in the wind. The film ends with a blinding close-up shot of a white street light.

The Drawing Away of the World

The last seven minutes of apparently random shots of streets and objects are probably the most famous sequence of "L'eclisse." No feature film had ever stopped the story so long before the actual end of the movie, and no director had ever mystified his audience by such an enigmatic collage of disconnected vistas and seemingly inconsequential details. Presenting the environment of a possible action without offering any action is like forcing a theatre audience to look at a stage set while withholding the drama. What does this signify? What is the director trying to say by not completing the story of Vittoria and Piero, and by presenting enigmatic views of streets and a collection of disconnected details instead?

In an interview Antonioni once suggested an interpretation of these puzzling seven minutes: "The city, material life, has devoured the living beings." (2) The world of things, in other words, has overwhelmed the world of human relations—possibly in the way in which the noisy and money-driven "life" at the Stock Exchange drowns out personal concerns, intimate feelings, and any thoughtful remembrance of the dead. "Things are in the saddle and ride mankind," Emerson once wrote. (3) The last seven minutes of Antonioni's film are in part a cinematic presentation of that thought.

There is no doubt that both Antonioni's and Vittoria's sensibilities are informed by such a view of modern civilization—with its overwhelming materialism, its failure to inspire people to pursue more than interminable economic growth, and its willingness to leave the fate of humanity to the impersonal forces of markets and run-away technologies. All these things are clearly hinted at in the film, and they are important for understanding the protagonist and the culture in which she tries to live her life. There is, however, yet another dimension to the last seven minutes and the whole film, a dimension that constitutes Vittoria's particular quest. It will be this further dimension that should come into view in the following discussion.

In the Preface to his book *Six Films* Antonioni describes how he experienced the actual solar eclipse that at one point he meant to include in "L'eclisse":

I am in Florence to see and film a solar eclipse. Unexpected and intense cold. Silence different from all other silences. Wan light, different from all other lights. And then darkness. Total stillness. All I am capable of thinking is that during an eclipse even feelings probably come to a halt.--It is an idea that has vaguely to do with the film I am preparing--more a sensation than an idea, but a sensation which defines the film even when the film is far from being defined. All the work and the shots that came after have always been related back to that idea, or sensation, or premonition. I have never been able to leave it aside. (4)

In general Antonioni did not like to explain his films; he always insisted that his cinematic work showed much more than he could possibly say in so many words. His description of the solar eclipse in Florence, however, provides us with some valuable pointers for the understanding of "L'eclisse," including the notorious seven minutes at the end of the film. The wan light and strange silence produced by the eclipse point, in fact, rather directly to the "clear night of nothingness revealed in *angst*" (5) of which Heidegger speaks, and thus to Vittoria's state of mind as an experience of nothingness that makes her story one of an existential awakening.

It has always been noted that the world of things plays an unusually weighty role in Antonioni's movies, particularly in the films that constitute his middle-period work--"L'avventura," "La notte," "L'eclisse," and "Il deserto rosso." More conventional films, especially Hollywood movies, naturally concentrate on relations between people. Protagonists and antagonists with their conflicting desires and feelings are at the center of every story. Rooms, streets, cities, or landscapes function only as backgrounds, and individual objects are rarely more than the necessary props for moving forward the plot of a drama. Even when stories take place in spectacular environments, cameras never focus on the world of things for more than a few seconds--just long enough to give the viewer an idea of where the protagonists are, or to add a bit of atmosphere and local color to the ongoing action. In Antonioni's films, by contrast, environments always loom large. Backgrounds turn into foregrounds. Locations and objects become players in their own rights.

That things have the same weight as people in his films is not just a stylistic peculiarity of Antonioni's work, it is to a large extent what his middle-period movies are thematically about. In "L'eclisse" especially the ascend and prevalence of the world of objects is a central part of the drama. Vittoria is embarked on a journey that increasingly gets her out of the ordinary world of human beings, and ever more deeply into a state of mind in which she experiences the presence of things as an inviting and challenging mystery. It is through her explicit confrontation with the silent world of things that the heroine approaches the threshold of what Existentialists have advocated as authentic existence.

From the very beginning of the movie Vittoria is shown to be fascinated by objects. Not, to be sure, in the way in which obsessive shoppers or voracious eaters are "into things," but by way of a quiet and wondering contemplation of her physical environment. When her exhausting night talk with Ricardo has petered out, she languidly moves around his apartment, idly looking at this and that. She handles a number of objects and tentatively

arranges them into an aesthetic configuration—in the way a painter arranges objects in the composition of a still life. She also finds a small picture frame and uses it to look at things as if they were works of art. This playful framing of things invokes a general *aesthetic* approach to the world, a possible mode of existence that some thinkers have recommended as a comprehensive philosophy of life.⁽⁶⁾ Vittoria's perception of things as aesthetic objects, however, is only tentative; aestheticism as a general mode of perception is presented here as a mere possibility. Later in the film another way of experiencing things will become more important.

When Vittoria finds herself late at night on top of the hill besides the flagpoles with their clanking wires, she still seems fascinated by the aesthetic qualities of the objects around her. That is strongly suggested by the fact that one of the things she contemplates is the Olympic statue, a work of art. Her gaze, that includes both artworks and utilitarian objects, turns all things of the world into items that could be exhibits in something like a universal art show. The world of sophisticated modernity in which Vittoria lives is, after all, a world in which mere noises have become standard parts of avant-garde music, and "found objects" regular exhibits in state-of-the-art museums. Ever since the emergence of Dada and related art movements, the systematic erosion of the difference between art and not-art has been a significant feature of modern art perception and culture: *Everything* can be art, if looked at in the right way.

In spite of Vittoria's aesthetic fascination, however, a further aspect of things begins to emerge in this night scene: the absolute strangeness of objects that are seen out of context—outside of any established framework of perception. Things are most familiar when seen in the context of their everyday use. There is no mystery about any object as long as it fulfills some practical function. Things lose their everyday familiarity somewhat, however, when they are removed from their practical use and contemplated as purely aesthetic objects. When some isolated machine part or a piece of anthracite, for example, are appreciated for their interesting texture, color, or form, such objects cease to be what they ordinarily are and become something else—products of a special kind of contemplation. Things, finally, become entirely strange when none of the above perceptions are applied. Without practical, aesthetic, or any other kind of recognizable purpose things become intriguingly mysterious when looked at with any degree of concentration or intensity. A thing that only exists, without any connection to any identifiable human interest or purpose, is something like an enigma. One does not know what to make of such an object—yet it is there to be reckoned with. It is this sort of strangeness of things that Vittoria begins to experience as she stands in the dark, gazing at the objects around her, and listening to the sounds of the clanking wires. (It is also the strangeness that prevails in the last seven minutes of the film: the disconnected and purposeless nature of the things shown there present the world as an enigma.)

Her fascination with the strangeness of things never leaves Vittoria for the rest of the film. While walking around at the airfield in Verona, for example, she is, of course, enjoying the quiet day and the absence of the pressures that besieged her in Rome. But she also experiences the attraction that the purposeless presence of things and people has for her. There is nothing special to see, after all, nothing sensational or even moderately

beautiful. Vittoria is not curious about either aeronautics or the social life at the airfield. She just moves about, looking dreamily and intensely at people, buildings, runways, and distant vapor trails in the sky. She is absorbed in the pure, purposeless presence of things.

In the house of Piero's parents Vittoria also spends a long time just looking at objects, both inside and outside the apartment. Her lingering with things is, of course, in part due to the hesitation she feels about getting sexually involved with Piero. But Vittoria is also caught by the haunting strangeness of everything around her, particularly by the strangeness of vistas and objects that are exceedingly ordinary and familiar. Describing Vittoria's gaze from the window into the street, when she aimlessly observes people engaged in their everyday pursuits, the text of the screenplay explains:

There is little sunlight outside, and the city is bathed in a soft, ambiguous light. In front of the house, the street widens out towards an enormous church. Buildings are bunched together on all sides, one on top of the other, with countless vacant windows. The entire world is here laid out in front of her, tired and still, as though waiting to die: the grotesquerie of the church building, the group of people coming out of the afternoon mass, the soldier leaning up against the side of the wall, eating ice cream. (7)

The things Vittoria sees are very ordinary indeed; Piero does not have the faintest idea why there should be anything to gaze at. Nevertheless, for Vittoria the very presence--and mysterious existence--of these things is enormous. Their silent being-there drowns out everything else. The "ambiguous" light in which Vittoria sees things is that of the eclipse described earlier, the eclipse during which "even feelings come probably to a halt." In spite of the fact that at the end of the scene Vittoria and Piero become lovers, it is the haunting presence of the world of objects--the mystery of their existence--that ultimately dominates everything.

The world of things is definitively there; it makes its silent presence felt, and in its strange light it overwhelms human feelings and relations. It is not an affirmative or engaging world, however, but one that is alien and remote. It is "the whole world" that is laid out in front of Vittoria, but it is "tired and still, as though waiting to die." It is the world that is "drawing away" in the experience of angst. Vittoria, in the mysterious presence of things, is in the process of encountering the "nothingness" of which Heidegger writes, and what we see in the film is the effect of this encounter on her relationships and her basic feeling of life.

When Anita asks Vittoria about her last night with Ricardo, Vittoria answers: "Ugh...we spent the whole night talking and talking. And for what? I tell you I'm so sick and tired and disgusted, so dissatisfied!" This by itself would express nothing more than an ordinary weariness about men and relationship hassles. But Vittoria's remark that immediately follows this outburst indicates a more profound and philosophical alienation from the world of romantic feelings and sexual passions: "What can I tell you? There are days when it seems that having a piece of cloth, or a needle and thread, or a book, or a man, is all the same thing." The idea is that men are altogether on the same level as objects, that they cannot claim any special preeminence or proximity just because they are living or human beings or the thing women supposedly care about most. That is why

relationships with men or romantic feelings cannot be any antidote for the increasingly alienating perception of the world that Vittoria experiences in "L'eclisse." Men and intimate relationships are just another kind of thing, and thus as baffling and strange as everything else that appears in the spectral light of the eclipse. Intimacy that suggests familiarity and closeness is a sort of every-day illusion. If desire and passion are acceptable at all, they should be experienced in an entirely new way, a way that consciously acknowledges the pervasive strangeness of people and things. That is why Vittoria suggests to Piero: "In order to love one shouldn't know the other... But then, maybe, one shouldn't love at all."

Vittoria is, of course, still part of the ordinary human world. She is naturally attracted to the handsome Piero, and she is by no means dysfunctional as far as living and working in modern industrial society is concerned. (It would be quite misguided to suggest that Vittoria is somehow morbid, that she would have more "success" in her relationships if she chose more suitable partners, or that some psychological counselor could turn her into a more "adjusted" member of society. As Antonioni emphasized in a 1964 interview, Vittoria is a quite healthy young woman: "She's a calm, well-balanced girl who thinks about what she is doing. There is absolutely no symptom of neurosis in her."(8) The questions to which "L'eclisse" and Vittoria give rise are not psychological in nature, nor even sociological or political. They are philosophical in an Existentialist sense.)

What is happening to Vittoria is a sort of awakening, an awakening that will enable her to see herself and the world in a radically new way. Most people, one might say, go through life like wandering somnambulists—largely unaware of themselves, and unquestioning of the environment in which they pursue their mundane goals. Piero and Vittoria's mother are presented as prominent examples of this sort of somnambulism. The whole frantic world of the Stock Exchange is so extensively portrayed by Antonioni to highlight a way of being that is characterized by obsessive activity and the total absence of self-reflection and wondering, questioning thoughts. Vittoria, in contrast to most people around her, is in a process of coming to; her experience of the world as something strange is a liberation. The hesitation and lack of decisiveness that characterize her speech and conduct indicate that she has stopped moving and reacting like an automaton.

Naturally, Vittoria's uncertainty about things affects her relationship with other people. When Piero asks her whether she thinks that the two of them could get along with each other, she replies, not surprisingly: "I don't know, Piero." Piero, irritated, responds: "There you go again! That's all you know to say: I don't know, I don't know, I don't know! Then why do you go with me?" Obviously, Piero wants the usual certainty and predictability. He himself is a very predictable and altogether conventional person. The purpose of his life is to make money, to own status symbols like Alfa-Romeos, and to consume beautiful women in the usual manner--either as exchangeable girl friends, or by owning them in sanctified matrimony. Piero always wears expensive, conservative suits, and he never wastes time on potentially disruptive or subversive interests such as art, politics, or reflective books. As a mind he is as bland as he is adjusted to the status quo. At the time at which they meet, Piero is the exact opposite of Vittoria. While he is firmly locked into his frantic brokerage activity and his conventional outlook on life, she is

wondering, searching, and probing open to discoveries and possibilities. While Piero is a cog in the commercial machine and an unconscious part in society's predominant behavior patterns, Vittoria is something like a quiet subversive--not by pursuing any revolutionary goals, but by doubting and growing out of established relations, by gradually moving away from the world that most people accept without question.

Vittoria's growing distance to the world implies a distance to institutions and forms of life. When Piero asks her whether she would marry him, Vittoria answers: "I don't miss marriage." "How can you miss it?" Piero replies. "You've never been married." "No, that's not what I meant," Vittoria tells him. Her point is that she does not have any desire to live within the confines of that particular or any other established institution. She has no need for the sort of rules and structures that seem so natural to Piero and people like him. Her tendency is to get out--out of the habits and conventions that dominate the lives of most people around her, and out of the sort of security and being settled that other people want. (Which is one reason why she was so delighted by the sight of the dogs that were freely roaming through the night.) Vittoria's basic disposition is openness—without yet any idea of what she may be open to. She experiences existence as such—held out into nothingness, as it were, and without being in a hurry to define herself by accepting all the usual limitations and structures.

That not minor changes or adjustments, but radically new approaches to life are at stake, is suggested by Vittoria's enthusiastic impersonation of an African dancer. In this playful encounter with another civilization she temporarily experiences a joy and intensity of being that she rather misses in her present European life. The new life for which she vaguely hopes must be something like a different civilization, something that would require an entirely new way of being in the world. She realizes, of course, that imitating tribal Africans, or even just moving to Africa, would be a futile and illusory endeavor. Marta tells her that Africa is in revolt, and that Europeans, as the former colonizers and exploiters of that continent, would hardly be welcome to just go there and naively live an enchanted life. Still, Vittoria's momentary infatuation serves as a measure of her disenchantment with the established ways of the West. Her critical remarks about the obsessive pursuits at the stock exchange, and about the inner poverty of the people who spend their days fettered to that institution, leave no doubt that she feels like a stranger in her own culture. Describing how he often feels around Vittoria, Piero once observes: "I feel that I am in a foreign country." "How strange!" Vittoria replies. "That's exactly how you make me feel!"

During the lovers' last tryst in Piero's office we see them in a mocking performance of love scenes. At first they mimic couples they had observed earlier, exaggerating their expressions of devotion, and making fun of the stereotypes of love. Very quickly they get into mimicking their own love behavior, too, and they seem amused by the apparent strangeness of their own conduct. By mimicking themselves they create a sort of distance between their own passionate feelings and themselves, and for Vittoria this distance is clearly more than the product of a temporary lark. Vittoria keenly feels that she is not entirely herself while carrying on as a lover of Piero; seeing herself doing what she does she has become a bit of a stranger to herself. While saying that she would meet Piero

soon, as usual, a shade of anxiety moves across her face. When, after leaving Piero's office for the last time, she looks pensively at the moving leaves of a tree, we realize that she is as far away from Piero as she had been from Francisco on the morning of their separation. Then, too, it was the wind that had signaled a departure and inspiration by something new and unknown—wind, since ancient times, signifying the presence of some spirit.

The story of "The Eclipse" has no resolution. It is the story of the slowly increasing distance between Vittoria and the world—without any indication as to who she eventually might become. All she knows is that her old identities and roles are suspended, and that everything familiar is sinking into deep meaninglessness. She is reduced to a pure "being-there;" she exists in the "clear night of *angst*."

Feeling this angst can be one way of experiencing the peculiarity of human existence in an intense and clarifying way. Realizing one's mortality (in the way Tolstoy's Ivan Ilych does) is another. While "L' eclisse" does not focus directly on death and the finitude of human existence, it does include the theme of death in a relevant way. At the Verona air field Vittoria watches the vapor trails produced by the high-flying bombers of the U.S. Air Force. (A big and controversial American air base is located in that area.) These trails appear again in a shot at the end of the film--in close proximity to the newspaper headlines "The Atomic Age" and "The Peace Is Weak." Without moving to the center of the story or the viewer's attention, these small but ominous details invoke the ever present possibility of nuclear war. They remind us that the possible sudden end of all human life has become a permanent feature of the human condition.

The man-made threat of nuclear catastrophe lends a systemic precariousness to modern life. While everyday living may be uneventful and normal, the distinct possibility of total annihilation gives the lie to the apparent peace of this life. Vittoria's afternoon in Verona is serene, and her preoccupations are more or less normal, but the vapor trails in the sky remind us that the possible change could be total—out of proportion to everything we see and care about in the course of ordinary events. The ready-to-go holocaust renders the familiar every-day world profoundly uncanny—utterly strange, and almost unreal. The feeling it engenders is another kind of *angst*. Those who are seized by its dread are encountering nothingness in Heidegger's sense. It is this nothingness, again, that prevails at the end of the film, and that characterizes the strangeness that Vittoria feels during the time in which we are witness to her life.