



## Frame, Space, Narrative. Doors, Windows and Mobile Framing in the Films of Luchino Visconti

Ivo Blom

VU University Amsterdam (The Netherlands)

E-mail: il.blom@let.vu.nl

**Abstract:** In the last years, film and media studies are more and more discovering or rather appropriating ideas from art history and art theory, in particular iconology. This has led to great attention for the work of Aby Warburg and Ernst Panofsky. In particular the concept of motif has led to publications such as Michael Walker's *Hitchcock's Motifs* (2005), and, most recently, the article "Medienwissenschaft der Motive" (2009) by André Wendler and Lorenz Engell.<sup>1</sup> In the underlying article, the motif of the door in the films of Luchino Visconti will be researched, in comparison with, in particular 17<sup>th</sup> century, painting. The framing by doors in art and film will be compared with the motif of the framing window, while differences with mobile framing will be traced. Finally, the results will be embedded within contemporary ideas on intermediality.

In his intriguing study *L'instauration du tableau* (1993), released in English as *The Self-Aware Image: An Insight into Early Modern Meta-Painting* (1997), the Romanian art historian Victor Stoichita researched the phenomenon of *framing* in art, in particular the effect of the frame *within* the frame of a painting. He connects this with the creation of depth, and within this matter, he analyzes the functions and the representations of mirrors, paintings and maps within the representation, but he also deals with the representation of doors and windows in early modern painting. For research into depth and *framing* in *cinema*, in particular the work of the Italian filmmaker Luchino Visconti, Stoichita's work proved to be an extremely useful source in order to compare early modern but also 19<sup>th</sup> century painting, silent cinema, and the cinema of the 1930s and 1940s with the cinema of Luchino Visconti.

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<sup>1</sup> The article is part of a special issue on motifs of the new journal *zfm. Zeitschrift für Medienwissenschaft*.

## The Door as Frame within a Frame

Within Visconti's films, the *door opening* often functions as a frame within a frame. In *The Self-Aware Image*, Victor Stoichita makes an interesting division between door and window openings (Stoichita 1997, 47–68). In early modern painting, the window opens the interior to the exterior, permitting light to come in and offering a view towards the outside. That is how we see windows often represented. Much less often, we encounter examples of watching through a window towards the inside while standing outside. Doors mostly do not have that visual function. You can pass a door either towards the inside or the outside. Still, doors can also function as a kind of window, in the Albertian sense, when they offer us a view of the space behind the door. Not only can they offer a view from inside to outside or from outside to inside, but, while we remain inside, they can also show us another space, beyond the door. The open door thus connects two adjacent spaces. While we are inside in the world of culture, the window offers a view towards nature outside; with the door, however, we can stay within the world of culture, of domestic space. That's why Stoichita states that the door opening is the matrix of interior and genre painting. Of course these are a bit sweeping statements, and we will see this even more when projecting his analysis onto film: in cinema, open doors can also give views on streets and gardens, while sometimes windows are used to climb from the outside in (say burglars) or from the inside out (take rebellious teenagers). And as we will notice, views from outside to inside are very common in film, especially when the camera stands outside and shoots persons inside standing in front of an open window or behind a glass window.

The motif of doubling of the frame by use of the door opening is already visible in medieval art and thrived in Flemish painting of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, but whereas the motif had not been developed yet as a meta-pictorial issue, it surely became one in 17<sup>th</sup> century painting. The door became a topos. In the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the door appears as a prominent motif in Dutch painting, in its separation *and* connection of two adjacent interior spaces. One of the oldest examples is *The Sleeping Maid/The Idle Servant* (National Gallery, London, 1655) by Nicolaes Maes. The difference from previous paintings such as Pieter Aertsen's *Christ with Maria and Martha* (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, 1552) is that here the space behind is not a religious scene, but a second genre scene, a second interior scene. The viewer looks via the foreground and the frame of the image to a second space in the background, by means of the door opening. So there are two parallel frames, that are in close contact with each other, in contrast with previous

examples like Diego Velazquez' *Christ in the House of Mary and Martha* (London, National Gallery, 1618). In the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, this gaze through the open door, the famous Dutch "doorkijkje" or see-through, becomes a constant motif in the work of Maes, Pieter de Hooch and others. Samuel van Hoogstraten even went further. In his paintings *View of a Corridor or The Slippers* (Louvre, Paris, 1658) and *View of a Corridor* (Dyrham Park, Gloucestershire, 1662) [Fig. 1.] we have two representations in which humans are even almost absent. At most, we notice *references* to their presence, such as the woman on the Gerard Terborch-like painting in the back, the broom and the slippers in the first mentioned painting; and the dog and the swab in the foreground and the cat in the middle plane of the second painting, and only the vague contour of a man in the back room, seen from behind. We are looking at an almost pure interior, as a seemingly endless chain of door posts, the sign of a parallel research by Hoogstraten which eventually led to his well-known perspective peepshows, in which he offered three-dimensional looks onto a Dutch interior through peepholes at the far ends of the box. Here too we notice a fascination for the pure interior; man seems present only casually, in the foreground. Hoogstraten's *Slippers* contains even an extra door post, of which we notice a part on the right side. So the frame of the picture looks like a door opening itself.

Finally Stoichita discusses Johannes Vermeer's well-known *Love Letter* (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, 1669) [Fig. 2.] and *An Interior, with a Woman Refusing a Glass of Wine* (London, National Gallery, 1660-5) by Ludolf de Jongh.<sup>2</sup> The play with spaces in Vermeer's *Love Letter* reminds us of Hoogstraten, but with Vermeer the foreground is a kind of *hors-porte*, an off-doors. The objects on the right side turn the foreground in a kind of still life. Because of the curtain and the dimmed light, the foreground functions like a *repoussoir* versus the interior in the back. Actually, in some reproductions of the painting, the foreground is not even visible or legible. Our attention goes to the middle plane with the two women and the chequered floor, while we notice the paintings in the back on the white wall, a landscape and a seascape. So a still-life, an interior scene and landscapes are thus combined as the three modalities of the image, used to create depth. In the painting by De Jongh we notice at the far left the post and the handle of a door, turning the whole painting in a kind of *doorkijkje*. Preceding Vermeer's famous interior scenes, we notice here the fascination for framing. In the back of the image, we see a mirror

<sup>2</sup> The De Jongh painting could have been the inspiration for Vermeer, De Hooch and Hoogstraten as it precedes the work of Vermeer and others. Ludolf de Jongh, himself not from Delft but a Rotterdam painter, was from a generation older than the Delft based painters.

by which both the person in front of it and we ourselves can notice the off-screen space *behind* us, on the other side of the open doors, by means of mirrors. In his films, Visconti also often plays with this off-doors, thus showing simultaneously persons off-screen and onscreen talking to each other. Characters enter and exit spaces which we shall only notice in mirrors, thus avoiding editing, and creating a kind of neoclassical unity of time, space and action. Within De Jongh's painting, the character functions as our 'ambassador' within the painting – he stands opposite the mirror as we stand opposite the painting – but he is also the mediator between spectator and painting. This function of the character as mediator and ambassador also plays an important part in Visconti's films, either by reacting onto the space we also notice, or, on the contrary, by blocking our view onto another character we would like to see; so deliberately withholding information. In that sense, Visconti constantly plays with the different planes within the field of play, in ways reminding not only of Dutch genre painting but also of European silent cinema: we use the term *deep staging* then.

Visconti loved to film his actors through door openings, in ways that reminds us of 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch interior painting. But he also loved to put up barriers, in order to create distance between the viewer and the characters, refusing total identification and enabling moral judgment. Sometimes the door openings form blockades that partly obstruct the view, or they might construct a vertical frame around the space beyond the door, contrasting with the horizontal frame of the filmic image. Let me give you a few examples: In *White Nights* (*Le notti bianche*, 1957), a film set in a foggy harbour town, the young Mario (Marcello Mastroianni) and the girl Natalia (Maria Schell) just finished a wild dance in a bar. From the outside, we look at them through an open door, we notice them within the smoky room. The image was shot in the so-called Academy format (1.37:1), the standard format of the filmic frame between the 1930s and the 1950s. The horizontal format of the frame is contrasted, however, by the vertical lines of the door posts. Our see-through on the dance hall thus has a vertical character, in spite of the film frame.<sup>3</sup> [Fig. 3.] Back to *White Nights*: after the dance is over, the glass door is closed and we notice Natalia through the steamed up window. [Fig. 4.] She is all exited, steamed up herself. From the rest of the bar, we can hardly notice anything as the vapour on the window strategically works like a frame around Natalia's face; a kind of spotlight or natural focus on her. The other visitors are separated by Natalia and Mario by the vertical bar in the middle of the window: they are

<sup>3</sup> In the days of silent cinema it was even common to use *masks* to create such effects, accentuating people climbing or falling down stairs.

left, Natalia and Mario sit right. Who manages to see through the steam, will notice that Natalia's exhilaration contrasts with the boredom of two ladies in the back, sitting on a bench.

Within Visconti's films, filmed in *widescreen format*, such as *The Leopard* (*Il Gattopardo*, 1963) and *The Innocent/The Intruder* (*L'Innocente*, 1976), this contrast of horizontal and vertical, in combination with staging in depth, is even more remarkable. In *The Innocent*, Visconti's last film, we see a hotel servant carrying an enormous bouquet of tuberose into the suite of Tullio Hermil and his mistress Teresa Raffo. We are looking at the servant from the bedroom, so the space in front of the room he is in. In the reverse shot, taken from the other room, Visconti films alongside the door posts and curtains to the bedroom, where, indirectly by means of a mirror we notice Tullio (Giancarlo Giannini), who, off-screen, is furious about the sender of the flowers, his rival, count Egano. These kinds of indirect reactions Visconti must have cherished, considering the many examples in his films where he used mirrors to show characters standing off-screen.

In widescreen films like *The Leopard* we do not see the upper sides of doors anymore, and thus we are even more confronted with the vertical elements of doors and door posts, contrasting with the extremely horizontal frame. Open doors offer views onto adjacent spaces beyond the doors, inviting the spectator to investigate not only the foregrounds, but much more than that. Leaving information out in the foreground, draws our attention to the back, as in the shot in which we notice the uncle, Don Fabrizio (Burt Lancaster), getting dressed to leave the ball. As the foreground is relatively quiet and no actors distract us, we do not mind he is in the back, in a space beyond an open door, in the middle plane of the image. Often our view is even directed towards the back by actors walking to these spaces in the back, as in *The Leopard* when Tancredi (Alain Delon) passes the rooms of his uncle's villa, saying goodbye on his leaving to war, when Tancredi and his fiancée wander through the empty spaces in the attics of his uncle's palace, when they pass the rooms of the palace of the ball in the final sequence, or when at the end of the ball Tancredi is searching for his uncle; all explorations for us as spectators, while often these are explorations for the characters, too. Continuously, the actors not only interact with each other, but even more with the – often changing – spaces.

Sometimes those door openings are shot from a relatively high angle, which enables to look far away into the spaces behind. That is the case in the opening scene of *The Leopard*, where we can watch over the heads of the staff into the room behind, in which the local family mass is held. When shortly after, Don

Fabrizio decides to ride into town in spite of the troubled times, we notice him standing in the room behind, surrounded by his family, while the camera looks over the heads of the princess and the family priest. If the camera had not been positioned so high, the actors would have blocked our view onto the persons in the back; in this way we are searching for a relationship between people in the foreground *and* those in the back. Sometimes people in the foreground almost function as a kind of *exhortatio* towards the central figures in the back; they show us how to respond emotionally to a certain situation, just like in classical paintings by Jacopo Tintoretto and others. In short, not having the central figure in the foreground is not a problem in this kind of deep staging, in particular if lighting accentuates where we are supposed to look at.

In Visconti's *The Damned* (*La caduta degli dei*, 1969) we notice two contrasting shots in which a character walks to the back and the corridor functions like a kind of tunnel. In the first case, the mother Sophie (Ingrid Thulin) finds her lost son Martin (Helmut Berger) back in the attic of their villa; Martin hides there, terrified by his uncle. The servant sneaking away must be an aid of the uncle. In the second example it is Martin himself who is head of the situation, after his uncle is killed and he has raped his own mother. He is walking to the back, but whereas in the previous shot the foreground was dark and the corridor was lighted, now the foreground is lighted and the corridor is dark. Our attention is drawn towards the back: the dressing room of Sophie who is getting dressed for her marriage, a dark marriage, as it also means the death of her future husband and herself, on instigation of her son. His dark profile means no good.

But sometimes Visconti deliberately did not opt for a high angle and used actors to block our view. Let me give you an example. Creation of depth through open doors and corridors is not only persistent in Visconti's work, we also notice it very often in the European cinema of the 1930s, in particular in the work of Max Ophüls, such as his *Everybody's Woman* (*La signora di tutti*, 1934), and in that of Jean Renoir, the French director with whom Visconti started his career in 1936, as trainee and costume assistant for the film *A Day in the Country* (*Une partie de campagne*, 1936). In Renoir's film *The Human Beast* (*La bête humaine*, 1938) we encounter a scene that Visconti uses and reworks in his first film *Obsession* (*Ossessione*, 1943), made during the war and hailed as the first neorealist film. [Figs. 5–6.] In *Obsession*, based on James Cain's hard boiled novel *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, a bum called Mario arrives at a gas station and inn, and falls for Giovanna, the young wife of the innkeeper Bragana. Eventually, she convinces him to kill her husband. In the opening scene, for a long time, we only see Gino's

(Massimo Girotti) back; while he gets off the truck, moves to the inn, enters, and hears Giovanna (Clara Calamai) sing in the kitchen. Our recognition of his face is postponed. Only after *she* has seen him, in shock, we get a close up of his face, enforced by a rapid tracking shot onto that face. These postponements are quite Renoir-like, I should say, and create a kind of distance: we observe Gino, but through him, we also observe, explore and validate the space, the location. So-called subjective or point-of-view shots lack, but we still experience a kind of *third person subjectivity*.

But I would like to point your attention to the first glimpse of *Giovanna*, a kind of filmic see-through if you like. The first part of Giovanna we get to see are her legs, dangling from the kitchen table. The rest of her body is covered by Gino's back in the open kitchen door. While again the filmic image is in Academy format, the door post, the door, the shape of Gino, the legs of the table, and even the vertical window in the back, put forward a dominance of vertical lines. Visconti used this exact composition and angle a *second* time, when the husband is away and Gino has decided to grab Giovanna. She already knows what is going to happen; defiantly she is waiting for him in the kitchen. This time we see her full figure. While in *Obsession* it was the *first* image of the woman, in *The Human Beast* Renoir uses this very composition for the *last* shot of *his* leading female character. In *Judas Was a Woman*, a quite liberal and condensed adaptation of the novel by Émile Zola, the railway station manager Roubaud (Fernand Ledoux), married to the *petite* but oh so *femme fatale* Severine (Simone Simon), has killed her rich tutor Grandmorin and has hidden his money and golden watch under the floor. Horrified, Severine stops loving him, starts an affair with the engine driver Jacques Lantier (Jean Gabin) and pushes Lantier to kill Roubaud, but he fails, to her great anger. Lantier, though, suffers from murderous afflictions, and during a reconciliation with Severine, he kills his beloved. Lantier confesses his crime to a colleague and throws himself from a running train. When Roubaud finds the corpse of Severine, we notice, again, her legs sticking out on the left side of the image, just like in *Obsession*, while Roubaud himself, standing right, and the high backside of the bed block our view on the rest of Severine. The composition is exactly as in the *Obsession*. Again, the vertical lines dominate within the horizontal film frame. So two examples where the human figure partly blocks our view of the space beyond or behind the door, raising our attention. Actually, the two films have very much in common, but that goes beyond this text. It is clear that here cinema can do something that for instance theatre cannot do, as only the persons right in front of the stage would have their view blocked; the others can just see around it.



Coming back to Hoogstraten's examples of corridors, let me show you an example of a typical Visconti trait, the serial opening of doors, of spaces; the *emulatio* of the see-through, if you like. Visconti loved to create spaces that opened up in sequence, thus proving to be larger and larger, comparable to Hoogstraten's corridors interrupted by door posts. In his historical drama *Senso* (*Senso*, 1954), set in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Visconti had his character countess Livia Serpieri (Alida Valli) opening one door after another in one of the most dramatic moments in the film, when her lover Franz (Farley Granger), threatens to have himself killed on the battlefield. Even if Franz is an officer in the Austrian army occupying Italy, she decides to give him the money of the free-fighters, the *garibaldini*, thus betraying her country, ideals and self-esteem, all for her beloved so that he can bribe a doctor and desert his military service. During a climax in the accompanying music of Brückner's *Seventh Symphony*, Livia desperately opens all doors to fetch the money. [Figs. 7–10.] What is striking is that often with these serial openings of doors and spaces, the actors are always walking to the back, while the camera stands still.<sup>4</sup> There must have been a biographical element there too, as Visconti, descendant of the counts that once ruled the whole of Lombardy, was raised in the vast *palazzi* and villas, with endless corridors, creating serial vistas towards the back.

## The Window

Let's move over now to the window. In *The Self-Aware Image*, Stoichita focuses on the question: what part did the painted window have in the consciousness of a new kind of painting? Just like he related the door to interior painting, the window was the catalyst in the definition of the genre of landscape. The window actualizes the dialectics between inside and outside, without which we would not perceive landscape. Landscape asks for distance, whereas still life calls for vicinity. Until the arrival of *plein air* painting, the image of nature had been conceived from a space of culture. It is the rectangle of the window that changed 'outside' into landscape. Thus in 15<sup>th</sup> century Flemish and Italian painting, we look at nature through open windows. The frame also helps the spectator to experience the landscape as a painting, but the stand-ins for our view, the figures in the painting watching the landscape also help us to get in the right mood.

In *La Madone au Chancelier Rollin* (Louvre, Paris, 1435) by Jan van Eyck, we notice in the back two people from behind, who seem to contemplate the scenery.

<sup>4</sup> We already notice the same effect in the film *Tosca* (1941) by Carl Koch, for which Visconti was assistant-director, and which was originally started as a film by Renoir. See my forthcoming article (Blom 2010).



They are *stand-ins* for us viewers. So on one side, we look at the representation in the interior in the foreground, but by means of the two little figures in the back, we also look at the landscape. It is, however, only in the 16<sup>th</sup> century that the theme of the view through the window indicates the birth of landscape painting, and only in the 17<sup>th</sup> century that the independent landscape starts to play with the frame of the painting as if it were the frame of a window. Take Vermeer's *View of Delft* (Mauritshuis, The Hague, 1659–1660), one of the best known cityscapes of Dutch painting, which presumably was painted from a window. The independent landscape was a typical modern genre for the 17<sup>th</sup> century and was also conceived as such. Stoichita states that at the time, people saw the landscape, previously considered *parergon*, that is, a part referring to a whole, as a religious painting which, being in a subordinate position, had become *ergon*, a self-sustaining entity. This passage occurred by the window. Sometimes we cannot trace the window in the landscape as in Vermeer's painting; hanging on the wall it might as well be a kind of hole into the wall – Stoichita speaks of embrasures – even if that obviously only refers to land-scapes and not to sea-scapes.

This lack of clarity about the frame of the window we also notice in the films by Visconti sometimes. Take *White Nights* (*Le notti bianche*, 1957) where we are standing outside, with Mario, looking at the window of a bar. There is party going on and all are exited. A young woman laughs at Mario and writes 'Ciao!' on the steamed window. Only on the right we notice a part of the vertical bar of the window. Left, top and bottom frames are off-screen. Where we do see the complete frame of a window within the filmic frame is in Visconti's fishermen's drama *The Earth Trembles* (*La terra trema*, 1948). It contains an abundance of images of people at a window: Mara, looking outside, watering her basil and watching her beloved Nicola, the police sergeant Don Salvatore, looking inside, courting Mara's sister Lucia, or Mara and Lucia looking outside, lost and destroyed, after the shipwreck of their brother's boat which causes them to lose their money, house and reputation.

Such shots through open windows we also often encounter in the work of Visconti's "teacher" Jean Renoir, from outside to inside or from inside to outside; so there might be a tie too. We notice actions taking place in the background simultaneously with actions in the foreground. The window functions as threshold, as passage between two worlds, that of the observers and that of the observed. The window separates but also connects; so identification and distance at the same time, just as in Visconti's work. In *The Crime of Monsieur Lange* (*Le crime de M. Lange*, 1936) an injured, bed-ridden boy lies in bed and has no light in his room because of an announcement board. When the odious manager is

away, the inhabitants lift the board and give the poor sod a ‘window on the world.’ In Renoir’s *A Day in the Country* we notice the two men Rodolphe (Jacques Brunius) and Henri (George D’Arnoux) having breakfast at the open window, while we look outside, like Henri seen from behind, watching the daughter and the mother on the swing. While Rodolphe looks at the women with lustful eyes, Henri, the serious one, keeps to himself. Soon their roles will switch; Henri will claim the daughter, while Rodolphe is left with the mother. As Deleuze remarked: “the cynic proves to have a good heart while the sentimental proves to be an unembarrassed seducer” (Deleuze 2005, 84).

## Mobile Framing

But what happens when the camera itself and not only the actors move through open doors? Already in his first film *Obsession* Visconti used a remarkable *tracking shot* forward, a kind of following shot. [Figs. 11–16.] We are in Ferrara. From a bar Giovanna spies upon her former lover Gino. She watches how he leaves the house of the prostitute Anita (Dhia Cristiani), and runs for errands across the street. Giovanna is sitting at the table (MS).<sup>5</sup> The background of the bar is *out of focus*. Suddenly we can see on her face she has seen Gino exiting. Her mask of well-controlled middle class woman goes off, and vengeance and pain take over. Clutching her bag with the life insurance of her deceased husband, she stands up. The camera tracks in on her, showing her in CU while the camera stands next to her. She rises, walks to the back, towards the exit of the bar. The camera follows her from behind, on table height and not as fast as she walks, which results that she goes from CU to MS, to MLS. In the back we can see Gino and Anita coming out, crossing the street, but they disappear off-screen left. Giovanna leaves the bar, crosses the threshold, followed by the camera. A man left sitting at the terrace stands up and leaves, probably to make the tracking easier. As soon as the camera passes the terrace visitors, we have full view on Giovanna and the street, where just before, in the back of the image, we saw Gino and Anita in front of an ice-cream car near a dairy shop. The camera stops following when coming outside, turning Giovanna in LS, walking from the middle plane to the background, crossing the street. As the foreground is empty, we know where to look. As soon as she is crossing though obstacles occur like bikes and pedestrians passing by, blocking *her* way or *our* view on her. Apparently, this was the solution to indicate the time passed for Gino’s shopping, without the need for cutting the

<sup>5</sup> MS = medium shot, CU= close up, MLS = medium long shot, LS = long shot.

long take tracking shot, keeping the unity. After that, less extras pass and we can focus better on Giovanna. She walks around the ice cream car, around the shop, in order to have a better look at Gino. Only then, a cut is inserted in the editing, and we move to a closer shot of Giovanna (almost foretelling new dialogue), and yes, when he comes out, she grabs him, insults him and menaces him.

This scene introduces a new kind of treating perspective and depth, much beyond the previous example of *Senso* and beyond the research in perspective, and space in Dutch 17<sup>th</sup> century art. So yes, there are strong ties, we could even speak of a heritage or rather an appropriation, but there are also moments where painting and cinema become hard to compare, especially when the camera starts to move. It is then that the mobile gaze refers to other models. Gerard Wajcman in his study *Fenêtre* (2004) has indicated that the filmic frame does not so much hark back to the Albertian window – even if it is the basic model – as well as to other, newer models of *moving* windows in means of transports like the train. Before Wajcman, Jacques Aumont in *L'Oeil interminable* (1989) had already indicated that the mobile gaze marked a break between the traditional art historical conception and the filmic conception of representation.

## Transmediality, Intermediality, and Intervisuality

As we have noticed in the above mentioned examples of the use of doors, windows and mobile framing in the films of Luchino Visconti, the ways that, for instance, doors and windows manifest themselves in the films, we can draw comparisons both of cinema with another medium, painting, and compare with other films by other filmmakers, and thus stay within an intra-medial territory. In her article *Intermediality, Intertextuality and Remediation: A Literary Perspective on Intermediality*, Irina O. Rajewsky, discusses the various interpretations and uses of the concept of inter-mediality. One option is so-called *trans-medial* intermediality<sup>6</sup>, “the appearance of a certain motif, aesthetic, or discourse across a variety of different media” (Rajewsky 2005, 46). That applies well to our comparison of Visconti’s use of the motif of the door with its use in 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch painting. Yet, when we deepen the analysis and notice how Visconti not only uses doors as with Vermeer or Hoogstraten, but often also uses means such as the blocking of our view by placing characters between our eyes and persons in the back, we notice then the differences between his cinema and this kind of

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<sup>6</sup> Trans-medial is one of the four categories Jens Schröter proposes in his seminal text *Intermedialität. Facetten und Probleme eines aktuellen medienwissenschaftlichen Begriffs* (1998). The other categories are synthetic, transformatory and ontological intermediality.

painting – not any kind of painting, if we take into account the work of Edgar Degas for instance. But the blocking brings us also closer to earlier, intra-medial examples in cinema itself, i.e. the films of the 1930s, in particular those of Jean Renoir. Also the mobile framing in film indicates where the motif of the door opening becomes definitely different from the medium of painting.

We start with formal resemblances then, but when deepening our case, we notice differences that we might define as not only referring to a filmmaker's personal aesthetics but also helping us to recognize medial differences. Within this framework, Rajewsky refers to Sybille Krämer's concept of media-recognition (*Medienerkenntnis*), to Jens Schröter's idea of *ontological* intermediality, and to Gaudreault and Marion's words that "it is through intermediality, through a concern with the intermedial, that a medium is understood" (Rajewsky 2005, 48). However, most versions of intermediality, such as Bolter and Grusin's remediation, tend to be generalizing. Dissatisfied with this broad interpretation of the term intermediality, that only conceives of phenomena that take place between media in general, Rajewsky proposes a narrower version that takes into account individual cases and historicity; an approach that appeals to me, as I am looking for both a formal and historical approach. In particular she proposes the category of *intermedial references*, "to be understood as meaning-constitutional strategies that contribute to the media product's overall signification: the media product uses its own media-specific means, either to refer to a specific, individual work produced in another medium (i.e., what in German tradition is called *Einzelreferenz*, "individual reference"), or to refer to a specific medial subsystem (such as a certain film genre) or to another medium as a system (*Systemreferenz*, "system reference")" (Rajewsky 2005, 53). References in film to painting is one of the possibilities then, though it remained unclear to me whether that encompasses both aesthetic conventions from other media, or even specific temporarily and geographically limited kinds of painting, and, say, pictorial quotations in films. It is hard to establish this, as her own approach remains mainly within the field of literary studies, which she honestly admits, though she combines it with a diachronic, historical layer – unusual for most literary studies. My own topic, though, rather calls for an inter-visual approach<sup>7</sup>, which takes into account the developments of both painting and cinema, even if, like Engell proposes, the concept of motif *per se* is not strictly medium-specific but receives its medium-specific impact only because of its use within the medium-bound framework of narrative, space, or, we might add: time.

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<sup>7</sup> For the sake of my argument, I am leaving aside sound in film here, even when acknowledging that it makes up at least half of a film's final result.

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Figures 11–16. Mobile framing in *Obsession*.

