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Abstract: Through the analysis of some of the characters played by Monica Vitti in the context of the *Commedia all'italiana*, the paper aims to explore the connection between the construction of the new women's gender subjectivity and the male violence in the early years of Italian Neo-feminism. In particular, the analysis will focus on *Amore mio aiutami* (Alberto Sordi, 1969), *Dramma della gelosia* (Ettore Scola, 1970) and *A Mezzanotte va la ronda del piacere* (Marcello Fondato, 1974), released over a period of time in which not only feminist struggles exploded, but also some of the laws that would change the structure of Italian society and the relationship between the women and men were approved – from the divorce law (and the subsequent referendum) to the family law. By combining contemporary approaches from Film Studies and Gender Studies with primary sources of the time—including general press, film criticism, early feminist publications, and even Vitti's own self-narratives—this article aims to show how the actress's body, as that of an unruly woman within the Italian star system, becomes a space of conflict where erotic and passionate attraction intertwines with violence as a reaction to women's emancipation.

Keywords: Italian-Style Comedy, Monica Vitti, violence against women, Italian feminism, performance studies

"The Actress Who Got Slapped the Most": Monica Vitti's Body as a Space of Conflict in Italian-Style Comedy (1969–1975)

GIULIA SIMI*

"Non salterà il mondo se l'uomo non avrà
più l'equilibrio psicologico basato sulla nostra sottomissione."

The world won't fall apart if man no longer maintains
his psychological balance through our submission.[1]

Comic Body in Revolt

The first monograph dedicated to Monica Vitti, curated by film critic Laura Delli Colli and published in 1987, opens with a glossary—or rather, an atlas—of performative subjectivity situated within the inseparable nexus between art and life. Under the letter B, after *baci* (kisses)—"I like them, I would always kiss the people I love"—and *bicicletta* (bicycle)—"I don't know how to ride one, maybe I lack a sense of balance"—we find the entry *botte* (blows)—"Oh, how many I've received. Real ones, few; fake ones, many. Sometimes I fear I'll go down in entertainment history as the actress who got slapped the most."[2]

The blows suffered by Vitti's performative body through her characters did not go unnoticed by film critics, and from the 1980s onward, the topic re-emerged on multiple occasions. In a 1995 radio program, journalist Luciana Lanzarotti asked her: "But why did you get hit so much, have you ever wondered?" The actress responded with caustic irony and deliberate evasiveness, "Well, maybe my face inspired slaps." This reply leaves us, as contemporary viewers, attached to her body as a symbol of women's emancipation, adrift in troubled waters.[3]

Indeed, Vitti not only avoids delving into a critique—present in other instances—of a patriarchy-informed Italian film industry, but she emphasizes the identity between herself and the characters she portrayed, an issue on which she has often spoken with thoughtfulness and theoretical depth.[4] So she claimed in Rosalia Polizzi's interview for the TV program *Mixer* in 1984: "I don't represent anything. I am the representation. Yes, everything is mixed together: life, the characters. So, is it all false? No, it's all true—especially the characters. To represent is for me to live more, to add, to idealize, to transfigure. To add emotion to emotions, passion to passions. In

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[1] Lonzi, *Sputiamo su Hegel*, 19. The original text was published in *Manifesto di rivolta femminile* in 1970 by Elvira Banotti, Carla Accardi, and Carla Lonzi. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Italian texts and interviews are my own.

[2] Delli Colli, *Monica Vitti,* 13.

[3] The episode *A spasso con Monica* aired on June 18, 1995, with Vitti and Lanzarotti as co-hosts. The episode was based on Vitti's self-narration and seems to be part her will of constructing and telling her own story as part of an act of authorship. Around the same time, Vitti's two autobiographies *Sette sottane: un'autobiografia involontaria* (Seven Skirts: An Involuntary Autobiography, 1993) and *Il letto è una rosa* (The Bed is a Rose, 1995) were published. These were not the first attempts by the actress to speak about herself. She also granted several interviews in newspapers, magazines, television and radio talk shows, and in 1980 she and Roberto Russo were co-hosts of *Qualcosa di Monica* (Something About Monica), a TV program broadcasted on RAI 2. It is also worth mentioning that in 1968, Andrea Camilleri, an old friend of the actress, was the host of another radio program entitled *Monica o come tu mi vuoi* (Monica or As You Want Me) and devoted 16 short episodes to her career, from theatre to her first film experience, to the shift from Michelangelo Antonioni's auteur cinema, to comic performance.

[4] See Bellumori, *Le donne nel cinema*, among others.

short, for me, where representation ends, reality ends."[5] It is precisely this intertwining that allows us to explore the connection between the roles she played and the star image she skillfully constructed, attempting to trace a hypothesis as to why, especially in the crucial years between the late 1960s and mid-1970s, her body was the center of a comedy that also involved male violence.

Recognized as a true icon of modernity since her roles in Michelangelo Antonioni's tetralogy—to the extent that in July 1962 she was featured on the cover of the French magazine *Elle*, which described her as "the image of the modern woman"—Vitti, by the latter half of the 1960s, had become a symbol for the feminist struggle.[6] "Why are you involved in feminism?" Enzo Biagi asked her during an episode of RAI 1's program *Terza B, Facciamo l'appello* (Class 3B, Let's Take Attendance) in 1971. "Because maybe it's time," she replied, anticipating the slogan of today's ongoing Fourth Wave of feminism in Italy: Se non ora, quando? (If Not Now, When?)[7]

By 1971, Vitti had already left behind her roles in the then called *cinema impegnato* (engaged cinema) and had almost entirely committed herself to the genre of comedy. It is during that extensive part of her career that the blows find their place. Through the roles she played in Italian-style comedies starting in the mid-1960s, Vitti built a new subjectivity, leaving behind the turbulent waters of incommunicability and becoming one of the most recognizable faces of the genre—so much so that she earned the title of "fifth colonel," alongside the very symbols of comic cinema: Alberto Sordi, Nino Manfredi, Vittorio Gassman, and Ugo Tognazzi.[8]

Achieving such recognition in a traditionally male-dominated arena is a fundamental starting point to grasp the undeniable radicality of an actress like Monica Vitti, who was capable of manifesting the polysemy of a body that simultaneously adhered to the standards of erotic attraction—especially from the late 1960s onward—while performing, through comedy, a deconstruction of genre, by entering a space usually reserved to men.[9] It is precisely the choice to become a comic body—thus building a space for an irony that draws on a genealogy of female freedom—that enables Monica Vitti to play roles aligned with what Kathleen Rowe defined as an "unruly woman," whose erotic appeal, blended with laughter, never fully conformed to traditional norms.[10] Vitti consistently carves out the space of the woman-warrior: in *Modesty Blaise*, she plays a comic book-style spy quick with her weapons, and in the forerunner of Pasquale Festa Campanile's *Decamereon* adaptations *La cintura di castità* (On My Way to the Crusades, I Met a Girl Who...), Vitti portrays Boccadoro, a beautiful peasant woman who rebels against the patriarchal and Middle Age customs of *ius primae noctis* (the right of the first night) and the chastity belt—going so far as to don a knight's armor and fight alongside her man.[11] In both films, she breaks

[5] This episode had not been accessible on the RAI online archives. The author was able to watch it at the RAI archives in Bologna on January 20, 2025.

[6] Yet in the caption of the cover, we can read: "Monica Vitti, the image of the modern woman, just as Michelangelo Antionioni, her director, envisioned her." On the difficulty of recognizing women's authorship and the relationship between directors and producers and actresses, see Tognolotti, *Cenerentola, Galatea e Pigmalione*.

[7] On this topic, and in particular on the relationship between Vitti and the 1970s Italian women's emancipation, see Grespi, "Cine-femmina," and Colet, "Monica Vitti." In relation to recent Italian feminist activism, see Voela and Guaraldo, "'If not now, when?'"

[8] Asked by the journalist Cristina Borsatti whether Monica Vitti could be considered the only true female protagonist of Italian-style comedy, Ettore Scola affirms: "Absolutely. Monica Vitti was the only actress to break into the inner circle of the so-called 'four colonels' (Alberto Sordi, Vittorio Gassman, Ugo Tognazzi, and Nino Manfredi). She was the 'fifth one.'" See Borsatti, *Monica Vitti,* 116.

[9] The study conducted by Melis and Fresu, although primarily focused on Ancient Greek theatre, sheds lights on transhistorical dynamics in the relationship between women and the comic. See Melis and Fresu, *Le amiche di Lisistrata.*

[10] See Rowe, *The Unruly Woman*. The female genealogy of irony and the extensive body of literature on the role of irony in Jane Austen's novels, where it is often interpreted as a marked expression of the female subject's will to assert herself, is also particularly relevant. Among the numerous references, see Brownstein, "Jane Austen."

[11] The second title of *Modesty Blaise* in Italian is *La Bellissima che uccide* (The Beautiful Woman Who Kills). Furthermore, the classification of Festa Campanile's film within the pre-Decamerotici genre is suggested by Nicoletta Marini-Maio. See Marini-Maio, "Storie vecchie, maschi nuovi."

down gender boundaries, taking on the responsibility—and the risk—of embodying masculine traits.

In 1967, Vitti also starred in Luciano Salce's *Ti ho sposato per allegria* (I Married You for Fun), a comedy adapted from Natalia Ginzburg's stage play. The lead role in Salce's film adaptation was one that Vitti had personally and passionately pursued.[12] Although the narrative centers on female emancipation, the casting of Monica Vitti as Giuliana inevitably evokes the erotic charge of her body. Fully expressing the semantic complexity of an era marked by rapid change, Vitti's body is primarily exposed through her legs. Costume designer Luca Sabatelli dresses her in a miniskirt—a symbol of the "new woman"—and, in some informal domestic scenes, in nothing more than a man's shirt. Vitti thus becomes simultaneously a body of erotic attraction and a figure of unsettling modernity. Giuliana can't cook risotto, doesn't know how to give orders to the housemaid, and forgets what time her husband comes home from work. Of course, the female authorship and lightness of touch typical of Natalia Ginzburg's writing ensure that the wife's departure from traditional identity roles is accepted without conflict within the marital relationship. "I married you for fun," Piero (Giorgio Albertazzi) tells Giuliana (Vitti), embracing the joy of a marriage outside bourgeois conventions and welcoming—with enthusiasm and even gratitude—his wife's funny self-determination as an "eccentric subject."[13]

By the end of the 1960s, Vitti had already charted a path toward a new emancipated woman through comedy, a trajectory solidified by Mario Monicelli's *La ragazza con la pistola* (The Girl with the Pistol). In Monicelli's film, the character of Assunta Patané embarks on a true journey of self-discovery from Sicily to London, freeing herself from the moral strictures of a deeply patriarchal culture and ultimately embracing the economic and emotional independence of a self-determined woman in full control of herself. In that film, too—perhaps thanks to the setting of London, which offered a perspective less bound to virilist stereotypes—the male characters are able to accept, without great distress, a woman who does not conform to patriarchal ideals. They are not compelled to constantly assert their virility through displays of heterosexual prowess or violent reactions to sexual rejection, jealousy, or provocations.[14] It is precisely through behavior that escapes patriarchal performance that women are granted the space to accelerate their liberation from the moral codes that have long imprisoned them as objects of desire, possession, and social control. Borsatti notes that,

> Assunta is a woman who liberates herself, who enacts a personal feminist revolution on her own terms. She is a young woman from the deep south of Italy, tied to all the taboos of the time: honor killings, virginity, revenge. But when she moves from one cultural system to another—when she leaves for England, for London, in search of the man who seduced her so she can kill him—she changes. The story, of course, exaggerates for narrative effect, but through contact with the England of miniskirts—a country that at the time represented the height of Western modernity—she changes her customs. [...] In the end, she transforms herself and doesn't commit a crime, but instead falls in love with another man and even takes delight in getting even with the scoundrel she had come to find, seducing him in turn and abandoning him just as she herself had been abandoned—in a rumpled bed.[15]

It may seem surprising, then, that some of Vitti's characters in later years come to accept male violence. Yet perhaps the actress's body—both desiring and desired, where the male gaze encounters a woman's growing awareness of her autonomy and her will to control her own desires—becomes a space of conflict. Within this space, the blows become a signal of a transformation in progress.

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[12] See Cardone, "Parole che volano."
[13] See De Lauretis, *Soggetti eccentrici*. For a definition of this term, see De Lauretis, *Figures of Resistance.*
[14] For an analysis on the concepts in which masculinity in the Mediterranean has been long constrained, see Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making.*
[15] Borsatti, *Monica Vitti,* 94–95.

While it is true that physical blows mark the genre of comedy—heir to the popular immediacy of the slapstick genre—it is indisputable that when women's bodies are suffering physical violence by men, the mechanisms of laughter demand scrutiny and it is perhaps worth being framed within the perspective of gender violence.[16] In the fate assigned to Vitti's female characters, we might identify a subtle clue, one that entrusts us with the task of capturing, through the lens of history, a snapshot of an Italy in the throes of metamorphic turmoil. Against this backdrop, Vitti's body—in the following years second only to Rita Levi Montalcini as the most beloved Italian woman according to a 1993 Abacus survey—draws unsettling contours, effectively embodying persistent contradictions.[17]

We must resort to the lens of interpretive fragmentation to immerse ourselves in the historical period when Italy was undergoing sweeping social upheaval, with the drive for change producing an ethical geography that was incoherent and centrifugal—difficult to navigate. This has already been noted by Mariapia Comand and Martina Zanco, who, in retracing Vitti's roles in comedy, observe that "a simple approach to these films reveals their prismatic character at first glance: they are unmistakably innovative in focusing on a woman in a traditionally misogynist genre, yet they often reflect a chauvinistic and retrograde mindset."[18] We thus might be witnessing a body acting as an attractive zone for the seismic tremors of gender relations shifting in those years, where the blows become symptomatic of an identity crisis affecting both women and men.

Although vastly different in terms of scriptwriting and direction, and in the impact they have had on the Italian Film History and visual culture, three films in which Vitti plays a wife or partner enduring physical violence—*Amore mio aiutami* (Help Me, My Love, 1969), *Dramma della gelosia: tutti i particolari in cronaca* (The Pizza Triangle, 1970), and *A mezzanotte va la ronda del piacere* (The Immortal Bachelor, 1975)—span a crucial time period, which saw the aftermath of anti-authoritarian movements: the passage and referendum on divorce law, and the reform of family law. Meanwhile, terrorist bombings began to devastate Italy, and the period known as the Years of Lead approached. Feminist groups emerged to practice consciousness-raising, issue manifestos for new female subjectivity, and fight for domestic wages, rape laws, abortion rights, and civil equality.

Only some of these demands would be codified into law, but women's voices remained a powerful echo in the society of the time with notable consequences in men's thought and behavior. As historian Sandro Bellassai observed:

> Clearly, the situation had various effects on men. Even those who responded most antagonistically were, in the end, reacting to a stimulus they had nonetheless received—something that ended up influencing their behavior, language, and attitudes. Many men certainly developed a siege mentality, fighting back by increasing the level of misogyny in male conversations, or by casting themselves as victims of an overbearing female power.[19]

On the other hand, it is still Bellassai to note:

> The neo-feminist critique of patriarchy did not at all represent a threat to be fought, but rather an opportunity to confront aspects of virile masculinity that many men—without necessarily being interested in the women's cause—had come to see as rigid, oppressive, normative: in short, a gender identity model that had exacted, and continued to exact, a steep personal toll.[20]

[16] On this topic and for the Italian context, see Giomi and Magaraggia, *Relazioni brutali*.
[17] The results of the Abacus survey were reported to Monica Vitti during the program *Sottovoce*, hosted by Gigi Marzullo, in 1993.
[18] Comand and Zanco, "Artista distratta."
[19] Bellassai, *Mascolinità contemporanea*, 118. See also Bellassai, "La Mascolinità Post-Tradizionale."
[20] Bellassai, *La mascolinità contemporanea*, 119.

This was, in fact, exactly what some of the Italian feminists were hoping for. Carla Lonzi acknowledged in 1979 that

> Feminism sinks if it does not produce a new truth, and that truth can only be of this type. Those who have started putting it into practice understand the cost involved in how it shakes the foundations of relationships. The disappearance of any mediation through abstract concepts and intellectual reference points means that confrontation—with its elements of critique and judgment—no longer revolves around detached intellectual output, but ends up involving the entire existence of those concerned, their emotional and psychological equilibrium. [...] Consciousness-raising can never be theoretical, because relationships are not theoretical: from the moment it begins, it triggers a process that upends every bond surrounding a person. We must bid farewell to the old political concept that engages individuals based on general sentiments—love for Humanity, the Proletariat, the Third World, Women, etc.—to understand that feminism initiates a new political conception based on real time and real space: everyone's relationships.[21]

In the path I will outline below, Lonzi's statement—"the cost involved in how it shakes the foundations of relationships"—is revealed in all its violence, enacted through a precarious, acrobatic stance upon the sharp edge of change. Along that edge, Vitti's body seems to operate as a site of disorientation. By reading her films through the lens of critical and media reception at the time, and interweaving them with the civil and criminal legislative milestones Italy was confronting during those years, I aim to sketch a symbolic as well as orienting map of what appears to be the wound left by the first ruins of a patriarchy in the slow process of its unravelling.

Amore mio aiutami (Help Me, My Love!): The Lesser Evil

Written by Rodolfo Sonego and Alberto Sordi (who also directed and acted in the film), *Amore mio aiutami* was released in October 1969 and marked the beginning of a cinematic partnership between Monica Vitti and Alberto Sordi, which would become one of the most representative collaborations in Vitti's comedic career.[22] As reported in headlines at the time, the couple was "worth six billion"—the combined box office earnings of the previous year's films: Sordi's *Il medico della mutua* (Be Sick… It's Free) and Vitti's *La ragazza con la pistola* (The Girl with the Pistol).[23] The latter was Sordi's fourth film as a director, and he had already lightly explored the subject of marital relationships in *Scusi, lei è favorevole o contrario?* (Pardon, Are You For or Against?) tapping into the heated public debate on divorce during the legislative process.

Here, however, the issue becomes more complex, delving into not only the institution of marriage but also the redefinition of male subjectivity and romantic relationships at the dawn of the new wave of feminism. The plot is simple: the seemingly perfect marriage of a bourgeois couple—Giovanni, a bank director, and Raffaella, a housewife—starts to unravel after the wife confesses she has fallen in love with another man, someone she met while accompanying her mother to weekly classical music concerts. Giovanni initially appears to be ready to accept this infatuation with progressive calm and emotional detachment. Yet his "hypocritical behavior of a self-proclaimed 'modern husband,'" soon collapses into more traditional reactions of possession and control, using every means—including violence—to reassert the traditional structure of

[21] Lonzi, "I collettivi si raccontano," 12–13. Lonzi's response was to an investigation by the magazine *Quotidiano Donna* (Women's Daily) on feminist collectives. For an in-depth analysis of Lonzi's thought, see Bertelli and Equi Pierazzini, *Il corpo delle pagine*.

[22] The two had, in fact, already acted together in *Il disco volante* (The Flying Saucer) by Tinto Brass, playing a couple of lovers. However, it is *Amore mio aiutami* that marks the film in which the two are true co-protagonists.

[23] Clipping from a newspaper held in the Alberto Sordi Archive. The full headline reads: "A couple worth six billion together in *Amore mio aiutami*." The source is available online: http://archivio.fondazionemuseoalbertosordi.org/fonds/229/units/1793

marriage.[24] The failure of this effort, in the film's reactionary tone, is presented as a sign of the collapse of traditional values and a broader identity crisis.

In the opening scene, the couple discusses the importance of sincerity in marriage. Giovanni claims, "If there were more honesty between husbands and wives, how many tragedies could be avoided," while reading news of a woman murdered by her husband out of jealousy. A few hours later, Raffaella asks, "But Giovanni, do you really think that if she had been honest, the husband would've understood?" As they drive to the seaside Villa Raffaella in her honor, Giovanni replies, "I don't know how that man would've reacted, but I know exactly what I would've done. It's simple: 'Dear Raffaella, you've got a crush on this young man? Fine. Meet him, get to know him better. If it's just a fling, fine, it'll pass. If you're truly in love, then go with him and let's stay friends.'"

This apparent open-mindedness, however, is merely theoretical and far removed from their actual daily life. The news of what would today be labelled *femminicidio* (femicide) is read aloud from *Il Messaggero* while Raffaella, fitting the most classic bourgeois stereotype, brings Giovanni breakfast in bed, struggling due to a temporary paralysis in her left arm. We later discover this paralysis is psychosomatic—a "hysterical neurosis," as her husband defines it, using a psychoanalytic terminology directed to women's neurosis—stemming from an infatuation she neither lives out nor dares to voice. The paralysis vanishes the moment she confesses her feelings. From there, Giovanni attempts to manage his disappointment with rationality and emotional restraint. When a friend comments on his indifference ("You speak with such detachment, even though you love her so much") Giovanni responds, "Of course I love her, but there's no point in talking about gender equality if we end up acting like petty bourgeois."

This brief line encapsulates the transformational landscape of those years. Two key constitutional court rulings from 1968 offer both concrete and symbolic evidence. Called to judge the constitutionality of Articles 559 of the penal code, which concerned honor killings, the court ruled it unconstitutional under Articles 3 and 29 of the constitution. The ruling actually refers to two articles of the penal code then in force, Articles 559 and 560. The first regulated the crime of adultery, which was considered such only when committed by a woman; the second, instead, addressed male concubinage, effectively establishing that the punishability of an extramarital relationship was defined differently for men and women: for the former, it was punishable only in the case of a continuous relationship parallel to the marriage, whereas for the latter, the crime was established even with a single act of adultery. In ruling number 126, the court declared: "In light of today's social reality, discrimination is not only unhelpful but gravely detrimental to family harmony and unity. By not recognizing the adultery of the husband and punishing that of the wife, the law puts the latter in a state of inferiority, harming her dignity and providing no legal protection."[25]

This ruling overturned a 1961 decision—only seven years earlier—which had deemed the same article acceptable, stating: "The wife granting sexual favors to another man is seen, according to prevailing opinion, as a graver offense than the husband's occasional infidelity. It is a matter of common social experience that lawmakers felt could not be ignored."[26]

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[24] Cottino-Jones, *Women, Desire, and Power*; Francesca Cantore suggests that Alberto Sordi, particularly in the roles he plays in his own films, chooses to tread misogynistic and anti-feminist paths—perhaps as a reaction to the roles often assigned to him in comedy, where he is sometimes subjected to processes of feminization: "It is interesting to note—though it is merely a suggestion that warrants further investigation—that when Sordi took on directing his own films, starting in the mid-1960s, with *Fumo di Londra* (Smoke over London), his characters began to evolve toward a reassertion of a traditional, patriarchal model of masculinity, bordering on misogyny. Consider, for example, two films such as *Amore mio aiutami* or, even more explicitly, *Io e Caterina* (Catherine and I), in which the woman is ultimately annihilated and reduced to a robotic maid, stripped of all human identity." Cantore, "Figlio, marito," 315.

[25] Ruling no. 126 is available on the website of the Italian Constitutional Court: https://www.cortecostituzionale.it/actionSchedaPronuncia.do?param_ecli=ECLI:IT:COST:1968:126

[26] This is ruling no. 64 of 1961, which is fully available on the website of the Italian Constitutional Court: https://www.cortecostituzionale.it/actionSchedaPronuncia.do?anno=1961&numero=64

Clearly, those seven years had marked a true revolution in Italy—albeit perhaps too short a time for it to be fully digested. In the years leading up to the 1970 divorce law, Italians flocked to cinemas to make sense of the rubble left by collapsing gender roles.[27] But the pieces no longer fit together.

In *Amore mio aiutami*, Giovanni continues his seemingly progressive stance as Raffaella, who does not physically consummate the relationship, openly expresses her desire. She even consults Giovanni on what to wear for her Wednesday classical music outings with Valerio (Silvano Tranquilli), the other man she was attracted to. Valerio Her immature selfishness—emphasized by a whiny tone and an exaggerated, childlike performance—creates a paradoxical situation that allows reactionary audiences to sympathize with Giovanni's suffering.

In the notorious beach scene, set in the dunes of Sabaudia, Giovanni violently beats Raffaella, chasing her through the sand and shrubs, demanding she retract her feelings under physical assault. Lasting a full minute and a half, the scene is almost unbearable for today's viewers—and even contemporary critics noted its brutality. Leo Pestelli wrote in *La Stampa*, "Giovanni, who claimed to be so progressive, unleashes himself: he beats his wife like nothing ever seen before on screen."[28] Dark musical tones, Sordi's realistic acting and close-ups of Vitti's bloodied face suspend any comic framework. Vitti's acting, which still hints at farce in what Chiara Tognolotti defined a "a gestural and vocal performance entirely played in the register of excess," only makes the scene more unsettling, highlighting the tension between intended comedy and visual violence.[29]

Yet film critic Vittorio Ricciuti of *Il Mattino* wrote the day after the film's release in theatres: "*Amore mio aiutami* is a detailed, if slightly verbose, portrayal of this [marriage crisis]. There's no lack of comedic moments, like the scene—one of the film's best—where Alberto Sordi, fed up with his wife's hysteria and pathetic convulsions, remembers he's a man and gives her a beating, satisfied to see her rolling on the ground, her nose bleeding, her clothes torn, her ankle twisted."[30]

A starkly different opinion came from another review, which found the film steeped in misogyny already long attributed to Sordi:

> It may be Sordi's most autobiographical film—not for its plot, which likely bears no resemblance to his personal life as Italian cinema's golden bachelor—but for the acute misogyny it exudes. Throughout the film, the audience smiles or openly laughs at certain lines. Sordi is, above all, an excellent comic actor, though irreparably bound to his unchanging traits. But as the story ends bitterly, the viewer starts to suspect that behind the humor lies a ferociously anti-feminist attitude.[31]

The film unfolds through a series of grotesque situations and concludes with Giovanni deciding to let his wife go. In the final scene, the two meet in a hotel room. Raffaella lies in bed, undressed as if after a night of lovemaking. Valerio, her new partner, is in the shower. The setting is outlandish and humiliating for what is now her ex-husband, and the tone veers toward drama. After calmly discussing the logistics of their separation, Raffaella returns the house keys to Giovanni in a symbolic gesture that brings both to tears. "Giovanni, do you want me to come back with you?" she asks. He shakes his head and leaves.

Once again, it is Vitti who maintains a tone with comedic overtones, using exaggerated gestures and melodramatic surrealistic parody. Sordi, instead, opts for a more restrained, realistic

[27] For an overview of the legislative process leading to the divorce law in relation to Italian cinema, see Comand, *Commedia all'italiana*, particularly the chapter dedicated to Pietro Germi's film *Divorzio all'italiana*. On this latter film, see also Palmieri, "Il cinema precorre la storia."
[28] Pestelli, "Sordi geloso," 8.
[29] Tognolotti, "In un momento di distrazione," 116.
[30] Ricciuti, "*Amore mio aiutami*."
[31] *Il Gazzettino*, "Antifemminismo."

performance that encourages viewers to sympathize with his character's pain. The difference in realistic tone between the two actors' performances is noted by the press:

> Monica Vitti's role is certainly an ungrateful one, but what the popular actress makes of the character of Raffaella clearly, and excessively, betrays the director's naturally misogynistic intentions and the taste for caricature that we appreciated in *La ragazza con la pistola*. Raffaella is a puppet who constantly imitates herself, who speaks, laughs, and cries always one tone too high—she is the fake wife of a real husband.[32]

The final shots are reserved for Giovanni: the camera follows him from behind as he walks down the hotel corridor, then cuts to a front-facing shot as he crosses the courtyard, his face expressing bitter resignation. He stares into the camera until the frame fades out of focus.

In an article in *La Stampa* published just before the film's release, Sordi's hyperbolic and provocative words cast a dark shadow over the cracks in an Italy overrun with violence and murders of women: "The reality is, when a woman turns her back on her husband because she's seduced by another, there's nothing to do but let her go. Or kill her. The question is: which of the two evils is the lesser?"[33]

Dramma della gelosia (The Pizza Triangle): *"Fun to die for"*[34]

While *Amore mio aiutami* was presented in October 1969 aboard a transatlantic liner—the same one featured in parts of the film, in a promotional operation with a glamorous and commercial frame—the next film Monica Vitti starred in, *Dramma della gelosia: Tutti i particolari in cronaca* (Jealousy, Italian Style), had a very different cultural placement. Originally titled *Per ragioni di gelosia* (The Motive Was Jealousy), the film premiered at the Cannes Film Festival in May 1970. This was still a time of full-fledged militant fervor against authoritarianism. Ettore Scola's work was the only Italian film in competition alongside *Indagine su un cittadino al di sopra di ogni sospetto* (Investigation of a Citizen Above Suspicion) by Elio Petri, which went on to win the official Grand Jury Prize. Yet Marcello Mastroianni won Best Actor, followed the next year by a Golden Globe and a Grolla d'Oro for Monica Vitti.

The filming of *Jealousy, Italian Style* took place in December 1969, in Rome, during the same days that a bomb exploded in a central Milan bank, killing thirteen people (seventeen in the days that followed) and injuring ninety. The Piazza Fontana bombing—"The horrendous massacre," as *Il Corriere della Sera* headlined—inaugurated the so-called strategy of tension, filled with murders and carnage.[35] Italy, wounded and disoriented, was taking its first steps toward social justice and emancipation. While the Cannes Festival was underway, legislators passed the Workers' Statue Public Law No. 300 (1970) on May 20. On December 1 of the same year, the divorce law (known also as Fortuna-Baslini Law) was introduced.[36]

Meanwhile, newspapers continued reporting crime cases labeled with the literary-sounding phrase "drama of jealousy." In extreme cases, men blinded by jealousy and suffering from a loss of self-control killed their female partners with pistols, knives, hammers, and even their bare hands.[37] In extreme cases, men blinded by jealousy and suffering from a loss of self control killed

[32] Ripa, "Bene Sordi."
[33] *La Stampa*, "La Vitti senza Antonioni."
[34] Del Buono, "La fatale amante," 105.
[35] *Corriere della Sera*, "Orrenda strage a Milano," 1.
[36] For more on the long road to the divorce law in Italy, see Lussana, *L'Italia del divorzio.*
[37] In the context of relationships grounded in the idea of possession within a still patriarchal society, news reports also mention a few homicides committed by women—yet often themselves victims of domestic violence and abuse. A study capable of reconstructing in greater detail the numbers and characteristics of homicides between partners in postwar Italy before the explosion of neofeminism has yet to be carried out.

their female partners with pistols, knives, hammers, and even their bare hands. Melodrama reemerged not in luxurious salons but in everyday popular crime, in the crumbling buildings of the suburbs and poor historic centers far from the promise of modernity.

Scola, along with Agenore Incrocci and Furio Scarpelli (Age & Scarpelli), created a film that felt like an elegy for change—a change not without wounds. As the director recalled, the characters' faces were already imagined during writing, including Monica Vitti's:

> She had already done *The Girl with the Pistol* by Monicelli [...], she had proven she could be very funny. So, when I needed a witty, uneducated Roman flower seller with a patchwork of knowledge drawn from photo-novels and old melodramas, Monica seemed ideal. And I didn't just need a comedienne—I considered Bice Valori too—but a woman with a strong physical presence, a beautiful, sensual woman because she had to be desired by two men. She needed to be able to make people laugh, but also carry a fate that was both tragic and comic.[38]

The hybrid space between drama and comedy initially explored in the Sordi/Sonego collaboration is here further elaborated by Ettore Scola and the screenwriting duo Age & Scarpelli into a more sophisticated narrative framework. The film constitutes a refined and crucial step in the ethnographic investigation of gender relations undertaken by *commedie all'italiana* during this period—an inquiry often structured around romantic triangles and set against the backdrop of Italy's rapidly transforming economic, political, and cultural landscape. This thematic exploration would be further developed by Scola and the same writers in *C'eravamo tanto amati* (We All Loved Each Other So Much), while Age & Scarpelli had previously addressed analogous concerns in Dino Risi's *Straziami ma di baci saziami* (Torture Me But Kill Me with Kisses) and would return to them with greater political emphasis in Mario Monicelli's *Romanzo popolare* (Come Home and Meet My Wife).

As often in these comedies, the plot is simple: Adelaide Ciafrocchi, a flower seller, meets the communist bricklayer Oreste Nardi (Marcello Mastroianni) one late night after a *Festa dell'Unità* event and falls in love at first sight, according to melodramatic conventions. They embark on a passionate relationship featuring seaside picnics—yet on a beach that looks more like a dump—and pizza dinners. Oreste, however, is married and lives in a cold, rundown apartment with an older wife, who upon discovering the affair physically attacks Adelaide in a public outburst. This is the first of several hospitalizations for Adelaide: in a classic comic trope, the ambulance rushes to the emergency room—employing a sped-up images reminiscent of slapstick—and an orderly wheels her through the hospital corridor on a stretcher. This brief scene, repeated three times with slight variation, becomes a rhythmic marker of the escalating violence inflicted onto Adelaide.

The woman also falls in love with Nello Serafini (Giancarlo Giannini), a young, radical-left pizza maker who becomes Oreste's friend during a labor protest. Though politically divided, the two men form a strong bond. When Oreste discovers the affair, feeling doubly betrayed by his partner and his friend, he publicly humiliates Adelaide in a pizzeria, in a scene that parodically echoes the infamous lyric opera *La Traviata*: Just as Alfredo shames Violetta at a party in the Act 2—"or testimon vi chiamo che qui pagata io l'ho" ("Now I call you to witness that here I paid her")—Oreste denounces Adelaide—"non sono venuto qui per magnare, ma per fare sapere a tutti che questa infame mi tradisce con quel boia traditore che fa le pizze"("I didn't come here to eat, but to let everyone know that this wretch is cheating on me with that scoundrel pizza-maker!")—though in Scola's version the declaration ends in a brawl, and Adelaide lands in the hospital once again, beaten by Oreste.

She ends up in the hospital a third time after a suicide attempt, overwhelmed by indecision over which man she truly loves. In the end, Adelaide chooses Nello, marrying him after he attempts suicide himself—a gesture she interprets as proof of his love. Oreste, consumed by heartbreak, descends into poverty and despair, jobless and homeless, sleeping among market stalls in a classic

[38] Borsatti, *Monica Vitti*, 112.

"madness from love" narrative tradition. There he encounters the newlyweds and, in a clumsy, neorealist-style duel and dressed in rags that juxtapose Nello's wedding suit, stabs Adelaide by mistake, thinking he's attacking Nello. Adelaide dies in white, pressing her bleeding abdomen, held by both men, in an ending scene once again steeped in melodramatic codes.

Despite its simple plot, the film boasts a complex narrative and direction, with a constant breaking of the fourth wall (further developed by Scola in *C'eravamo tanto amati*), a refined use of language drawing heavily from popular lexicons, and a tragic tone softened by surreal elements that keeps the film from tipping too far into melodrama. This difficult alchemy is made successful by the performances of Mastroianni, Giannini, and above all Vitti, who, according to critic Oreste Del Buono in *L'Europeo*, "is emerging as the true woman of our cinema after the retirement of Anna Magnani."[39]

We hear Vitti's voice before seeing her body in an unusual diva entrance that emphasizes sound over sight. Her hoarse voice—"like a drunken sailor in a port tavern," as she defined it—unmistakably marks a subjectivity outside the norm.[40] In the film's opening sequence, preceding a long flashback, the voice of the deceased Adelaide introduces the characters as they reenact the crime during an inquest: "This is Nello, this is Oreste, and that guy with the mustache is me, Adelaide. So many tears, so much happiness. Have you ever loved? Have you ever suffered from love?" she asks us directly. And then screams in desperation: "No? Then what are you looking at?!"

Adelaide, lacking education but full of passion, embodies the spirit of romantic titanism rooted in the love-death dialectic. In a conversation with her sister, a prostitute with firm Catholic values and a crucifix around her neck who reminds her of the sanctity of marriage and its risks when disturbed, Adelaide, driving her car, exclaims: "So what? Then it'll have been a big flame with a banner underneath that says: 'Now that's living!'"

In a later sequence, during a secret night of lovemaking with Nello, her thoughtful face is lit by a flash of lightning, reflected in the window like a ghost—perhaps a foreshadowing of her tragic fate: love and death. "What kind of illness do I have?" she asks a psychiatrist at the hospital where she goes, unable to choose. "Was it trauma, shock, a neurovegetative disorder—or am I just a slut?" The doctor's indifferent tone drops us right into the era's shifting gender dynamics: "Forget the scientific terms. Your condition boils down to this—you think you're a unique and desperate case. But loving two men? These days that's below average." The psychiatrist's remarks reveal a rare acceptance, for the time, of the female body as a desiring subject.

The narrative construction ultimately leads Adelaide to death, Nello to the loss of a wife and a friend, Oreste to the definitive madness for love, delving into the knot of death and love which seems to act not only as traces of a typical tradition of Italian melodrama, but also as a sign for a cultural and social mutation where the sexual liberty pays a cost in terms of macabre visions. Even in the frame of parody and comic language, *Dramma della gelosia* seems to be resonant with a wider tendency of those years. As Giacomo Manzoli notes:

> By the mid-1970s, the connection between Eros and Thanatos—which had found some of its most extreme expressions in Italian cinema—already seemed to be drawing to a close. It is quite evident that auteur cinema, when addressing sexuality, often carries with it an air of death; this emerges from countless films, most notably those by Ferreri and Fellini himself, from *8½* to *Amarcord*, including *Satyricon*. In short, with the sexual revolution, it seems there is also a funeral to be held.

In matters concerning women's sexual autonomy, the resistance to societal acceptance emerges with even greater intensity. Oreste del Buono, in an enthusiastic review published in the aftermath of the film's screening at the Cannes Film Festival, interprets the character of Adelaide as an embodiment of the femme fatale—a manipulative and overbearing figure, whose seductive power

[39] Del Buono, "La fatale amante," 105.
[40] Vitti, *Sette sottane*, 37. On the concept of a star entrance, see Vitella, "Domanda divistica."

leads men to their downfall. Del Buono's interpretation is far removed from the filmmakers' construction of the character. Adelaide is, in fact, not only devoid of a calculating and manipulative mind, but entirely immersed in the idea of a passionate love, devoted to excess. In his misogyny-driven reading, Adelaide's eventual death—"more than justified"—is not only narratively coherent, but deemed:

> The femme fatale possesses an ancient wisdom about how to handle men. She knows men can't resist the specter of death. For her, death—whether suicide or attempted murder (always upon herself)—is a familiar tool, like an iron or a hairdryer. Familiar, yet treacherous: sometimes, just like a short-circuiting appliance, death actually works. In that case, the femme fatale is screwed. Because the femme fatale is fatal, above all, to herself. But she's not to be pitied. After all, she had her fun—fun to die for.[41]

A mezzanotte va la ronda del piacere (The Immortal Bachelor): *A Head "Full of Thoughts"*

Five years later, Vitti returned to the role of a woman caught in tragic events stemming from passionate love. Directed by Marcello Fondato—with whom Vitti had already worked in one of her most famous films, *Ninì Tirabusciò: la donna che inventò la mossa* (Ninì Tirabusciò: The Woman Who Invented "The Move")—*A mezzanotte va la ronda del piacere* takes its title from a text of 1920s song, yet nodding to the erotic comedies of the time.[42] And yet it attempts, perhaps clumsily, to capture some of the feminist demands circulating at that time in Italian society.

The story unfolds in a courtroom, where Tina Candela (Vitti) is accused of murdering her husband, Gino Bonacciò (Giancarlo Giannini), following yet another argument triggered by a jealous outburst. During the trial, Tina recounts their love story, once again marked by the entanglement of passion and violence. The dynamic of their relationship—based on her verbal provocations and his violent reactions—is evident from the beginning. "It started badly," Tina remarks during her courtroom narration. "Because the more I like a man, the more I tease him." During a costume party at a suburban club, Tina mocks Gino, rejecting his invitation to dance in a way that's deliberately childish and irritating. Her behavior stops only when he slaps her. As the slap lands, the previously diegetic music cuts off, and a close-up of Vitti's heaving face, with erotic undertones, shifts the scene into a meta-narrative space. Tina, still within the flashback, turns to the camera and addresses the judge (and the viewers): "You see, Your Honor, his hand on my face was like magic, and I fell madly in love with him."

However, when Gino demands that she marry him, Tina refuses, provoking another violent reaction as he slaps her until she agrees. "I really didn't want to," she says through tears—and we see now her back in the courtroom—"but he was so hard-headed. In the end, I realized that if I didn't say yes," she continues, touching her cheek as if it still hurt, "I'd be the one who ended up worse off."

As the story continues, Tina and Gino's life is shaped by poverty, his infidelity (and also hers, as a self-determination reaction), his joblessness and laziness, her jealous rages, mutual beatings, and frequent sexual encounters. "That was our life. What could I do with a husband like that? Drink bleach to kill myself? Throw acid in his face? Tear my hair out from jealousy? But I didn't have time to waste. I worked hard—for myself and for him, poor guy, who got kicked out of every job. So, I just went along with life his way. His way."

Among the mostly male jurors, one woman stands out: Gabriella Sansone (Claudia Cardinale), who forms a silent bond with the defendant, bound by invisible but strong female solidarity and admiration for Tina's ability to live love as a space of subjectivity. Gabriella is married

[41] Del Buono, "La fatale amante," 105.

[42] "Il tango delle capinere" (Tango of the Finches) was a song composed by Cesare Andrea Bixio in 1928 and made popular by the singer Gabrè.

to Andrea, an engineer and businessman (Vittorio Gassman) burdened by creditors and tax collectors. He provides a comfortable but emotionally void life, complete with sporadic slaps to reassert dominance. Tina's story becomes a path to liberation for Gabriella, who finds in Tina's words a space for her own desires. This act of listening to female experience resembles the consciousness-raising groups that had become widespread throughout Italy.[43]

Empathizing with Tina's account, Gabriella finds the strength to stand up to her husband, ultimately demanding that he testify in court—having realized his affair with Tina and his presence during the altercation with Gino—as a witness for the defense. In an unexpected twist, however, Gino Bonacciò appears in court, alive and well, leading to Tina's immediate acquittal. Disappointed by her husband's cowardice—he fails to appear at court—and after engaging in an extramarital affair with his colleague Fulvio (Renato Pozzetto), Gabriella shows she has found her path to self-determination, so much so that she imagines killing her husband with a shovel—a fantasy the film leaves ambiguously open to realization.

In the final scene, Gino and Tina attempt to mend their deeply damaged relationship. His slaps alternate with kisses in a ritual of violence and passion. "Who told you I love you?" he yells while hitting her. "Every time you slap me, you're telling me," she replies, smiling, hair disheveled and cheeks flushed. They eventually collapse onto the sand. "I don't understand anything anymore," Gino says. "I don't recognize myself. Tell me, Tina, why did I come back?" he asks, and she recoils at his caress, mistaking it for another slap. The woman's final words, turning away from the man and staring directly into the camera, are a declaration that borders on a manifesto: "I've never really thought about it before. But watch out, Gino, because now my head is full of thoughts."

We are invited to read this as Tina's newly gained awareness, the culmination of a long act of self-narration in the space of justice. By reliving her story, Tina perhaps sees through the structures of male domination. And Gino, too, appears disoriented, his masculine identity shaken by love. His "I don't recognize myself anymore" signals a masculinity disrupted by the feminist earthquake—where a woman's liberation may also open a path for men to break free from the traps of their own roles.[44]

As the final shot shows a sunset over rough seas, Tina's words hint at a new beginning for a relationship now grounded in her emancipation. Vitti, interviewed by *Annabella* magazine, summarized her character this way:

> My name is Tina. I'm a poor wife. I make mistakes because I accept slaps, humiliation, and insults from my husband. I make mistakes because I'm poor and ignorant; my only wealth is love. Because of that love, I accept his violence. For poor people, love is everything. That's why they have so many children, they're passionate, they even kill when love disappears or turns to betrayal. I'm a poor, ignorant, passionate woman who, through the trial, realizes that she had love, but not respect, not esteem. That's when she changes and rebels. At the end, when it turns out the husband isn't dead, Tina says: "I never used to think. But watch out, because now my head is full of thoughts." That's clearly a feminist statement.[45]

The press, even during production, described the film as a "feminist film."[46] A journalist asked the director, "What's the core of the feminist issue for you?" to which Fondato replied: "True feminism means helping women free themselves from subjugation to men. It's a problem of their

[43] On this topic, among others, see Lussana, *Il movimento femminista*.
[44] See Saponari and Zecca, *Oltre l'inetto*; Bellassai, *L'invenzione della virilità*; Rigoletto, *Masculinity and Italian Cinema*.
[45] Ferri, "Che noia," 52–53.
[46] See Galimberti, "Gassman – Cardinale – Vitti – Giannini."

mental and moral freedom. If the woman's condition changes, men's behavior and attitudes will change, too. Even the most enlightened men today still treat women as inferiors."[47]

Natalia Aspesi disagreed: "A film like *A mezzanotte va la ronda del piacere* proves how, despite the best intentions, it is very, very difficult to understand and describe what director Marcello Fondato calls 'the new woman searching for her identity.'"[48] Aspesi critiques the film for falling back on salvific romanticism from which women were struggling to escape. She also points out how the character's lack of children is unrealistic, especially for women of the working class. She concludes: "For cinema, it's clear, the female world remains annoying, unchanged, and secret. Better, then, the filmmakers who don't even try anymore and make films about male friendships, courage, solidarity—with a few token female figures thrown in: the charming prostitute, the patient wife, the cunning adulteress…"[49]

For many Italian women in 1975—still fighting daily against a deeply patriarchal mindset—Tina/Vitti's final line or Gabriella/Cardinale's defiant gaze facing her husband were not enough. A more radical break was expected. Aspesi cited different endings, like the one Monicelli (with Age & Scarpelli) gave to Vincenzina Rotunno in *Romanzo Popolare* (Come Home and Meet My Wife), where the young woman (played by Ornella Muti) leaves both husband and lover, choosing to raise her child alone and write a new story of selfhood.

Patrizia Carrano, writing in *Noi Donne* (Us Women)—the magazine affiliated with the women's organization UDI (Unione Donne Italiane, Italian Women's Union)—went further, identifying the film's violence as its central issue:

> Throughout the film, which is rather dull, the only moment that gets the audience laughing out loud is when the women are beaten. That says little for either the authors or the audience. The laughter can only come from this logic: He's a pain, he knows he shouldn't hit women, but eventually, he can't take it anymore and gets his rightful revenge; the poor, mistreated man finally stands up to the castrating virago. Add to this a healthy dose of female masochism: "Every slap is an act of love," as Vitti says.[50]

A mezzanotte va la ronda del piacere was released on February 19, 1975. As an article in *Effe* magazine reminds us, 1975 was the International Year of Women: "The fact that the UN proclaimed 1975 the International Year of Women shows how widespread and resonant feminist movements had become globally. It refutes those who say feminism only concerns a privileged minority of women."[51] A few months later, on September 20, 1975, after a nine-year legislative journey, Italy's Family Law reform came into effect. It had been approved on April 22 by the Justice Committee of the Chamber of Deputies—with support from all parties except the Italian Social Movement and abstention from the Liberals.

The reform's cornerstone, Article 143, reads: "Marriage grants the husband and wife the same rights and responsibilities. It entails a mutual obligation to fidelity, moral and material assistance, cooperation in the family's interest, and cohabitation. Both spouses must contribute to the family's needs according to their means and professional or domestic capacity."

La Stampa reported it as "Absolute Equality Between Spouses. After the long, difficult labor, the resulting law is among the most advanced and represents a true civil achievement."[52] But in February of 1975, *Il Corriere della Sera* had reported the opinion of Christian Democrat Giancarlo

[47] *Il Messaggero*, "La Vitti e la Jackson." This press article refers to the pre-production phase, during which Glenda Jackson—actress and prominent figure in the Women's Movement—was initially expected to star in the film. The role was eventually assigned to Claudia Cardinale, who, at the time, was a close friend of Monica Vitti.
[48] Aspesi, "Sempre infelice e scontenta."
[49] Aspesi, "Sempre infelice e scontenta."
[50] Carrano, "Lo schiaffo," 53.
[51] Colombo, "L'anno della donna."
[52] Franci, "Storica riforma."

De Carolis: "The reform will need to resonate with the mindset of the Italian family, which lawmakers can only minimally influence."[53]

In *Effe* magazine, before the law passed, Maria Adele Teodori, while supporting the law's framework, wrote: "For feminists, the problem lies further upstream. Does a law that clarifies a woman's position within the family, remove the notion of the 'weaker spouse,' protect all children, and establish strict financial guidelines truly renew society? Or is it the family itself that must be questioned, as the root of a sick society?"[54]

Almost twenty years later, in the first of her two autobiographical books structured as a fictional interview, Vitti responded to her own question about why she never got married: "I don't know exactly. Maybe out of fear. The idea of a family unit scares me—like a crime novel that keeps you up at night."[55]

Conclusions

In the brief path I have attempted to trace here, Monica Vitti's body emerges as a site of conflict: it not only oscillates between drama and farce, between melodramatic echoes and a heterogeneous range of comic registers, but also functions as a porous zone where emancipatory impulses coexist with chaotic reactions to a shifting gender dynamic that, within just a few years, was profoundly disrupting the contours of Italy's value system. Particularly in the realm of passionate relationships—and, in some cases, those governed by the institution of marriage—the characters portrayed by Vitti act as unruly manifestations of an autonomous and desiring female subject. Confronted with such a subject and aided by her erotic power, men lose their bearings and sense of security. In this seismic upheaval, the blows become the trace of a loss. That loss is the collapse of a relationship between men and women long based on the subordination of the latter—a loss that proves difficult to accept.

As the Christian Democrat Senator Giancarlo De Carolis put it after the Senate's approval of the family law reform: "[We must] find a resonance within the mindset of the Italian family, which the legislator can only marginally influence."[56] Vitti's body became a powerful image of this mindset in the making, a true language of autonomy—conquered not without scars, even if through laughter, which she herself described as "a space of freedom."[57] In the appearance of a body that acts as the uncanny—in Freud's terminology—or more precisely as "unexpected subject" of history, to borrow instead from the framework of Italian feminist theory and Carla Lonzi's famous definition, the male gesture often falters, collapsing into disoriented and violent reactions.[58]

To retrace the contours of this violence is to reconstruct a fragment of the difficult mosaic that the long end of patriarchy compels us to decipher. In its complex identity—where the boundaries between performance and life are constantly being recoded—Vitti and her characters help us begin again, starting from a woman's body that demands to be seen and heard in its full reality. Italian neo-feminism, especially through the thought and practice of Carla Lonzi, has shown us the importance of staying within the authenticity of relationships—which ultimately means being capable of recognizing bodies in their reality and their truths. Thus, Lonzi wrote in her long dialogue with her partner Pietro Consagra at the end of their relationship:

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[53] *Il Corriere della Sera*, "Riforma del diritto di famiglia."
[54] Testori, "Il diritto di Famiglia."
[55] Vitti, *Sette sottane*, 138.
[56] The Family Law Reform is Law No. 151 from 1975. De Carolis' words quoted here are taken from his speech during the final debate before the law's approval.
[57] Vitti, *Sette sottane*, 146.
[58] Lonzi, *Sputiamo su Hegel*, 60. For an analysis of Monica Vitti as an unexpected body, see Cardone, "Il soggetto imprevisto."

> What makes me despair, what is it? It's the fact that this work I do—I speak for myself, but of course there's all of feminism, there's a whole feminine need behind it—in the end it's based on human relationships, on mutual knowledge, on the very demolition of the cultural myth of the protagonist. It's based on showing that things always unfold through dialogue, that truths always lie within a relationship.[59]

In the final scene of *Dramma della gelosia*, Oreste/Mastroianni—having been found partially insane and sentenced to five years in prison and two in a criminal psychiatric hospital—walks along a desolate sidewalk at the exit of a crowded underpass, speaking in his ungrammatical and vernacular language to Adelaide, now only a figment of his imagination: "Se non t'ammazzavo, adesso non staressimo così felici e soli" (If I hadn't killed you, we wouldn't be so happy and alone now).

In the final shots, the two run joyfully along the beach in Ostia, among trash and views of suburban apartment blocks, oblivious to the grayness of the sky and the world—in an eternal love yet one devoid of life.

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[59] Lonzi, *Vai pure*, 45.

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