Film Degree Zero:  
Antonionni’s The Passenger

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ABSTRACT

This article examines Michelangelo Antonionni’s The Passenger (1975) as an experiment in radical desubjectification, releasing the objectified film image into the image flux as it moves towards degree zero. Roland Barthes describes degree zero as “negative momentum”: the negentropic resistance found in modernist literature and film as self-neutralising. My examination picks up on Barthes’s concept of degree zero, together with Jean-Luc Nancy’s concept of the look of film as seeing and nothing more, applying them to an analysis of Antonionni’s film. The look of the film is accessed in the space opened up at degree zero – a constellation of images posing sphinx-like questions requiring a response for the film to “go on.” Detailed analysis of the mise-en-scène reveals how the film goes on through an in situ praxis of image sketching – in the negentropic movement of the film as it moves towards degree zero.

INTRODUCTION

In his essay entitled “Writing Degree Zero,” Roland Barthes identifies a tendency within the novels of mid-twentieth century French authors towards “neutral modes of writing … [where] we can easily discern a negative momentum, and an inability to maintain it within time’s flow” (5). Writing degree zero is the tendency in modern literature towards negentropic withdrawal from exhausted classical forms into a “neutral … mode of writing” approaching silence (77), where “the problematics of mankind is uncovered and presented without elaboration” (78). Barthes’s concept of writing degree zero is not confined to literature, but finds its way into his essays on film and photography, for instance in his concept of signifiance as “the founding act of the filmic itself” (“Third Meaning” 65), as well as the concept of the “neutral” in the photographic image, as a “body which signifies nothing” (Camera Lucida 12). For Barthes, writing degree zero searches for a self-neutralising mode of expression resistive to the dead-letter forms and styles of classicism, and “which might at least achieve innocence” (“Writing Degree Zero” 67). Picking up on these ideas, my concern in this article will be with accessing Michelangelo Antonionni’s film The Passenger (1975) at degree zero through the look of the camera as an immanent mode of seeing, freeing itself from complicity in the subjective life of the film. From the perspective of degree zero, film analysis concerns the materiality of film in its potential as “work-to-be-made” (Souriau 220), the “as yet unmade work [that] imposes itself as an existential urgency … as having a claim on us” (223). Etienne Souriau’s filmology is invoked here to provide a sense of the incompleteness of any film encountered in its phenomenal life as work-to-be-made: the task of a co-becoming between the film as a para-object seeking sufficient ground to justify its existence, and the viewer who is challenged to live up to the call that the film makes on her in its incompleteness, to

1 The authors Barthes has in mind include Camus, Blanchot and Robbe-Grillet.
“go on” (Beckett 134) in the viewing. Work-to-be-made calls for the shaping of a not-yet-visible form through the material residue of film in its “negative momentum.”

Antonioni’s films exemplify film degree zero by opening their frameworks into the void (the non-being of cinema) his films are forever seeking. They set out to show us this void, not in itself, but in its felt existence, exposing film as it approaches degree zero. In so doing, they open up a world of potential meaning as the work-to-be-made in the demand that life must “go on.” This opening up of the film approaching degree zero is the negentropic counter-movement against “time’s flow” (against the narrative drive propelling the film forward to its end), allowing the film to go on in the sense of always having to be; of always having to affirm itself as film and nothing more.

**From the perspective of degree zero, film analysis concerns the materiality of film in its potential as 'work-to-be-made' beginning with the nullity of form.**

**THE PROSTHETIC EYE**

*The Passenger* is one of Antonioni’s later films and completes that director’s exploration into the ontology of film as openness to the void. In *The Passenger*, Antonioni shows us the void as the very becoming of the film itself; how it goes on as work-to-be-made. In Antonioni’s films, characters are reduced to figural potentials, waiting for a promised mode of being that fails to arrive. To achieve this sense of ontological anticipation, the director employs techniques of camera work and figure placement in the mise-en-scène – techniques that objectify the look of the film. The terms “to look” and “to see” are used in this article in two distinct ways: “to look” means to egress – to come out or emerge – in what is seen, whereas “to see” means the opposite: to regress – to withdraw – in what is seen. Seeing is passive; looking is active. Looking becomes objective in the view as what is seen – an immanent mode of appearing. In an interview about the making of *The Passenger*, Antonioni had said that what he wanted to achieve was a certain “objectivity” (Antonioni 335): a look that sees with the camera, released from bondage to the subject, and free to explore cinematic space on its own terms. Objectifying the look of the camera suspends the film in its own seeing, thereby withdrawing the subject as an agent of the look.

Everything in the film begins in the objectivity of looks: “In *The Passenger* I have not tampered with reality. I look at it with the same eye with which the hero, a reporter, looks at the events he is reporting. Objectivity is one of the main themes of the film” (Antonioni 335). By looking at reality with “the same eye,” Antonioni is saying that the film does not see the world subjectively through a character’s look, but objectively through what the camera sees – a view composed of discrete images:

> What I try to do is provoke them [the actors], put them in the right mood. And then I watch them through the camera and at that moment tell them to do this or that. But not before. I have to have my shot, and they are an element of the image – and not always the most important element. (Antonioni 337, my emphasis)

Antonioni’s control of the film-making process is limited to the way he sees “not before” the camera sees, but as the camera sees: a prosthetic *seeing-with* the camera in which actors are placed as an “element of the image.”

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2 To “go on” is the existential demand of life, exemplified by the Beckettian voice at the end of The Unnameable: “I can’t go on/ I’ll go on” (Beckett 134). To go on is not to move forward but to stand in resistance to the entropy of the flow of time.

3 Other films include the “modernist” trilogy – L’Avventura (1960), La Notte (1961), L’Eclisse (1962) – as well as Blow Up (1966). In an explicit sense, all of these films are concerned with revelatory power – film’s capacity to make us see.
What they (the actors and the director) see is what the camera sees, but the camera can always see more (views cut off by the frame or outside its current optical range). Antonioni’s method is thus stochastic – responding to variables of film-making with negentropic feedback: by embedding his prosthetic eye in the film-making process, the director allows the exigency of the shoot to guide decisions made in what is shot and how it is shot, so that the film comes into existence as work-to-be-made. Antonioni’s film-making practice can be understood as a praxis of image sketching (tentative, preparatory, searching for a way), guided by the demands of a “questioning situation” (Souriau 232) that includes the prosthetic eye of the camera whose look is continually opening into new views demanded by the sphinx-like presence of the film in its incompleteness.

Antonioni’s films exemplify film degree zero by opening their frameworks into the void (the non-being of cinema) his films are forever seeking.

We encounter Antonioni’s prosthetic eye in the opening sequence of *The Passenger*, through a long take of an Arab village somewhere in north Africa. A Land Rover enters a communal space from a narrow street and moves towards its centre where it stops, as three heavily veiled women and some children move towards it (Fig. 1). The driver (David Locke, played by Jack Nicholson) alights from the vehicle and asks one of the women a question which we cannot hear, and then walks around the front of the vehicle to ask more questions of another woman standing beside a nearby house. As he does so, the camera moves to the left, causing Locke, his vehicle and the group of people to disappear, while revealing two teenage boys running into the square. Here, the camera objectifies the scene by taking control of what we see relative to its position in the mise-en-scène. By refusing to provide a subjective viewpoint from which to anchor the image in a character’s perspective – for instance by cutting to a shot-reverse-shot sequence of Locke’s conversations with the women – the camera frees itself to roam about the scene, searching for other entries and exits that may or may not be consequential for future action.

The primacy of the visual gesture over the voice in this opening scene serves to demotivate the image from subjective viewpoints, allowing the shot to linger in suspended objectivity. In what follows, we see the vehicle entering another common area of the village where it comes to a halt in centre frame. As Locke alights, the camera pans to the left, causing him once again to disappear, while revealing a man seated in the shade of a house as a woman approaches from the background. Locke then reappears, entering the frame from the right as he moves to address the man (Fig. 2). At this point the man gestures for a cigarette, which Locke offers to him, only to realise that the man is not going to provide him with any information. On this, he quickly turns away to return to his vehicle, where he finds one of the teenage boys from the previous sequence now seated in the passenger seat. Here we see Antonioni’s prosthetic eye working to full effect: Locke’s movements are strictly controlled by what the camera sees, to the point where he can only “go on” – advance in diegetic space – when the camera beckons him into the frame.

The camera’s look, we see, is what the camera sees – always more than what Locke can see – as possibilities opened up in the freedom of the camera to look awry – to see otherwise – in this instance allowing the boy into the scene literally behind Locke’s back. These few examples are evidence of Antonioni’s objectivising techniques, in which the director’s prosthetic eye sees the world through images interfaced with what they bring forth; where characters become figures synchronised with the look of the camera in its efforts to respond to the questioning situation arising in the work-to-be-made of the film in its ongoing incompleteness.

**THE LOOK OF FILM**

What is a look? In his essay on the films of the Iranian filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami, Jean-Luc Nancy
Fig. 1 | Long take of entry of Land Rover into communal space of Arab village. Source: The Passenger. DVD, Sony Pictures, 2006.

Fig. 2 | Locke enters the frame after having been left behind by the camera panning left to the seated man. Source: The Passenger. DVD, Sony Pictures, 2006.
has argued that all films produce a look that carries the film’s gaze – its way of seeing. In this look

there is no room for reflexivity or for speculation on looking at images. We are dealing neither with formalistic (let us say, tentatively “symbolic”) nor with narcissistic (let us say “imaginary”) vision. We are not dealing with sight – seeing or voyeuristic, fantasizing or hallucination, ideative or intuitive – but solely with looking. It is a matter of opening the seeing to something real, toward which the look carries itself and which in turn, the look allows to be carried back to itself. What is evident imposes itself as the setting up of the look. (18)

The look is not that of a subject (a spectator or character) but the film’s capacity to “carry back to itself” what it reaches out to see as “something real.” The look of film is thus a praxis – a self-constituting act that grounds itself in its own seeing: “cinema is becoming this art of looking made possible and required by a world that refers only to itself and what is real in it.” (18). So, we begin with a self-neutralising look – “a shot devoid of [subjective] reflexivity” (16) – where, for instance, all we see is a “door left ajar in close up” (14), opening up a view to be seen. Here the look carries something away, not the seeing of a subject perceiving objects in a world already disposed to receive its (the subject’s) look, but the seeing of the film itself, in its opening up of a “world viewed” – a world that includes views cut off by the current view – views not yet seen (Cavell 24). Nancy’s analysis of Kiarostami’s film-making practice suggests that the look of film produces a certain kind of cinematic realism – a realism of the filmworld “that refers only to itself and what is real in it.” By seeing with what is seen, the camera releases itself into the void of what comes next as the work-to-be-made of a cinematic realism grounded in its own look.

The look of film includes its own blind spot: the view left out of the look in what it sees. A blind spot occurs through the camera’s inability to see everything without shifting or adding another camera – a supplementary, unseen camera as “the one working now” (Cavell 126). All cameras are supplementary insofar their seeing infers many possible views from which the one working now must withdraw in order to see this way rather than any other. By looking this way, all other ways remain “blind,” yet possible; to experience blindness is to stare into the abyssal nothing of the other view blocked from being seen. In Perez’s terms, the experience of blindness in perception (i.e. a “blind spot”) is “a call to the activation of blindness – to open up that which blindness itself and it alone can reveal, blindness understood not as a deprivation of perception to be overcome but as holding a mystery of its own” (12). Blindness is not the simple negation of sight but, something that holds a “mystery of its own” in the concealment of that which is not currently revealed. In Nancy’s terms, the blind spot works both negatively and positively, as the mark of death (finitude) that “opens up the looking” (18). Death refers to the contraction of filmic life into the materiality of the image flux – a regression towards degree zero. Here we are dealing with life as “nothing more” – the failure to “see” oneself in the abyssal otherness revealed. The blind spot is the place unseen in the seeing – the place of death.

In The Passenger, we see the main character, the journalist Locke, inhabiting the identity of Robertson (Ian Hendry), a gunrunner supplying weapons to resistance fighters in north Africa. Having failed to meet with the resistance fighters in the opening sequence of the film, Locke seizes the chance to make contact with them by pretending to be Robertson who has suffered a fatal heart attack. Locke’s attempts to follow what Robertson would have been required to do in supplying guns to the guerrillas always falls short – on making Robertson’s appointments he has no idea why he should be there in the first place. As Robertson’s figural appearance, Locke can only act out Robertson’s life as empty gestures. Locke’s life thus allegorises the narrative that would otherwise have been, had Robertson not died and been able to fulfil his contract to supply arms to the guerrillas. Locke’s failure to inhabit Robertson’s subjectivity makes him excessive to the narrative; stripped of the means of self-recognition (expressed in his indifference to those who were once close to him), his existence poses the question: how to go on? Locke can only respond by following what the camera
The Passenger is one of Antonioni’s later films and completes that director’s exploration into the ontology of film as openness to the void.

sees in the view opening up just ahead of him – through “the door left ajar” (to borrow from Nancy’s description of Kiarostami’s mise-en-scène) to other spaces and times in the unfolding of film images.

The look of the film becomes blind when we see past the figure of Locke to the character Locke-as-Robertson, as if they were two separate identities. However, this blindness becomes visible in its blindness (in the possibilities opened up but not yet shown) when we shift perspective to see that their identities are not separate but entangled in the gap – the “falling short” – between what Robertson was to have done, and what Locke must now do in the film’s negative momentum. In many ways, the look of the film is what it cannot show: the negative momentum regressing towards degree zero as looking and nothing more. Near the end of the film, Locke meditates on this condition by asking: “what can you see” to his female companion (Maria Schneider) – the “girl” as she is known – as she looks out of the window. What follows is a Nietzschean meditation on seeing and blindness. Seeing is a blindness to the possibilities of what could be. In knowing this, one wishes not to see, to be blind to the dirt and ugliness of the world. To wish for blindness is to wish for a kind of death, but in the death of blindness a seeing otherwise takes place. We discover that Locke’s journey has been a quest to see as a blind man sees; to see the other possibilities in what is given to be seen; to see with the camera in showing us what is not seen in the seeing. By the end of the film we are able to see as the camera sees. We see with the look of film at degree zero.

FILM DEGREE ZERO

As a film approaches degree zero, the camera is liberated from subjective views and narrative drive so that it becomes a “first-person narrator that records and documents without judging. The angle from which reality is exposed allows the perceiver to arrive at the truth by putting all the pieces together” (Ramsey 65). The “angle from which reality is exposed” allows the camera to look “without judging”; that is, to look objectively in the gap exposed at the figural register as work-to-be-made in “putting all the pieces together.” Antonioni himself had described this freeing up of the camera as a view without a subject (Brunette 176). The Passenger is a film approaching degree zero – hollowed out from within and constantly withdrawing itself from subjectivity. The film shows us this withdrawal through the figure, bereft of agency, and captive to the look of the camera. In the rest of this article, I will examine how the film releases the look of the camera from serving the subject, exposing the reality of a filmworld “put together” by gestures, signs and images whereby figures appear and disappear on the screen. By releasing the camera, the film escapes the limitations of frame coherence, blending time and space into a complex whole – a whole putting all the pieces together. Antonioni himself had described this freeing up of the camera as a view without a subject (Brunette 176).

4 In film theory, the concept of a complex whole has been used to analyse nonlinear film narratives (Buckland).
has discussed this scene in some detail, remarking that the film here “raises for the first time the question of subjectivity versus objectivity that will preoccupy it” (131). Throughout Brunette’s analysis, there is a sense that what is at stake is a hidden subject (an inner core to Locke) obscured by the elliptical style of the film. However, I argue that there is no hidden subject, no inner core; rather, what we see are possibilities of “becoming subject” not fulfilled. As a complex whole, the film is all appearing without appearance; no stabilising image through which the self-recognition required of a subject to “be” might take place. Some close-quarter analysis of the sequencing of shots in this scene will bear this out.

At one point in the scene, Locke moves close to Robertson’s dead body lying on the bed, and for a while the camera lingers on Locke looking deeply into Robertson’s open but dead eyes (Fig. 3). Locke gently plays with a wisp of Robertson’s hair as if he were playing with his own hair, suggesting a superposition of one identity on the other. The scene then shifts through elisions of time (signalled by shots of a rotating ceiling fan) showing Locke pondering how to go on, and then settles on a shot of Locke sitting shirtless at a table looking at his and Robertson’s passports (from the prior images we infer that, having decided to take on Robertson’s identity, Locke is now preparing to cut and paste Robertson’s passport photo into his own passport). A knock at the door is heard followed by Locke saying “come in.” However, the knock at the door and Locke’s voice do not equate: the knock is in the real time of the shot (it has the full sonorous sound of the immediate presence of the voice), while the voice is recorded (it has the scratchy sound of a tape recorded voice at some time in the past). It is as if the knock in the present were being answered by a voice from the past. What follows is a recorded conversation between Locke and Robertson the previous day, played over the image of Locke removing and exchanging his passport photograph for Robertson’s. The camera then pans across to a nearby chair where the source of the recorded voice is revealed to be a tape recorder.

All of the activities and gestures described above are presented in what at first appears to be a seamless flow of images, as if they were happening in a coherent space-time setting. However, close inspection of the visual and sonorous texture of the shots in relation to their temporal ordering (undertaken above) indicates that the film is working across temporal registers blended together in a metaleptic breaching of the unities of time and space. 5 This is confirmed later in the scene when Locke, still listening to the tape recording, looks out towards the window with a slight nod of his head, as if acknowledging the presence of person unseen to us (Fig. 4). In further

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5 Genette defines metalepsis as the “transition from one narrative level to another” (234), especially in terms of the intrusion of a “voice” belonging to one level into another.
developments of appearing/disappearing figures triggered by the movement of the camera (discussed previously in this article), the camera then pans to the open window where the now dead Robertson and then Locke enter from the right, standing together with their backs to the camera while leaning on a wall looking out into the desert (Fig. 5). At this point, the tape stops, and Robertson and Locke’s conversation is heard in real time. Robertson makes some comments on the view: “It’s beautiful, don’t you think so? So still, a kind of … waiting.” Locke doesn’t grasp the prophetic meaning of Robertson’s words – that it is Locke himself who will be waiting for death to come – and dismisses them as too poetic for a businessman. Later he will be asked the same question by the girl. At this point they enter the room and continue their conversation. The camera then pans back across the room where we see Locke still removing and replacing the photographs in the passports.

The sequence of shots I have just described blends different temporal registers into a seemingly coherent scene through a metalepsis that renders it incoherent at the same time. In this “disjunctive synthesis” of images, events from the past are re-introduced retroactively into the present by the trigger gesture of Locke’s nod, as if they were happening for the first time, causing the edifice of the film to crack open. As Locke goes to leave the room, he is shifted marginally by a jump cut (Figs. 6 and 7), effecting what Bersoni and Dutoit, in their analysis of Godard’s Hélas pour moi (Woe is Me), call a “non-transitional displacement,” whereby a female character “disappears and reoccurs to the side of herself” (4). The jump cut that shifts Locke to the side of himself in The Passenger is accompanied by a sharp mechanical sound, as if the action of the cut were simultaneously connecting the shots together – an ontological shifting of Locke so that he is both “held together” and “kept apart” in the same place. In this ontologically divided state, Locke’s appearance cannot be guaranteed in advance, but rather poses the question: “how to go on?” in the void of what comes next.

In a later scene in London, we see Locke walking out of a modern apartment block and into a large open square (paralleling his entries into the communal areas of the north African village at the start of the film). Like the film’s opening sequence, we have no indication just why he was in the apartment block in the first place and no sense of where he might be headed. Immediately prior to this we have just heard a voice on television praising Locke for his “detachment and … great talent for observation.” It is as if the film is telling us that what comes next will be Locke exercising these very qualities. As he descends a set of stairs, Locke notices a young woman – the girl – sitting on a bench reading a book. The unnamed woman briefly looks up to see him looking at her and then returns to reading the book while Locke walks away. This brief exchange of looks, although insignificant here, will make sense later in the film when Locke comes across the young woman again, in a church in Barcelona in an equivalent position, sitting on a bench reading a book. At this point Locke and the woman form an alliance in his aimless quest. Locke’s “great talent for observation” turns out to be a device for linking.

6 In an interview on his film-making practices, Antonioni is asked why his characters “appear full-blown in a particular situation.” He replies: “I think it is a different way of looking at the world. … This is the modern way of looking at people. Today, everyone has less background than in the past” (Antonioni 341). Here the director indicates how his craft practices relate to the realities of modern life by synchronising the mise-en-scène with the “look” of being modern.
random encounters into something significant. Here the film is riveting itself together from disparate events that, although meaningless in themselves, start to take on meaning when combined into an image montage.

One of the effects of Antonioni’s image sketching techniques is to break the realist connection between the viewer and the film – a connection that calls for narrative causality to explain the succession of events. Through this break, a screen space is opened up in which the connection between events produces image realism – a realism grounded in image contiguity alone. For instance, a scene in a church in Munich where Locke meets the agents of the resistance movement suddenly cuts to Locke burning something in his front yard in London followed by a cut to his wife staring down at the empty space where the fire had been. These images are not flashbacks but fragments of a story constellation – a set of image fragments brought together through random re-alignments in narrative logic – the causality of which remains undecided. Here we have the work-to-be-made of a complex filmworld in which space-time relations correspond to an “exorbitant logic” (Sallis 95-125) released from narrative eschatology; where characters are stripped of their subjectivity and set free in a world immersed in the image flux. These effects are achieved cinematically by releasing the camera from faithfully recording what the subject does and says (as if to explain the whole of which these events are a part), and instead allowing it to see this act, this gesture, this event as part an incomplete seeing in the going-on of the film.

The figure of Locke responds only to his place in the frame. This is told to us in a number of ways, for instance when Locke’s wife Rachael and his boss Martin view video tape of Locke interviewing an African witchdoctor. Rachael asks “what happened,” referring to Martin’s recent trip to find out about Locke. In reply, Martin says “he disappeared,” referring to Robertson but obliquely to Locke as well. At this very moment, the image of Locke disappears off screen as he rises to leave, triggering a retroaction between the past event of Robertson’s disappearance and the present event of Locke’s image

7 Walter Benjamin’s concept of the constellation as retroactivated memory traces is apposite here (“Doctrine of the Similar”).
appearing and disappearing on the screen. In another scene when Locke meets the girl for the second time, in a church in Barcelona, she says “people are disappearing all the time” and in reply Locke says “even when they leave the room,” a metaleptic reference to the condition of the film figure as a finite appearance in the frame. Later in the film when Locke and the girl travel out of Barcelona in a rented convertible, the girl asks him: “what are you running away from?” In reply, Locke says “Turn your back to the front seat.” She then turns around, so that what we see is what she sees: the view of the road disappearing behind her/us as the car speeds ahead. What Locke is running from is precisely what the camera sees: the past as a receding landscape regressing into the abyss of the image flux. Later when the girl and Locke, now on the run from the police, stop on the side of the road in a small village, the camera shows us a man walking a bicycle along a rocky side road leading up a mountainside. Locke momentarily looks over to the road as if considering an escape route, but the moment passes. Here the film is offering alternatives, as if to say “but these are barred to you.” At this point Locke accepts his fate. He tells the girl to leave and waits for what happens next, passing the time in futile gestures such as squashing a bug on a whitewashed wall. Like the dog we see tethered to a post, Locke is tethered to the place where he is to meet his death – an isolated village somewhere in the Spanish hinterland. The red blood of the squashed bug splattered on the wall foretells the death of Locke at the hands of assassins. It is as if, by his very actions, Locke is calling forth his own death.8

In the final scene of the film, a mobile shot lasting some seven minutes begins with the camera moving effortlessly through the bars of the window of a hotel room in the Spanish village, where we see Locke lying on a bed awaiting death. It then moves out into a courtyard where we see people coming and going, including the

8 In another prescient image occurring just prior to this scene, we see Locke lying under an apple tree resting, while the girl stands beside him looking down. This image is an echo of the image of the enigmatic dead body lying in a London park in Antonioni’s earlier film Blow Up (1966).
Antonioni's instaurative techniques catalyse negative momentum by slowing the film to degree zero, where characters are emptied of desire and left with nothing by the drive to go on.

girl and Locke's wife, both of whom have made their way to the town to warn Locke, or perhaps to bear witness to his death (we are not explicitly told). What is not shown is what goes on behind the camera – in the scene's blind spot. As the camera moves slowly through the courtyard, we hear a muffled explosion mingled with other sounds as people and vehicles continue to come and go. Later we realise that this is the sound of the gunshot that kills Locke. Still moving slowly, the camera circles back on its path, returning to the room, where we now see Locke's dead body lying on the bed surrounded by officials as well as Locke's wife and the girl (Fig. 8). However, the camera's re-entry into the room is blocked by the bars of the security grill through which it had passed with ease at the beginning of the shot. By not passing through the bars, the camera demonstrates its own limit in not being able to see all (a limit it must constantly try to breach for the film to go on). From hereon in, there can be no further looking, no more views to be had. Death has been reached but it cannot be shown. By not showing us Locke's death, the director remains true to the immanent mode of seeing that controls the look of the film throughout, presenting us in this final scene with the thing revealed in its concealment: in order to present Locke's death, the film must show that it is concealed. At this point the film stops, having reached an absolute limit.

CONCLUSION

One of the issues emerging in this analysis of The Passenger is the shift from narrative realism to image realism through Antonioni’s desubjectifying procedures...
of image sketching. Image realism is effected through a change in perspective, when the film draws back from its diegetic content to reveal the connectedness between contiguously related images whose causality has yet to be decided. Image realism relates to the camera’s failure to efface itself in the seeing that it makes possible: there is always an unseen camera, “the one working now” (Cavell 126), whose presence is felt in what cannot be shown – in the work-to-be-made for the film to “go on.” By drawing attention to this fact of film making, Antonioni’s films open up cinematic space to an anticipatory mode of seeing that waits on the future as something shown in its nullity – as void. Antonioni’s films are incomplete works-to-be-made, exploring the possibility of an image realism experienced as the void of the non-cinematic Real – the future in its inchoate otherness – felt to exist in potentia in the film’s negative momentum approaching degree zero.

WORKS CITED


