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**GRUPPO DI FAMIGLIA IN UN INTERNO (1974) AS A PENDANT TO  
THE FILM *VAGHE STELLE DELL'ORSA* (1965): A STUDY  
OF VISCONTI'S LATE DRAMATURGY**

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**Summary**

From his film debut in 1943 (*Ossessione*), Visconti displayed a tendency as a director towards dramaturgy of a theatrical provenance: condensed and focussed on the relationships between the characters. The films *Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa* (1965) and *Gruppo di famiglia in un interno* (1974) – not normally associated with one another, as they are thematically and aesthetically different – not only adhere to that model, but also correspond to each other in dramaturgical terms to such an extent that they form a sort of duet of works. On one hand, that interdependency seems to be a result of the aspiration to perfecting technique that is natural to all great artists (in 1959 Visconti stated openly that his directorial method was evolving towards ever great simplicity). On the other hand, it may be understood as the effect of an intentional dialogue between the later and the earlier work. In the history of art, the term ‘pendant’ is used to define “a work constituting an exact compositional equivalent to another work; in painting, these are two pictures of the same dimensions, with similar subject matter, colouring and composition, generally intended to be displayed together, usually symmetrically hung”, and that is precisely the perspective of a simultaneous overview and parallel evaluation of two works that opens up during the course of a comparative analysis of the films *Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa* and *Gruppo di famiglia in un interno*.

**Key-words:** Luchino Visconti (1906-1976), dramaturgy, *Gruppo di famiglia in un interno* (1974), *Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa* (1965), late style, film music

*Gruppo di famiglia in un interno* (1974) jako pendant filmu *Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa* (1965).

Studium późnej dramaturgii Viscontiego (Streszczenie)

Począwszy od debiutu filmowego z 1943 roku (*Ossessione*), Visconti wykazywał w swej reżyserii skłonność do dramaturgii o proveniencji teatralnej: zwartej i skupionej na relacjach postaci. Filmy *Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa* (1965) i *Gruppo di famiglia in un interno* (1974) – zwykle ze sobą nie łączone, bo też tematycznie i estetycznie różne – nie tylko wpisują się w ten model, lecz także do tego stopnia korespondują między sobą pod względem dramaturgicznym, że tworzą swoisty duet dzieł. Ta przyległość wydaje się być z jednej strony rezultatem naturalnego dla każdego wielkiego twórcy doskonalenia warsztatu (już w roku 1959 Visconti otwarcie mówił, że jego metoda reżyserii ewoluuje w stronę coraz większej prostoty). Z drugiej strony natomiast można ją

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rozumieć jako efekt zamierzonego przez artystę dialogu dzieła późniejszego z wcześniejszym. W historii sztuki terminu *pendant* używa się do określenia „dzieła stanowiącego dokładny odpowiednik kompozycyjny drugiego dzieła; w malarstwie są to dwa obrazy tych samych rozmiarów, o zbliżonym temacie, kolorystyce i kompozycji, przeznaczone na ogół do wzajemnie skomponowanego, zwykle symetrycznego zawieszenia” – taka właśnie perspektywa jednoczesnego oglądu i równoległego wartościowania dwóch dzieł otwiera się na drodze porównawczej analizy filmów *Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa* i *Gruppo di famiglia in un interno*.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Luchino Visconti (1906-1976), dramaturgia, *Gruppo di famiglia in un interno* (1974), *Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa* (1965), styl późny, muzyka filmowa

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Ernst Hans Gombrich, in *Art and Illusion* (1961), explaining the logic behind the historical situation at the heart of which the illusionistic style was able to function in painting for so long, emphasised that an essential part of it was the evident conviction of the importance of technical skills – those which, as we know, perpetuate knowledge of effective artistic solutions. Those solutions – he argued – can be improved by reducing what is superfluous to the creation of the effect of illusion. Progress in technology and progress in art would be connected by a common rhythm: ‘the rhythm of lumbering advance and subsequent simplification’ (331). When gazing at Rembrandt’s *Portrait of Jan Six* (1654), and more precisely that gold braid which riveted Gombrich’s attention, conjured up with just ‘one brush-stroke’, one is moved to reflect that a similar path to this ‘magic simplicity’ can be observed in the work of other great masters.

Luchino Visconti made his debut in film in 1943, at the age of 37, so he was 59 when he made *Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa* and 68 during the shooting of *Gruppo di famiglia in un interno*. These two films belong to the late (or second) phase in the director’s oeuvre, beginning with *Il gattopardo* (1963), which is characterised by a greater subjectivity to the presentation of reality (Micciché, 1996, 191–193; Rondolino 2006, 443–444) and a concentration on aspects of the twilight of the European cultural formation of the turn of the twentieth century and the vision of beauty it created. He had long been addressing this theme on the stage, beginning with his productions of *Three Sisters* (1952), *Come le foglie* (1954) and the famous *La traviata* with Maria Callas (1955), but in film he imparted to it a specific stamp of personal recollection. According to Gianni Rondolino (470 nn.), in his cinematic poetics, from the moment he encountered Lampedusa, Visconti clearly followed the lead of Proust. In this comparative analysis of the films *Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa* and *Gruppo di famiglia in un interno*, we will project backwards: from a later film (the penultimate in the director’s output) to an earlier film, the relationship of which

to the later work remains not fully revealed. *Vaghe stelle* is seen as an experiment – a work both surmounting and expressing Visconti's existential crisis (Rondolino, 2006, 469), concise and compact, like a 'dramaturgical block' (Ferrero, 1969, 335). *Gruppo di famiglia*, meanwhile, represents a 'requiem' in the spirit of Mann or Proust (Medioli, 2013, 174; Medioli, 1975, 13–14), of a wholly theatrical character (Conti, 2013, 148, 228–229, 245–246). 'Faccio film come requiem' – Visconti openly declared (Micciché, 2002, 73), placing his work in the spectrum of personal meditation on death, which he was also to explore in the ultimately unfinished *Magic Mountain*, planned as the conclusion of his German cycle (Rondolino, 2002, 499–522).

1. Beginning with his debut film, *Ossessione* (1943), Visconti displayed an inclination for a certain type of dramaturgy: concise, employing mirrored structures – parallelisms of a greater or lesser scope. This dramaturgical model, of a theatrical provenance, is closely linked to a mode of presentation characteristic of theatre. At the centre stands the action; the Greek word *drān* means simply 'to do' (Schadewaldt, 1991, 56). The characters are needed for showing that action (Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1450 a–1450 b),<sup>2</sup> hence drama is a genre that foregrounds structures which highlight that (staged) action. The origins of the primacy of action in theatre refer us to the complex issue of the sources of theatre and are linked to the preserving, in the formula of ancient drama, reference to actions related to cult worship (see Burkert, 1966). We must also remember that while tragedy developed primarily through an oral tradition, it was the first literary genre to be 'controlled completely by writing' (Ong, 2009, 139) and the first in which, thanks to the technique of writing, a form of organising events arose that was impossible to realise within the oral tradition, namely, 'a climactic linear plot' (Ong, 2009, 139). Of course, this is only what might be called the superficial layer of that unity characteristic of tragedy, based on building up tension through various detailed means and placing the hero in flesh and blood in front of the viewer.

Unity of this sort only encroaches into poetry together with tragedy. Naturally, unity also occurs in the epos, as in the lyrical work and in every work of art of any type, only in each of them it is a unity of a completely different kind. [...] The epos was [...] performed over several days [...]. In tragedy, time is suddenly restricted, three tragedies were given in one day, and there was also rivalry with others to consider. Besides

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<sup>2</sup> 'Tragedy is mimesis of action, and it is chiefly for the sake of the action that it represents the agents' (Aristotle, 53; 1450 b).

this, the epos as an account possesses a different form from that in which things are represented as acting. This all requires heightened concentration, and out of all of this emerges a tangible tension-filled architectonic whole, which in turns forms the basis for effect, since dramatic effect is naturally completely different to epic [effect]. (Schadewaldt, 1991, 86–87)

Violent closing scenes of a quarrel between the protagonists of a film – especially scenes in which verbal sparring leads to physical violence and crime (*Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa* (1965), *Senso* (1954), *Gruppo di famiglia in un interno* (1974)) – are so different from scenes emphasising the perspective of enduring that conclude such works as *La terra trema* (1948), *Il gattopardo* (1963) and *Morte a Venezia* (1971), and they convince us that a predilection for using words in a manner appropriate to tragedy (to convey, by means of dialogue, the contradictory or ambiguous nature of everything that exists; Schadewaldt, 1991, 56–59) co-existed in Visconti with a preference for perceiving also the other side of phenomena: their constancy, for the expression of which he turned to forms rooted in an epic or almost epic mode of narration. With the former tendency, it is man who constantly occupies the centre – man who sometimes, like a tragic hero, can only discern the meaning of events through suffering (Schadewaldt, 1991, 58; Goethe/Schiller, 2004, 790). With the latter tendency, man, his vision of reality and his particular fortunes become part of a constancy, the representation of which is the work's primary function. Of course, these are not separate tendencies, and on closer inspection we come across a multitude of phenomena that complicate this dichotomous picture, yet it seems to enable us to do justice to reality and brings with it some crucial cognitive qualities. As Manfred Pfister notes (1988, 277), the choice of narrative mode is always a decision regarding the form of the plot and the distribution of its semantic elements.

So let us repeat: one striking feature of Visconti's cinematographic output – with regard to his full-length films and those which acquired a form accepted by the director (so excluding *Lo straniero*) – is how it extends between the poles of epic prolixity and dramatic succinctness. It would be simplest to explain the existence of these two dominant aspects on one hand in terms of the artist's fondness for historical material, immortalised in nineteenth-century novels, and on the other hand through his constant preoccupation with stage work and – as a consequence – his natural gravitation towards that type of drama and its forms of expression. The staging of operas – a *métier* in which Visconti always distinguished himself with his respect for the primacy of musical structures and the competence of their interpretation, is sometimes echoed in his filmic

works of both the first and the second type, and it merits particular attention here on account of the generic classification of opera – its dramatic structure allied to extensive epic connotations. Although a clear-cut division proves only partly feasible and requires clarifications of various kinds, let us propose just such an approach, adopting as criteria not just generic features distinguishing the play and the novel (the timespan of the plot, the use of space, the dimensions of the work, the relationship between the hero and the historical-social background, the type of issues addressed, the kind of conflict, the number of motifs and the way they are led), but also the *density of the dramaturgical structure*, which naturally remains in symbiosis with those features. Its pivotal component would be the occurrence of given formal solutions in a greater or lesser degree of intensity.

In terms of the uniform density of dramaturgical structure, *Ossessione* (1943) would certainly stand next to *Senso* (1954), *Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa*, *Morte a Venezia* (1971) and *Gruppo di famiglia in un interno*; nineteenth-century-type novelistic dramaturgy, meanwhile, linked to the use of extensive historical material and the revealing of that historical horizon, and additionally finding expression in the physical length of the film, would certainly concern *La terra trema* (1948), *Senso*, *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* (1960), *La caduta degli dei* (1969) and *Ludwig* (1972). As we can see, *Senso* has a special status here, as it unites both the modes of narration – three modes, in fact, if we take into account its operatic character. Also distinctly separate would be the status of *Morte a Venezia*, which, although not displaying the features of epic narration, ultimately leans towards such a qualification or else, in terms of the mode of narration, rises above the whole of Visconti's oeuvre as his only film about art, while at the same time absolutising the musical element and using that element – as the work's material substance – to express its principal meanings. One might say that Visconti's film, in an analogous way to the method chosen by Tomas Mann in *The Magic Mountain*, heads towards 'the complete congruence of content and form', towards showing, through artistic means (especially the setting of the story in a constantly manifest 'musical-notional' sphere), timelessness, a 'magical *nunc stans*' (Mann, 1965, 441). Besides these two exceptions, the films *Bellissima* (1951) and *Le notti bianche* (1957), although not adhering entirely to the drama-epic schema, by the same stroke render that schema all the more distinct, since they both grow out of the reforming and experimental impulses of a Visconti seeking new paths of expression, and they both – two of his seven films set in contemporary times – employ the figure of anti-illusionism and auto-thematicity while

serving as a reference point for the whole of a work and a filter that weakens the power of the drama of the characters that it depicts. Visconti explores here – and only here – film's capacity for generating myths – for perpetuating social dreams (Osterland, 1970, 216).

The films *Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa* and *Gruppo di famiglia in un interno* are linked by three aspects: the setting of the action in contemporary times, its focussing on the problems of a family (Bacon, 1998, 119–138), and its location within the space of a particular home. Most interestingly, however, beyond those easily discernible elements extends a space of various analogies of structure and content, displaying a remarkable exactness and scope. The idea for *Gruppo di famiglia in un interno* – a chamber drama produced shortly after the director regained sufficient physical fitness following his stroke and paralysis – was admittedly strongly entwined with the circumstances, but its germ arose at least several years earlier, before *Morte a Venezia*, as Enrico Medioli states. The screenwriter, a good friend of Visconti's, saw this as a manifestation of Visconti's characteristic 'spirit of defiance'.

On one occasion, when asked what film he would shoot if he had ten billion at his disposal, he replied: 'the story of two characters, simple and brief, everything in one room'. This time, the defiance concerned the type of narrative, which had already been in his plans for some time: a present-day story, not mediated by an historical moment, an epoch or a costume, with no concessions towards 'spectacle'; it was a project, the beginnings of which stretched back before *Ludwig*, before the drafting of Proust, before *Death in Venice*, and which always, for various reasons, was put off and left on the drawing board. (Medioli, 1975, 11)

We have no additional information that might shed light on the affinity between the two films in genetic terms, just as we have no hints from Visconti himself that might indicate that he wanted with this late work to create a sort of pendant to *Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa*.

2. It is nothing out of the ordinary that a feature film displays a certain regularity to the building of the action and that in many respects it is a dramatic type of regularity. Action, with the tried and tested methods for building it, appears wherever the focus is on a character and what they are doing.<sup>3</sup> A division into three, five, seven or more phases in the action belongs to the core resources of a film as a plot-based form of narrative and can be found even in works regarded as breaking with traditional patterns for leading a narrative – like Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'Avventura* (1960), in which the perfect

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<sup>3</sup> See the definitions of 'action' advanced by Axel Hübler and Manfred Pfister (Pfister, 1988, 269–270), Roman Ingarden (1966, 393), Otto F. Best (1996, 218) and Ulrich Suerbaum (2001, 135–137).

proportioning of the timeframe and the functions of particular phases goes hand in hand with continuous innovation in the type of drama and the way the narrative is led (Wuss, 1992, 26–29; Eco 1989, 115–117).

The constitution of a work of art ‘as something that presents itself as self-coherent, gapless, and therefore unmediated’ may – as Theodor W. Adorno wrote – ‘appear intuitive and naïve’ (1997, 144). Meanwhile, when conceived as that which turns a product into a work of art, it lies at the heart of aesthetics as the philosophy of art and at the heart of the description of a work’s aesthetics. As Werner Faulstich notes, the aesthetics of the medium of film deals with the potential for artistic crafting in that medium (Faulstich, 1982b, 93). This means that the analysis of the aesthetics of a particular film must encompass both the features confirming the specific nature of the medium and those which go beyond the boundaries of crafting established by the medium. This playing with the capacities of the medium of film refers us to a question considered in traditional aesthetics in terms of the freedom of form; hence it is closely linked to reflection on art. Although Visconti (1966) openly refused to classify film as art, with hindsight there is no doubt that his own works refute that opinion (see Düttmann, 2007).

Bearing Popper’s lesson in mind (2010, 70), we will distinguish between form understood as a whole, as a unity in multiplicity, and the structures or formal means from which it is forged. ‘Structure – writes Carl Dahlhaus (1987, 261) – is the aspect of the work directed at the composer, form that which is directed at the listener’. For a film, a crucial structure with characteristic expressive capabilities would be the dramatic contour of the action, understood as the foundation of the plot. The plot in turn works in a film in a different way than in a book. According to Faulstich (1982b, 147–159), the notions of story and plot, treated conjointly, and consolidated by a long tradition, are specific to printed media and require clarification when applied to other media of literature (1982b, 65–76), including audiovisual media. In the case of film, both categories would concern the reception of a work, not its aesthetic,<sup>4</sup> and would be closely linked to the need for the represented content to be successively concretised and independently merged by the reader into larger semantic whole – a need not existing in presentative media.<sup>5</sup> In film,

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<sup>4</sup> Of course, this standpoint is nothing new, as it extends from Aristotle to Bakhtin, Scholes and Kellog, and in Poland to Jerzy Ziomek. It seems that Faulstich accentuates it so strongly because his aim is to show the peculiar character of printed media and the notions describing phenomena closely linked to them.

<sup>5</sup> Faulstich (1982b, 151) understands the story, referring to the comments of Edward M. Forster (‘a narrative of events arranged in their time-sequence’ (1968, 93); ‘the primitive power of keeping the reader

‘the story is not built during the process of reception’ (1982b, 156). The plot, which in a printed literary work is obscured by the story imposed on the reader during the process of reading, is obscured differently in a film – primarily through the realism of the representation, which is a constant quality of every individual work and results from the technical nature of the medium (1982a, 35).<sup>6</sup> Characteristic of filmic realism – according to Faulstich – is that it allows us to forget about the medium as the instance of transmission. ‘What is shown supplants the process of showing’ (Faulstich, 1982a, 52). We succumb to the illusion that what is shown on the screen is simply a slice of reality, and not an element in the construction of a whole.

The need to interpret the narrative literary work [...] arises not out of the supposedly ontological ambiguity of the work of art as ‘original’, but out of the obscuring, *on the level of reception*, of the plot, ‘meaning’ and ‘logic’ of the literary connections or of the construction characteristic of literature, and that obscuring takes place in a way that is specific to the given medium – differently in the case of printed media than in, say, film; that is why, when seeking to penetrate what was obscured, we must choose a path [appropriate to] the specific medium. (Faulstich, 1982b, 160)

The obscuring of the plot also means the obscuring of the dramaturgical structures from which it is built. In the case of Visconti’s cinematics, this picture is complicated by the fact that the aesthetics of film and theatre continuously intermingle, and in various ways. The model of dramatic structure revealed in the films *Vaghe stelle dell’Orsa* and *Gruppo di famiglia in un interno* prompts the question as to whether some hitherto unnoticed, but crucial to Visconti, way of binding the senses and guiding the viewer’s perception does not crystallise within it – a method sufficiently robust that it was used on two occasions. The fact that these two films were based on original screenplays only reinforces that question. Let us add that theatricalisation remained for Visconti a constant element of his poetics, modified under the pressure of new stylistic experiments. One may hazard the thesis that the formula of the co-existence of film and theatre on one hand offered Visconti the possibility of getting even closer to the human being (see Stirling, 1979, 248), and on the other – as with Renoir and Buñuel – helped to maintain the status of art as ‘a sublime joke’ (Adorno, 1954, 56–57).

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[or listener – A.I.] in suspense and playing on his curiosity’ (1968, 39)), as a sequence of experiences which remain in the awareness of every ‘normal’ empirical reader as meaningful; the story is a tale which is concretised by the reader and ordered through their experiences into a meaningful whole.

<sup>6</sup> The relationship that occurs between the work and the medium is a fundamental distinction in the theory of Werner Faulstich. For a definition of the medium, see Faulstich 2000, 27, 31–40.



3. In both *Gruppo di famiglia in un interno* and *Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa*, the start of the action is linked to a situation where the main characters are in intimate contact with art. When the title sequence fades out, the first frame in the film *Gruppo di famiglia* shows an eighteenth-century painting (Johann Zoffany's conversation piece *John, Fourteenth Lord Willoughby de Broke and his Family* (1766)), which the Professor is studying through a magnifying glass. In *Vaghe stelle*, the sounds of the *Prélude* from César Franck's piano cycle *Prélude, Chorale et Fugue* (1884), heard through the hubbub of voices, grasp the attention of Sandra, who anxiously ('con un forte turbamento') approaches the piano. In both cases, the two characters are thus moved into the actual setting of the action; that is, into themselves and their own passions, embroiled in the past of their family. The parallelism of the situations is enhanced by the gesture of moving closer to a 'source' of art – in the first film by means of a magnifying glass, in the second at first through a symbolic zoom, picking the character out from the reality that surrounds them and opening up before them an abyss of recollections, and then through the woman's actual approach to the piano. From the start, the existence of a distance between the worlds of life and art is made clear, with the latter appearing as an element in the represented reality of the film and a symbolic bearer of the drama.



Ex. 1: *Gruppo di famiglia in un interno* (1974): Professor is studying the details of a painting through a magnifying glass.

Ex. 2: *Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa* (1965): Sandra approaches the piano, in order to hear more clearly the work being played by the pianist.

In *Gruppo di famiglia in un interno*, the old becomes a path to confrontation with the new (an old Roman villa-museum, an ageing collector of eighteenth-century paintings living far from people and everyday problems); in *Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa*, the reverse occurs: old layers begin to peep through what is new (the marriage between Sandra, an Italian Jew, and Andrew, an American, the plan to leave Italy and Europe). The two films have mutually contradictory temporal vectors: in *Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa*, the main heroine Sandra embarks on a journey deep into her private past, linked to her return to the family home in Volterra; in *Gruppo di famiglia in un interno*, meanwhile, we watch the Professor's forced journey into the present, initiated by the appearance in his villa of unwanted guests (the Italian marchesa Bianca Brumonti, wife of an influential right-wing politician, her lover Konrad, and her daughter Lietta with her 'fiancé' Stefano) and sealed by the act of his renting to them an apartment on the top floor of the building. In both cases, the house becomes the actual setting of the action: it undergoes metaphorisation and expands – as in theatre – to the dimensions of the world.

The first event in the exposition phase initiates a sequence of striking analogies, which succeed one another with such precision that one may gain the impression that someone is inscribing content into a ready-made template. Yet there is not a trace of unnaturalness to the developments.

Table 1

<i>Gruppo di famiglia in un interno</i> (1974)		<i>Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa</i> (1965)	
Phase I	00:02:06–00:17:45	Phase I	00:00:14–00:09:26
PROFESSOR BEGINS A JOURNEY INTO THE PRESENT		SANDRA BEGINS A JOURNEY INTO THE PAST	
STARTING POINT: ARTWORK		STARTING POINT: MUSIC	
1. The Professor is studying the details of a painting through a magnifying glass.		1. Geneva. Sandra and Andrew's farewell party. Sandra approaches the piano, in order to hear more clearly the work being played by the pianist.	
2. The Professor climbs to a higher floor with the marchesa Brumonti to show her an empty apartment.		2. Sandra travels by car with her husband to the family home in Italy (Volterra).	
3. The Professor makes a phone call about buying a painting and learns that it has been sold to the marchesa Brumonti.		3. On the way to Volterra, Sandra calls home and learns something about her brother.	
HERE THE PROFESSOR STRIKES UP A RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS UNWANTED TENANTS – KEY TO THE WHOLE FILM.		ADDRESSED HERE FOR THE FIRST TIME IS THE SUBJECT OF THE SISTER'S RELATIONSHIP WITH HER BROTHER – KEY TO THE WHOLE FILM.	
4. A pact with the present: the new tenants 'encroach' on the Professor's villa.		4. A pact with the past: Sandra and her husband Andrew travel to Volterra.	

Wolfram Schütte (133) linked these two films, pointing – after Visconti (1965, 32) – to the vivid reference within them to the *Kammerspiel* tradition, having in mind chiefly the condensed mode of narration. Visconti introduced that genre into Italian cinema with the film *Le notti bianche* (1957) and would return to it in *Il lavoro* (1962) and in the two late films of interest to us here (Micciché, 2002, 36, 71). The intimate quality of the film is evident not only in the confinement of the space and its peculiar characteristics that bring it close in function to the highly symbolic space of a theatre, but also, as we see from the above analysis, in the way that a small group of characters is brought to the fore and their conflict is made the focal point, or microcosm (Souriau, 1976, 267), of the work.

So we are evidently dealing with two plans of action during the first phase in each of the films. The first is the plan of intentional, external action: it is set in motion by the actions of the marchesa Brumonti, determined to rent a flat in the Professor's villa, and of Sandra, who visits the abandoned family mansion to take care of matters relating to the family and the estate. The second plan is that of internal action that is linked to the characters of Konrad and Gianni. In *Gruppo di famiglia*, the second protagonist already appears briefly in the scene of the first viewing of the unused upstairs flat. On hearing the voice of an unfamiliar guest, the Professor raises his glance. This movement was shown in a dynamic take through a zoom camera, which, combined with the counter-plan that appears a moment later, allows one to single out the relationship between these two characters and hints at their special bond, further emphasised by means of music: henceforth, the music (a composition by Franco Mannino) clearly ascribed to the flat will be music linked to Konrad and – in terms of style – to the music of Mozart's *Sinfonia concertante*, to the notes of which the characters of the mother (played by Dominique Sanda) and the wife (Claudia Cardinale, who plays Sandra in *Vaghe stelle*) appear in the Professor's retrospections.

The second phase in the action begins with a full presentation of the characters of Konrad and Gianni. They serve to trigger the conflict, then in the finale – dying a tragic death – they become its victim and render the conflict impossible to resolve. They each enter the action in the same suggestive atmosphere of mystery and surprise, heightened by the staging of their entrance: Konrad emerges out of the darkness of a ruined apartment, illuminated only by the light of his own torch, pointing straight at the Professor; Gianni suddenly, by night, comes out from behind the garden gate to greet his sister, who is embracing the statue of their father on his grave in the grounds of the palace. In both cases, the play of light and shade makes the scene visually distinctive, although only in

*Vaghe stelle* is it linked to the strategy of dismantling the space-time continuum that is realised consistently throughout the work (Parigi, 2000, 222–225, 232–233).



Ex. 3: *Gruppo di famiglia in un interno* (1974): Konrad emerges out of the darkness of a ruined apartment.

Ex. 4: *Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa* (1965): Gianni, by night, comes out from behind the garden gate to greet his sister.

Both scenes of the first appearance of the protagonists Konrad and Gianni – the former while telephoning and talking with the Professor, in a situation of conflict

with a lover; the latter in a reunion with his sister – are semantically underscored by music: early (Mozart) and contemporary (Le Tigri). As such, they constitute a central point in the dramaturgical structure of the first half of the film – analogously to two other ‘musical’ scenes placed in the fourth phase in the action, to which they closely correspond, and which form a central point in the dramatic structure of the second half of the film. We will analyse these complementary dramaturgical structures and their references to music separately; here, we will describe the action from the perspective of the relations that arise between the characters and situate against that background the pairs of scenes (designated A and B) that are key to the realisation of the protagonists’ drama.

Table 2

	Confrontation between the Professor and the marchesa Brumonti.	Sandra’s confrontation with music bringing remembrance of the past (her pianist mother).
II	New relationship: Professor – Konrad <b>PRESAGING A FATHER–SON RELATIONSHIP<sup>7</sup></b>	New relationship: Sandra – Gianni <b>PRESAGING AN INCESTUAL RELATIONSHIP</b>

<sup>7</sup> Taking account of the autobiographical components of this film, the existence of which is confirmed by source research, the relationship between Konrad and the Professor displays homosexual allusions. Visconti, as Mauro Giori discovered when studying successive versions of the screenplay (2012: 351–366), decided against openly representing that theme, thereby shifting the focus onto the father–son relationship. It is worth quoting the balanced opinion of Laurence Schifano (2010: 415), who also pursues a biographical

	SCENE A	SCENE A
III	The tenants become the Professor's new 'family'.	Sandra grows more distant towards her husband as she plunges into the past.
IV	The Professor and Konrad grow increasingly close to one another, but at the decisive moment the Professor refuses Konrad his advice and commitment.  <b>EROTIC EXCESS: LOVE TRIANGLE<sup>8</sup> AND SYMBOLIC ADOPTION OF KONRAD SCENE B</b>	Sandra and Gianni come together in a mutual relationship.  <b>EROTIC EXCESS: SYMBOLIC INCEST SCENE B</b>
	Speculation regarding Konrad splits the 'family' and forces the Professor to take a stance.	-----
VI	Konrad is judged. A shared supper ends in fighting; the 'family' is split up and the protagonist branded.	Gianni is judged. A shared supper ends in fighting; the divisions are reinforced and the protagonist is branded.
VII	Konrad's death. The Professor returns to his former solitude (= death).	Gianni's suicide. Sandra decides to return to her husband (= life, but again in the shadow of death).

Scene A in *Gruppo di famiglia in un interno*: the marchesa's kept young man, Konrad, uses the Professor's telephone, which offers them the chance to listen to a Mozart aria together (*Vorrei spiegarvi, oh Dio!*, K. 418 (1783)) and talk about the painting supposedly by Arthur Davis hanging on the wall (based on David Allan's *The Family of Sir James Hunter Blair, First Baronet* (1785)).

Scene B in *Gruppo di famiglia in un interno*: the Professor observes the young tenants of his flat – Konrad with the much younger Lietta (the marchesa Brumonti's daughter) and Stefano (Lietta's 'fiancé') – during a mini-orgy in his study. The scene is accompanied by the song *Testarda Io*, performed by Iva Zanicchi (1974).

Scene A in *Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa*: an affectionate reunion between brother (Gianni) and sister (Sandra), referring to the scenes where Electra and Orestes meet at their father's grave (in Aeschylus' play) and Siegmund greets Sieglinde (in Wagner's opera). Iconographically, this scene refers to Mariano Fortuna y Madrazo's painting *The*

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reading of this film: 'He never [...] depicted a homosexual relationship with such moderation, in a way that is almost religiously devoid of the desire to possess [...]'.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> The transgressive potential of this scene concerns solely the erotic relationship linking Konrad, Lietta and Stefano. '[...] l'unico residuo trasgressivo di tutte le elaborazioni messe a punto nei materiali preparatori rimane un nudo alquanto timido, associato al malinconico voyeurismo del professore, il tutto trattenuto da una mesinscena che ricorre a un accurato gioco di ombre (come già negli incesti della *Caduta degli dei* e di *Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa*...) per garantire alla rappresentazione una qualche eleganza estetica [...]' (Giori 2012: 365–366).

*Valkyrie: Siegmund and Sieglinde Embrace* (1928) (Pestelli, 2000, 88). From afar, muted by the wind, we hear songs performed by Le Tigri.

Scene B in *Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa*: Sandra meets Gianni in a childhood hiding place and allows her brother to remove her wedding ring. The scene alludes to John Ford's play *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (pub. 1633)<sup>9</sup>. It is accompanied by music: the *Prélude* from César Franck's piano cycle *Prélude, Chorale et Fugue* (1884).

The two pairs of scenes are constructed in a way that is characteristic of Visconti: through the accumulation and skilful combination of different art forms (music, painting, literature, opera, theatre), functioning as quotations or allusions. On the thematic level, the music is linked to an act of erotic transgression, expressive of the protagonist's inner drama. Thus the equivalence of the dramaturgical structures manifests itself not just in their audiovisual form, but also in the way they are linked to the course of the action and the subject matter of the film.

Revealed in the fourth phase of the action in *Gruppo de famiglia in un interno* is that the Professor's growing embroilment in the affairs of his new tenants – synonymous with coming face to face with the problems of contemporary life – brings with it a simultaneous return to the past, since only the past, being connected with people, has life-giving value for this character. This also explains why the director, in the fourth and fifth phases in the action, turns to retrospection as a means of expression and a source of knowledge, albeit fragmentary, that sheds light on the hero's current situation. The first flashback is drawn out of the acoustic backdrop to the scene (the voice of Bianca, her chauffeur and the talking parrot, the maid's interjections, laughter, the sound of a ringing telephone overlapping with the sound of a doorbell from the next scene). The accumulation of sounds coming from behind the wall evokes in the character's memory the image of the same place years before, seen through the eyes of a child and closely associated with the figure of the mother. It is preceded by the Professor's extended listening and a static shot registering his facial expression, which produces a smooth effect and creates the impression of a calm expansion of the filmic diegesis. The second flashback is prepared by the scene of the Professor's conversation with Konrad, to which it is linked by music (Mannino – Mozart), just as Konrad is perceived as a character

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<sup>9</sup> Visconti produced this play in Pais in 1961, casting Romy Schneider and Alain Delon in the main roles. *Vaghe stelle* clearly takes up the problem of incest, broached here, which interested Visconti from the beginning of his work in the theatre, making it the focal point of the work and also trying out on it new resources for his cinematic language: zoom is employed in this film for the first time in a systematic way, as a visual solution consistently linked to the depiction of the incestual relationship between brother and sister (see Giori, 2012, 86, 94; Parigi, 2000, 232).

parallel to the professor's ex-wife, to whom the retrospection is devoted. The pattern for the use of retrospection in *Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa* is structurally identical, but visually different. The abrupt introduction of flashbacks seems to tear the image apart, rather than arising out of it or integrating it. Since they constitute snatches of the scene of Sandra's visit to her mother, concealed from the viewer, and since they concern current matters, they are lacking the nostalgic sublimation which characterises the Professor's view.

*Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa* is 20 minutes shorter, which is reflected in the fewer phases of action: it is lacking an equivalent to the events grouped in the fifth phase of the action in *Gruppo di famiglia in un interno*. The last 30 minutes of the action, meanwhile, bring a return to the full parallelism that we observed in relation to the first and second phases in the action. In both films, Visconti presents a direct confrontation between the standpoints of particular characters. The family suppers end with fighting, and consequently leads to the death of a male protagonist.

Table 3

<i>Gruppo di famiglia in un interno</i> (1974)		<i>Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa</i> (1965)	
Phase III	00:30:41 – 00:45:53	Phase III	00:29:22 – 00:39:20
A NEW 'FAMILY' ENTERS THE PROFESSOR'S LIFE		THE PROTAGONISTS ENTER THE PAST	
Phase IV	00:45:54 – 01:20:02	Phase IV	00:39:21 – 01:11:46
THE PROFESSOR BECOMES EMBROILED IN THE PRESENT		SANDRA PLUNGES DEEP INTO THE PAST	
(I) Repetition of the past: a secret room for fugitives 00:45:55 – 01:01:04		(I): Meeting with her mother and stepfather 00:39:21 – 00:46:33	
(II) Repetition of the past: mother 01:01:05 – 01:06:28		(II): Childhood haunts 00:46:34 – 00:54:49	
(III) Repetition of the past: a request for help 01:06:28 – 01:20:02		(III): Meeting between sister and brother 00:54:50 – 01:11:46	
Phase V	01:20:03 – 01:32:44		
NEW INFORMATION ABOUT KONRAD			
Phase VI	01:32:45 – 01:53:18	Phase V	01:11:46 – 01:34:01
KONRAD IS GUILTY. A FAMILY SUPPER ENDS IN FIGHTING		GIANNI IS GUILTY. A FAMILY SUPPER ENDS IN FIGHTING	
Phase VII	01:53:18 – 01:59:13	Phase VI	01:34:02 – 01:40:08
THE PROFESSOR ALONE AGAIN IN HIS HOME-MUSEUM (DEATH)		SANDRA WANTS TO LEAVE HER FAMILY HOME AND RETURN TO HER HUSBAND (LIFE)	

4. The first conversation between the Professor and Konrad – during which their relationship begins to take shape, before assuming the character of a father-son bond – is accompanied by the Mozart aria *Vorrei spiegarvi, oh Dio!*, played from a disc. The

composition is not heard to the end, but is interrupted by Konrad's telephone calls, just as the Professor's listening to another Mozart work – the Andante from the *Sinfonia concertante* in E flat major, K. 364 (1779) – in the fourth phase of the action is interrupted, drowned out by the sounds of a song coming from the young tenants' flat. Mozart's music in *Gruppo di famiglia* comes across as a sort of continuation of the main protagonist's interests as a collector, but – it is worth stressing – through the way it is incorporated into the action, it is appreciated (like eighteenth-century paintings) as art that is living, not dead. The Professor's space is also described by the music of Franco Mannino, set in the style of a nineteenth-century waltz<sup>10</sup> (excerpts from his *Concerto in sol per violoncello e orchestra*, Op. 102 (1974)). Its equivalent in *Vaghe stelle* – as music referring to the past – will be César Franck's composition *Prélude, Chorale et Fugue*. In keeping with the temporal direction taken by the film's main female character, Sandra – a character increasingly absorbed by the past and exposing herself to the action of (her own and her brother's) feelings, mythicised by the passage of time – Franck's music, contemporary to Wagner's *Valkyrie* (1870), gains the upper hand in the film over the music associated with the present-day 60s. So while in the scene of the encounter between the brother and the sister – modelled, as already mentioned, on the mythical meetings between Electra and Orestes and Siegmund and Sieglinde – Visconti uses the tunes of radio hits by 'the Italian Beatles' (Le Tigri), muted by the wind, in the scene from the fourth phase in the action – creating the phantasm of a return to childhood and giving voice to the former (incestuous?) love between brother and sister – the director relies solely on the music of César Franck.

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<sup>10</sup> This composition refers to the fourth movement of Johannes Brahms's Second Piano Concerto in B flat major, Op. 83 (1881).



<p>PHASE II PRESAGING A FATHER–SON RELATIONSHIP SCENE A</p>	<p>PHASE II PRESAGING AN INCESTUAL RELATIONSHIP SCENE A</p>
<p>W. A. Mozart, <i>Vorrei spiegarvi, oh Dio</i>, K. 418 (1783)</p>	<p>Le Tigri, <i>Let's go</i> (1965)</p>
<p>PHASE IV AN EROTIC TRIANGLE AND A SYMBOLIC ADOPTION SCENE B</p>	<p>PHASE IV SYMBOLIC INCEST SCENE B</p>
<p>Iva Zanicchi, <i>Testarda Io</i> (1974)</p>	<p>C. Franck, <i>Prélude</i> from the cycle <i>Prélude Chorale et Fugue</i> (1884)</p>

As we can see, both pairs of scenes are of a musical nature, with the music entwined with the drama of the characters. Showing Konrad in erotic relations with the considerably younger wards of the marchesa – an arrangement with incestuous undertones – fully reveals the loneliness of this character and prepares for the act of his symbolic adoption by the Professor. Konrad must be pulled out of the private and social configuration in which he is trapped. He is ready for this, but at that moment he is let down by the one to whom he confesses. The erotic triad ostentatiously expresses the stance of the two protagonists: for Konrad, a clean break proves impossible, and the Professor turns out to be incapable of going beyond the attitude of aloofness that repeats his mistake from the past. The same is true of Gianni: he meets his sister and enters into a domain imbued with incestuous content. He seeks salvation in his sister and – like

Konrad – wishes to extricate himself from the situation that his own actions have left him in. Key factors in the tragedy of both protagonists are their pride and the narrow-minded and hasty judgments of others. Gianni is at once both the hero and the author of a certain romance; he wants to abandon it but at the same time kindles it; he wants to describe it but at the same time recreates it; in the end, he becomes its victim. Konrad Hübel also ends as a ridiculed actor in a romance, but one that is much more strongly politicised. He is a German in Italy, left-wing among conservatives, old among the young and young among the old. He is a paid lover with aristocratic aspirations; he is vulgar and at the same time sensitive, arrogant and cultural, self-confident and weak, rebellious and well-adapted. As such ‘migrating’ protagonists, Gianni and Konrad stand in relation to the score-settling and political themes of the films: seeking those responsible for fascist crimes (the Italian terrorism of the early 70s thematised in *Gruppo di famiglia* has its equivalent in *Vaghe stelle* in the theme of Auschwitz, equally current at that time).

The Mozart aria *Vorrei spiegarvi, oh Dio!*, that Konrad and the Professor listen to together for a moment is an insertion aria that Mozart wrote for his sister-in-law, Aloisia Lange, to perform in Pasquale Anfossi’s comedy *Il curioso indiscreto* (Vienna, 1783), replacing an aria that was unappealing to the soprano. The situation that occurs in that opera is reminiscent of *Così fan tutte*: the Marchese Calandrino puts to the test the constancy of his future wife Clorinda’s feelings, through a confrontation with another man supposedly in love with her. Clorinda succumbs, but cannot show her feelings. The entangled emotional content is vented in the aria, the first part of which, *Adagio*, is used by Visconti in the film in the scene where Konrad is on the telephone. The text and instrumentation (particularly through the introduction of a solo oboe part) were altered by Mozart from the original version to express the protagonist’s feelings more concretely: the pain she feels, being forced to cry and remain silent (Angermüller, 2005, 103). The psychological portrait of Clorinda is thereby rendered deeper and more dramatic, and that is transferred by Visconti to the relationship between Konrad and the Professor. The echo effect that is musically highlighted by Mozart corresponds to the silent dialogue between the two men, one of whom is immersed in reverential listening, while the other irreverently shatters that atmosphere, reaching for the telephone receiver just after a leap in the soprano’s voice (a’-g” in bars 58–59) on the word *affanno* (‘grief’), the most important word in that strophe and in the whole aria. The elaborate coloraturas form a singular backdrop to the young man’s vulgar language.

The telephone scene and the erotic scene from the fourth phase in the action are linked not just by the protagonists and their mutual relations. Also shared is the lyrical situation, since both the Mozart aria from the telephone scene and the song *Testarda Io* used in the erotic scene employ the lyric of confession. The speaking 'I' tells of its suffering, rooted in solitude that is chosen in spite of love. Rudolf Angermüller (2005, 104) wrote that Mozart's rhetoric of sighs creates an image of 'restrained sweet pain', and that overall expressive character also seems to link the two compositions chosen by Visconti. In both works, the music is led by the words. On the verbal level, both the aria and the song tell the same story of loneliness and impossible love. The two musical worlds approach one another through a shared affect, the situation of confession and the form of expression, reflected in the coming-together in the film of Konrad and the Professor and of the solitude linked to old age and the solitude linked to youth. Konrad provides scope for the collision of these two worlds, before ultimately helping the Professor to recognise himself.

In scene B, Visconti shows the dance of three naked figures amid clouds of smoke, focussing attention on Konrad. We watch the erotic game through the eyes of the Professor, who is approached after a while by Lietta, who recites with excitement, almost as if it were a credo, an extract of what she states is 'the Auden's last poem' ('l'ultima poesia di Auden'). And again Konrad is perceived as an *angelus*, the one who joins and separates two worlds, as it is he who taught the girl the recited words. The work in question is indeed the anti-masque *The Entertainment of the Senses*, which Auden completed with Chester Kallman in September 1973, shortly before his death. Like the Mozart aria, this piece was intended to be inserted into another work: the seventeenth-century masque *Cupid and Death* by James Shirley (Auden/ Kallman, 1993, 736–739). So Lietta is quoting part of the text of a stage work with mocking-caricatural overtones, meant for performance with music and dance. Auden and Kallman (736) conceived it as a performance by five singers disguised as apes, representing and extolling in an ironical way the human senses, which in the modern world have been driven to hypertrophy. Lietta invokes an excerpt given to an ape speaking about the delights of the sense of touch.

Let us note that in this context the song *Testarda Io* is refunctionalised: on the plan of literary allusion, it serves as music for dancing, while the term 'dancers' should be

used – however far-fetched it might sound – for modern apes. Historically speaking, the distinguishing visual feature of an anti-masque consisted of the grotesque costumes. It is hard to resist the impression that with Visconti the dancing Konrad, Lietta and Stefano are ‘grotesquely’ naked. In effect, in terms of suggestiveness, this scene oscillates between gravity and jest, and it betrays the Professor’s axis of perception. Just as the fully-dressed countess Livia Serpieri in the closing scene of *Senso* is forced to see her mirror image as a scantily-dressed prostitute, so here the Professor, arrayed in a fine dressing gown, has to behold nakedness deprived of its intimacy – theatrical, superficial and tragic all in one, and extreme in its manifestation of the need to be with another person. Nakedness becomes a visual sign of the hero’s arrival at the truth about himself – tearing through the veil of illusion.



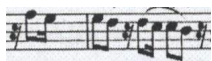
Ex. 5: *Gruppo di famiglia in un interno* (1974): Lietta recite an extract of the anti-masque *The Entertainment of the Senses* by W.H. Auden and Ch. Kallman (1973). Nakedness as a visual sign of the hero’s arrival at the truth about himself.



Ex. 6–7: *Senso* (1954): Countess Livia Serpieri in the closing scene, forced to see her mirror image as a scantily-dressed prostitute.

The song describes the relations which in the film are assigned to three adults of different ages: the Professor, the marchesa Bianca Brumonti and Konrad. Konrad's unexplained death from another's hand or his own (leaving the narrative as ambivalent as *Vaghe stelle*) may be read as a repetition of the symbolic suicide committed by the Professor – a figure seemingly very distant from him – who fled from life into art and instead of living in a family merely assembled family images. The last words of the song resound just before the Professor begins to relate how he sees the only suitable role for himself at this stage in his life to be that of King Lear. Those words are followed by the symbolic commencement of the process of his adoption of Konrad as his son. And here the dramaturgical arc that arose in the music scene placed in the second phase of the action is closed.

An analogous distribution of the musical scenes that are key to the work's dramaturgy organises the structure of *Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa*. The climactic scene of the encounter between Sandra and Gianni in the subterranean Etruscan cistern occurs during the fourth phase in the action and is linked to a reprise of a piece of music already invoked twice before in the film (the *Prélude* from César Franck's cycle), which is heard here in full for the first time. The melody appears in fragmented form initially at Sandra and her husband's farewell party in Geneva, then again when Sandra is visiting in Italy her mentally ill pianist mother, who, while playing Franck's work, stumbled on the motif



(in the film, the melody was transposed from the original key of B minor to C minor) that opens the second section of the composition ('a capriccio'). A moment of impotence, heightened by Sandra's presence, turns into an attack of hysteria, betraying at that moment that the music – a voice reaching back into the family's past – encodes dark

content shrouded in silence: Gianni and Sandra, through their Jewish roots, are linked to their father, who was murdered in Auschwitz, and it is assumed that the one whose denunciation put him there was the children's later stepfather – the same one who is openly accusing the two of an incestuous relationship, which Gianni does indeed openly manifest. Already in the farewell party scene that opens the action, this exalted and rhythmically distinct motif was played by the pianist differently than in the score: not sequentially (in the score: f sharp-e-e-d / d-c sharp-c sharp-b), but through repetition (in the film: g-f-f-e flat / g-f-f-e flat). This change could hardly be regarded as accidental or insignificant, particularly since – as Christiane Strucken-Paland notes (2009, 418) – ‘a falling, and then sequential stepwise motion’ constitutes ‘the nucleus of the whole work’. What is more, this motif belongs to a whole network of motifs that anticipate and structure Franck's cycle, and it distinctly presages the theme of the fugue, so it is very strongly rooted in the logic of the work. Sandra's mother proves incapable of playing these altered bars 8 and 9 that open section B of the *Prélude* (cf. Liandrat-Guigues, 1995, 146–147, 151). A memory slip or some other obstacle replaces them with cacophony, which seems not just to illustrate the woman's mental incoherence, but also to betray a powerful emotional tension arising between mother and daughter.

After this occurrence, a new character enters the scene: Sandra and Gianni's stepfather, Gilardini. The mode of narration also changes: Visconti introduces two flashbacks from a conversation between Sandra and her mother. From one of these, we learn about the woman's hatred of her former husband and of the supposedly racially determined moral corruption inherited from him by the children; the second flashback reveals the character of the relationship between the mother and her children. She openly calls them ‘monsters’ (‘due mostri’) and ‘foes’. This key filmic reminiscence appears precisely at the point of climax in the action, to which Visconti imparts the character of a quasi-operatic duet in the setting of the ancient Etruscan cistern. This is a key moment – both musically (Liandrat-Guigues, 1995, 155–156) and dramaturgically. It not so much crystallises the suggestions of incest between Sandra and Gianni that are scattered throughout the work as it takes them further (cf. Düttmann, 2007, 152–153) and arrays them in suggestive images. In the music, for the first time since the beginning of the film, the *Prélude* is heard – as already mentioned – in its entirety, including with that doubled motif on which the mother's memory foundered. On the plan of the action, we first see Sandra running towards the cistern and – in keeping with the movement pattern designed for this character – halting for a moment and looking back over her shoulder. Dressed in a

short dress, with a girlish braid encircling her head that seems to have been prepared specially for the encounter with her brother, Sandra descends the winding steps into the cistern. The camera dwells on her silhouette and a fragment of wall overgrown with greenery – suggestive signals of a descent into a time that has passed and into the abyss of the unconscious ('il grembo materno', Parigi, 2000, 225). The musical precision to the merging of the line of descent with the line of the melody immersed in the arpeggios of the opening bars of the *Prélude* gains a choreographic distinctness. A moment later, there is a sharp cut in the film, dictated by the dynamics of the music as it switches from section A to section B of the *Prélude*. At the moment when those two identical musical motifs g-f-f-e flat / g-f-f-e flat occur, the director shows us the image of two massive pillars submerged in water, which he initially treats in a thoroughly pictorial-theatrical way, seeking to place the figures exactly between them.



Ex. 8: *Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa* (1965): Sandra and Gianni in the setting of the ancient Etruscan cistern. Symbolism of pairs in music and image.

This consistently staged symbolism of pairs – rooted in the theme of incestuous love and encompassing, as we have seen, the use of both visual and musical motifs – reaches its zenith at a moment of multiple reflections: not only is the brother reflected in the sister and the sister in the brother, but they are here both filmed as a reflection seen in a watery mirror.

We find this same creative method – altering a quoted original and using that modification for dramaturgical purposes (Micciché, 2000, 84) – in *Gruppo di famiglia in*



*un interno*, although here the modifying material is not music, but a painting: the palatial estate in the background of David Allan's painting is replaced by another architectural element: a large pavilion. And the whole composition is placed in a different setting.







Ex. 9–11: *Gruppo di famiglia in un interno* (1974): Altering the quoted original painting by David Allan *The Family of Sir James Hunter Blair, First Baronet* (1785). The pavilion and its migrations in the painting's represented world are directly connected to the preparations in the Professor's villa of the apartment for Konrad.

Yet that pavilion attracts Konrad's attention and becomes the subject for a conversation leading to the solving of the puzzle of the painting's artist. This architectural element and its migrations in the painting's represented world are directly connected to the preparations in the Professor's villa of the apartment for Konrad (evidenced by the placement of a photograph of the painting on top of a technical drawing of the design for the renovated flat) and to the question of his 'belonging' to the marchesa Brumonti (the flat is a gift from the marchesa). An element in the original composition of the painting is replaced by the pavilion – just as Konrad in the film is to be “replaced” by another lover, because he has become politically dangerous for Bianca's husband. Tacitly repeated in that act is the tragic misunderstanding contained in the film's exposition, functioning as a metaphor of the relationship between Konrad and the marchesa: keeping from the lover the fact that the flat has been rented, and only for a year. As a space that forms part of the Professor's property and becomes stylistically its opposite, Konrad's flat assumes an eminently allegorical meaning and is linked to the secret room in the Professor's study, an intimate space for concealment and protection, the opening of which – like the opening of the wing of the mansion belonging to the mother in *Vaghe stelle* – equates to bringing alive the past and the protagonists' hidden passions. In *Vaghe stelle*, the closing scenes

which are associated with the theme of incest are played out in the mother's apartment (Parigi, 2000, 227–228), while in *Gruppo di famiglia* the maternal space is reserved for the scenes when Konrad and Professor are closest to one another, captured in the frame of a repeated gesture of salvation (the Professor reprises his mother's gesture of giving protection to people persecuted by the fascist regime). Konrad's flat – a place of death that functions analogously to the maternal room where Gianni dies – is transformed in the film's finale into a modern, open inner space devoid of internal walls, with architecture matching its strong colours and the ubiquitous white that connotes luxury, moral depravation and aestheticism (in this aspect, the intended reference to *The Clockwork Orange* is clearly discernible, cf. Giori, 2012, 364), and also the modern abstract art chosen to decorate the walls. The large colourful painting with a red background that adorns the newly furnished apartment, highlighted in a frame towards the end of the film, during a conversation between the Professor and Bianca on the subject of Konrad, turns out to be a variation on the German flag, and thereby represents the protagonist not physically present in this scene. We find the same configuration of colours in the above-mentioned scene of erotic transgression presenting Konrad in a relationship with Lietta and Stefano. In the last scene of the film (when Bianca and Lietta bid farewell to the Professor) – as in the closing scenes of *Vaghe stelle* and *Morte a Venezia* – white is linked to the domain of death and ritual, thereby neutralising the colour's negative connotations.



Ex. 12: *Gruppo di famiglia in un interno* (1974): The large colourful painting with a red background as a variation on the German flag – allegorical representation of Konrad.



Ex. 13: *Gruppo di famiglia in un interno* (1974): Color configuration of black, red and yellow in the scene of erotic transgression presenting Konrad in a relationship with Lietta and Stefano.

5. Regardless of when – at what stage in his work on the film *Gruppo di famiglia in un interno* – Visconti decided to impart to it the form of a work dialoguing with *Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa*, the fact that he returned to a tried and trusted dramaturgical structure strikes one as an artistic decision – like the deliberate simplification of the technique for creating illusion that struck Gombrich in the late work of Rembrandt. We treated this observation as the starting point for reflection on the laws governing Visconti's dramaturgy. Edward W. Said has shown that there is something which links the Italian director's late style to the late style of Beethoven and Richard Strauss: a kind of negation of the 'acceptable or easy' that employs 'alternative and unregimented modes of subjectivity'. According to Said (114), the assured hand of each of these creative artists reveals that they have behind them 'a lifetime of technical effort and preparation'. Perhaps it is in that light that we should see the choice made by Visconti, who, in imparting to the dramaturgy of his penultimate film the character of a distinctly recognisable variant, was turning – like past masters – to something of proven efficacy. And perhaps that suffices to be able to assert the existence of some new, characteristic aspiration related to those features of this artist's late style already captured by scholars (e.g. Aristarco, 1992). It would involve seeking the effect of bringing his own opus to a close by creating a situation that allows one work to be seen through another. Such a perceptual situation brings to mind the practice of pendants familiar to art history. A pendant is 'a work constituting an exact compositional equivalent to another work; in painting, two pictures of the same dimensions, with similar

subject matter, colouring and composition, generally intended to be displayed together, usually symmetrically hung' (Kubalska-Sulkiewicz, 2003, 307). What is more, by emphasising in *Gruppo di famiglia in un interno* a connection between looking at a painting and watching a film which becomes a sort of *emulatio* of the painting, Visconti seems to be immortalising his own work: he imparts to it features of a timeless picture.

Translated by John Comber

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