

**GENRE, GENDER, *GIALLO*:  
*THE DISTURBED DREAMS OF DARIO ARGENTO***

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Dr Colette Balmain  
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## ABSTRACT

This thesis presents an examination of the *giallo* films of Dario Argento from his directorial debut *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* (1970) to *The Stendhal Syndrome* (1996). In opposition to the dominant psychoanalytical approaches to the horror film generally and Argento's *giallo* specifically, this thesis argues that the *giallo*, both textually and meta-textually, actively resists oedipalisation. Taking up from Deleuze's contention in *Cinema 1: The Movement Image* that the cinematic-image can be considered the equivalent to a philosophical concept, I suggest that Argento's *giallo* are examples of what Deleuze calls cinema of the "time-image": provoked and extended "philosophical" acts of imagining the world which opens up a theoretical space of thinking differently about questions of gender and genre in horror film, which takes us beyond the fixed images of thought offered by traditional psychoanalytical and feminist paradigms of horror.

In the opening chapters of this thesis, I argue that the cinematic-image has to be thought "historically", and that it is only by understanding the emergence of the "*giallo*" in the 1960s within the wider picture of Italian national cinema, that we can understand Argento's films as specific cultural expressions of thought, which are not reducible to paradigms based upon analyses of the more puritan and fixed American horror film (via Mulvey et al). In my subsequent discussion of Argento's "Diva" trilogy, I consider an assemblage of Deleuzian becoming and poststructuralist feminist thought (Kristeva / Cixous / Irigaray) as a mechanism through which to explore the increasingly feminised and feminist spaces of his later work. This thesis concludes by assessing Argento's critical and creative legacy in films such as Toshiharu Ikeda's *Evil Dead Trap* (1988) and Cindy Sherman's *Office Killer* (1997).

In these terms, a Deleuzian "approach", enables a set of readings, which open up the texts to a more productive consideration of their appeal, in a way which other more traditional approaches do not, and cannot, account for. The close textual and historical analysis demanded by Deleuze is both a reconsideration of the [feminist] politics of Argento's work, and a response to criticisms of misogyny.

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Any filmmaker working in this [horror] genre will acknowledge an influence from Dario Argento. (Lustig, Williams, 1997<sup>1</sup>)

If the killer has over time been variously figured as shark, fog, gorilla, birds and slime, the victim is eternally and prototypically the damsel. Cinema hardly invented that pattern. It has simply given visual expression to the abiding proposition that, in Poe's famous formulation, the death of a beautiful woman is the "most poetical topic in the world". As horror director Dario Argento puts it, "I like women, especially beautiful ones. If they have a good face and figure, I would much prefer to watch them being murdered than an ugly girl or man." (Clover, 1992: 42)

The fact that the name Argento 'has almost become a brand' to his legion of fans suggests that he is a director of some importance and stature. His critical reception, as a director of horror films, has been considerably less enthusiastic. Repeatedly accused of misogyny and exploitation, Argento has struggled to achieve the same sort of success critically as commercially. Working at the edge of the acceptable, Argento's films are noted/notorious for their violent imagery in which there seem to be no limits to the innovative and bloody "set-pieces" of murder and mutilation. A notoriety no doubt helped by the banning of his 1982 film *Tenebrae* as a direct consequence of the "video nasty debates"<sup>2</sup> of the early 1980s.

Without doubt, irrespective of critical responses to his work, Argento is one of the finest technicians of cinema, pushing at the boundaries of both the technologically

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in *Dario Argento: An Eye for Horror* (1997). Dir. Leon Ferguson. Video. MIA Video Entertainment: UK.

<sup>2</sup> The 1984 *The Video Recordings Act* meant that videos had to be classified for home viewing. This was partly a response to films such as *I Spit on Your Grave* (Meir Zarchi, 1978: USA) and *Driller Killer* (Abel Ferrara, 1979: USA). The most notorious example is of course *Child's Play 3* (Jack Bender, 1991: USA). Released uncut in Japan, *Tenebrae* was banned due to its graphic violence and only recently released in this country onto video. A full list of all the films banned, and their present status, is available at *The Melon Farmers... Watching the Censors Watch What We Watch. Banned: The Video Nasties List*. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.melonfarmers.co.uk/nasties.htm>

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and the visually possible. It is not surprising therefore that well-known American directors such as John Carpenter, Francis Ford Coppola, Brian de Palma and George A. Romero<sup>3</sup>, noted for their cinematic technique, can also be counted as “fans” of Argento’s films. His understanding of cinema as a technology of vision, and not just a visual means of telling stories, is one of the defining features of his work: in the uncut version of his 1996 rape-revenge film *The Stendhal Syndrome*, there is a shocking shot of Alfredo (the male antagonist) peering at Anna (the female



**Figure 1:** Woman as “beautiful” corpse in *Suspiria*

protagonist) through a hole in a recently murdered woman’s face. Is “this technology of vision”, or the imposition of the inhuman within the human, merely an example of Argento’s misogyny<sup>4</sup>, as some critics maintain? Or does it signify something in excess of traditional systems of meaning and therefore our

understandings of the function of gender in horror film? If so, what alternative conceptual frameworks can we use to understand the links between gender, bodies

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<sup>3</sup> Dario Argento and George Romero have collaborated twice: the first time on *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), and more recently on *Two Evil Eyes* (1990)

<sup>4</sup> The accusations of misogyny in the work of Argento stress his victimisation of his female characters and utilise a Mulveyian paradigm of the sadistic controlling [male] gaze. The most recent example of this approach can be found in Reynold Humphries’ review of Argento’s latest *giallo*, *Sleepless* (2002). In ‘Trains of thought: Dario Argento’s *Non ho sonno* (*Sleepless*, 2000)’, Reynold Humphries contends that: ‘The way the female victims are treated by the director smacks, however, of the worst sort of sadism and misogyny, encouraging the spectator—especially in the case of the second victim—to want them to perish, in order to see what method is going to be resorted to next.’ *Kinoeye: new perspectives on European Film*. Vol 2. Issue 12. 24 June 2002. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.kinoeye.org/02/12/humphries12.php>

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and vision in Argento's films? And what justification can there be for the violent deaths and artistically arranged bodies of dead woman [Fig 1.] that are undoubtedly also a feature of his work? And what limitations are there, if any, in attempting to approach, as tends to be the case, Argento's work using theoretical paradigms based mainly upon analyses of American horror film?

This thesis sets out to explore these and other questions in relation to Argento's films, and specifically in terms of the *giallo*, with which he has become mainly associated. Throughout my research, I have moved from a predominantly Lacanian theoretical approach of lack, excess and [male] anxiety to a more flexible Deleuzian model of "becoming-other", beyond the binaries of psychoanalysis and the strict gender positions that it often ends up [unconsciously] reaffirming. This has been in direct response to my experience of the films themselves: a gradual and dawning awareness that they operate outside traditional iconographies of horror with their strong female protagonists and deeply sexually ambivalent male characters.

This thesis was originally conceived as a [traditional] feminist critique of Argento's *giallo*, within the terms dictated by Anglo-American theoretical paradigms. But these paradigms soon proved inadequate to the often violent but sympathetic expressions of femininity that distinguish Argento's *giallo* from the genre as a whole. Nor could they explain the frequent iconographic and allegorical references to Italian history in films such as *Suspiria* (Italy: 1977), in which the fascist past is visually embedded in the contemporary present of an archaic company of witches; or the explicit critique of capitalism in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* (*L'Uccello dalle piume di cristallo*, Italy: 1970); or the commentary on patriarchal oppression in

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Argento's *Trauma* (USA: 1993) and *The Stendhal Syndrome* (*La Sindrome di Stendhal*, Italy: 1996). The character of Helga, in *Deep Red* (*Profondo rosso*, Italy: 1975), is as much a feminist representation, as Thelma and Louise in Ridley-Scott's film of the same name (*Thelma and Louise*, USA: 1991), or Clarice in *The Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, USA: 1991) but considerably earlier. And even when his women become aggressors rather than victims, as in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* and *The Stendhal Syndrome*, there is more than a touch of both the Operatic [particularly Italian] and Shakespearean tragedy [peculiarly Argento] about their transformations. Consider the facts: in *Opera* (Italy: 1987), the central character, Betty, is an operatic diva playing the part of Lady Macbeth: a part prefigured by Monica in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*; in *Trauma* Aura's face is seen at one point reflected in the mirrored glass of a painting of Ophelia and pietistic imagery is used in *The Stendhal Syndrome* to draw an allegorical connection between Anna's suffering and that of Christ. It is in this sense that Argento's women are excessive of traditional paradigms of femininity based upon the Christian binaries of whore/virgin: this type of excessive femininity in Argento's films instead works within the tradition of the centrality of the figure of *la dolente* in early Italian cinema.

And as theorists of Argento's work, specifically Mendik (1996/2002) and Needham (2000), have been at pains to point out, his representations of men are no less transgressive. Again consider the figure of Marc Daly, rendered silent and passive, in the opening sequences of *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, the positioning of Tobais in the gothic role of damsel-in-distress in *Four Flies on Grey Velvet* and the masochistic desires of Inspector Santini in *Opera*. Sexuality is no less stable than gender in Argento's *giallo*. The use of transgendered [male] characters, as in Carlo in

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*Deep Red* and the “woman” in the flashback sequences in *Tenebrae*, foregrounds the constant expressions of a sexuality beyond and outside the norm that subvert the discourse of “compulsory heterosexuality” which constitutes those norms.

To try and understand these representations in terms of psychoanalytical binaries using the language of lack and castration anxiety [read male angst] is reductive. And everything is returned to the “primal scene” and the “phallus” as source of ultimate meaning. Further, a convention of the *giallo* as genre, as we shall see, is an active textual resistance of psychoanalytical interpretation. At one point in Argento’s *Deep Red*, Marc [the narrative’s protagonist], discussing his choice of profession [as a pianist] to Helga states that a psychoanalyst once said that his profession was an act of rebellion against his father. Marc insists, however, “I enjoy playing the piano”. This embedding of the meta-narrative of psychoanalysis and its subsequent denial suggests that a different conceptual framework is in operation to that normally articulated in the horror film.

It is within these terms that a Lacanian approach “became” a Deleuzian cinematics, and a critique of gender “became” a feminist poetics of gender. And Argento’s *giallo* “became-other” and provided a mapping for an exploration of culturally located and historically inflected approaches to questions of gender in horror cinema. In the later part of this thesis, I also draw on post-structuralist feminism as embodied within the writings of Kristeva, Irigaray and Cixous. Although these [post] feminist accounts of female subjectivity maintain, in different ways, a problematic relation with the meta-narrative of psychoanalysis, I argue that they are not incompatible with a Deleuzian dynamics of “becoming”. Like Deleuze’s early work with Guattari, and his later

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books on cinema, post-structuralist feminism takes us beyond binaries and frees us from the constraints of the Oedipal model of desire.

Unlike Barbara M. Kennedy's *Deleuze and Cinema: The Aesthetics of Sensation* (2000) which is a broad rethinking of subjectivity, affect and sensation in terms of cinema as a whole, this thesis is concerned with the manner in which analysis of the films of a specific auteur can allow us to reconceptualise the relation between gender and the gaze; power and politics; history and the technology of vision. This is in line with Deleuze's argument in his forward to *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, that filmmakers are no less philosophers than philosophers themselves: '[I]t is not sufficient to compare the great directors of cinema with painters, architects or even musicians. They must be also compared with thinkers.' Deleuze continues and contends that the 'creative capacities' of the visual image is 'inseparable from what the great directors of the cinema contribute to them. Rather like Varese in music, they lay claim to the new materials and means that the future is possible. (Deleuze, 1992: x) Just as Deleuze talks about Hitchcock as one of the foremost "thinkers" of the cinematic image whose "cinema of relations" paves the way for modern cinema<sup>5</sup>, this thesis situates Dario Argento as a philosopher practitioner whose films map out new types of mental images, conceptual frameworks, which enables us to think outside and beyond the limitations of traditional [feminist] film theory.

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<sup>5</sup> 'Hitchcock produces a cinema of relations, just as English philosophy produced a philosophy of relation. In this sense he is, perhaps, at the juncture of two cinemas, the classical that he perfects and the modern that he prepares.' (Deleuze, 1992: x).



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#### Argento: Philosopher / Practitioner



**Figure 2:** Dario Argento: Cinematic Philosopher

Born in 1940 to Salvatore Argento, a prominent movie producer, and Elda Luxardo, a Brazilian fashion model, Dario Argento began his career as a film critic for the Rome Daily, *Paese Sera*. And it is arguably Argento's broad knowledge of film and theory, which is as central, as are the conventions of the *giallo*, in determining the shape and form of his oeuvre. In 1967, he worked with Bertolucci as a story boarder on Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in The West* (Italy: 1968), and is credited with both the opening sequences and the flashback hanging sequence for which the film is noted. The fact that Leone, Argento and Bertolucci wrote the script for the film after having watched and re-watched numerous American westerns is also well documented. In many ways, Argento's work on *Once Upon A Time in the West* sets the precedent to the constant references to Americanism in his films. Following this, he worked as writer on a number of Italian films including *Cemetery without Crosses* (1968) and *The Love Circle* (1970). In 1970, Argento shot to international success with his first film, *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*. Argento is very much an auteur in the traditional sense of the word: controlling all phases of film production from script, music, casting and editing. And whilst the concept of the auteur entered in film vocabulary in the 1960s with Peter Wollen and Andrew Sarris's work, as a way of separating the means of production from the textual "meaning" of

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[Hollywood] films, and was displaced by genre theory in the 1970s, the European film industry remains mainly the *film d'auteur*. Defined by Angus Finney in *The State of European Cinema: A New Dose of Reality* as that in 'which the director and the writer is usually the same all-powerful individual unwilling to relinquish or share his or her creative leadership merely for the sake of a wider audience.' (Finney, 1996: 36). Argento's cutting comments on the American system, experienced during his time in the 1980s working in America, clearly demonstrate how he perceives his films as a means of personal expression - within the traditions of *film d'auteur*:

When you work with a studio, everyone is an artist, everybody has a suggestion for some way to change your work. I don't want to have a discussion with anyone about these things. I want to make my picture. (Argento cited in McDonagh, 1994: 239).

Signatures of Argento's films include: Argento's own voice used for any voice-over narration (such as in *Tenebrae*); the substitution of the arms of the murderer in his films with his own arms; frequent close-ups of eyes (which is also a convention of Mario Bava's *giallo*) and the artistic and feminine (feminised?) professions of many of his main protagonists<sup>6</sup>.

Since 1970 Argento has expressed his personal vision of cinema through 15 films: *The Cat O'Nine Tails* (1970); *Four Flies on Grey Velvet* (1974); *The Five Days of Milan* (1973); *Deep Red* (1975); *Suspiria* (1977); *Inferno* (1980); *Tenebrae* (1982); *Phenomena* (1984); *Opera* (1987); *Two Evil Eyes* with George Romero (1990); *Trauma* (1992); *The Stendhal Syndrome* (1996); *The Phantom of the Opera* (1998)

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<sup>6</sup> A Brief Biography and Information on Dario Argento can be found at the Internet Movie Database (IMDB) [Online]. Available at: <http://us.imdb.com/Bio?Argento,%20Dario>.

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and *Sleepless* (2001). And although not all these films can be classified as *gialli* [the plural of *giallo* and name of the genre], it is with the *giallo* that Dario Argento is most associated. Because of the scope of Argento's artistic achievements as director, as producer, as writer and as television director, this thesis concentrates on his *giallo* from *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* through to *The Stendhal Syndrome* as it is these films that demonstrate most clearly his cinematic philosophy and demonstrate his unique status as practitioner.

### ***Giallo* and gender**

The “*giallo*” is named after the yellow-backed pulp fictions published in Italy in the 1930s/1940s. The evolution of the genre is credited to Italian B film director, Mario Bava, with his 1962 production *The Evil Eye*, and 1964 film *Blood and Black Lace*. Unlike the narrative simplicity of the American “slasher” film, the *giallo* is noted for the complexity, if not incomprehensibility, of its narrative structure. And unlike the American horror film, the killer is rarely male. Instead the killer is either a woman or else suffers from gender confusion, which places him in the feminine position. Examples of the former are Lucio Fulci's *A Lizard in a Women's Skin* (1971) and the already cited *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, the later Lamberto Bava's *A Blade in the Dark* (1983) and Aldo Ladd's *Who Saw her Die* (1972). Significantly in the *giallo*, this transgression of gender and sexual norms is often an integral component in a wider political critique of capitalist imperialism and patriarchal oppression. This is can be seen clearly in the following short analysis of Mario Bava's 1971 *giallo* *A Bay of Blood*.

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In *A Bay of Blood*, capitalist greed for a plot of land - the eponymous bay of the title - sets off an increasingly baroque series of murders, committed by multiple murderers, until the shocking denouement in which two children “playing” accidentally shoot their parents. In *A Bay of Blood*, as in the *giallo* more generally, violence is not gender specific, not only in terms of the manner of its execution but in terms of the gender of the murderer[s]. There can be little doubt that *A Bay of Blood* is one of the prototypes [if not the prototype] for the later American “slasher”/“body-count” film.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, Bava’s film demonstrates what is a convention of many *giallo* in that it displaces political and cultural concerns onto the shape and form of the cinematic-image. In this case, the conflict between the old, as embodied in the figure of the Countess and the archaic land, and the new, the figure of the Count and modernisation, allows an allegorical commentary on the conflict between the urban North and modern South. In order to understand this, we need to have some knowledge of Italian history and in particular of the centrality of what is known as the “Southern Question”<sup>8</sup>. Referring to Gramsci’s analysis of Italian history, Marcia Landy points out how ‘[I]n Gramsci’s terms, the South has been portrayed as “the ball and chain that prevents a more rapid progress in the civil development of Italy.”’ (Landy, 2000: 151).

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<sup>7</sup> This is demonstrated by the fact that the spear sequence from *A Bay of Blood* is quoted in both *Friday 13th Part 1* (Cunningham, USA: 1980) and *Friday 13th Part 2* (Miner, USA: 1981).

<sup>8</sup> In “Some Aspects of the Southern Question” (1926), Gramsci writes: ‘The Northern bourgeoisie has subjugated the South of Italy and the Islands, and reduced them to exploitable colonies; by emancipating itself from capitalist slavery, the Northern proletariat will emancipate the Southern peasant masses enslaved to the banks and the parasitic industry of the North’. (Gramsci Antonio (1978). *Selections from Political Writings (1921-1926)*. Translated and edited by Quintin Hoare. First published by Lawrence and Wishart Ltd. London 1978. [Online version]. Available at: [http://www.marxists.org/archive/gramsci/works/1926/10/southern\\_question.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/gramsci/works/1926/10/southern_question.htm)

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In these terms, *A Bay of Blood* can be seen as a political commentary on the gradual assimilation of the South by the bourgeois from the North into the reigning hegemony. In *A Bay of Blood* the allegorical death of the South, is conveyed through the thirteen murders that structure the narrative. The juxtaposition of classical and modern music further embeds the Southern question as an integral component of the narrative trajectory. I would argue that it is clear that the aesthetics of the *giallo* demand a historical, social and cultural reading rather than a psychoanalytical one as Needham (2002a) contends. In *Signatures of the Visible*, Jameson argues that this is the only way through which to think the visual:

‘[T]he only way to think the visual, to get a handle on increasing tendential, all-pervasive visually as such, is to grasp its historical coming into being. Other kinds of thought have to replace the act of seeing by something else; history alone, however, can mimic the sharpening or dissolution of the gaze.’  
(Jameson, 1992: 1)

The underlying argument of this thesis that we need to understand the aesthetics and politics of the cinematic-image in the films of Dario Argento as historically and culturally specific is therefore situated in direct opposition to the dominant existing approaches to the study of his work. Anglo-American critical approaches to the films of Dario Argento specifically, and the *gialli* more generally, remain locked [located] within the traditions of psychoanalytic horror film criticism. Some of the most notable theorists, representative of this approach, are Xavier Mendik (1996/2002); Gary Needham (2000/2000a/2000b) and Chris Gallant (2000). A less reductive analysis can be found in Maitland McDonagh’s 1994 monograph on Dario Argento, *Broken Mirrors / Broken Minds*: although Jungian, Freudian and Lacanian concepts

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inform a sometimes confused methodological approach. Female abjection; male [castration] anxiety at the sight of female difference; and male sadism and voyeurism map out the territory explored in terms of Dario Argento's films. I have chosen not to map out these approaches in detail at this stage, as I use specific readings of key films as a point of departure throughout the thesis in order to demonstrate the precise manner in which his *giallo* both textually [in terms of narrative] and meta-textuality [in terms of structure] resist such psychoanalytical appropriation.

Instead the remainder of this introduction addresses the limitations of the [feminist] models, derived from Mulvey's seminal article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"<sup>9</sup> on which these readings are constructed, as this is crucial to my overall argument in terms of the relationship between gender and genre in Argento's *giallo*. I draw on Donato Totaro's recent article "The Final Girl: A Few Thoughts on Feminism and Horror"<sup>10</sup>, as a beginning from which to map out the ways in which questions of gender are both culturally constructed and historically inflected. It is not, I suggest that traditional feminist models are without merit, but rather that Italian

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<sup>9</sup> This essay was first published Screen 16.3 Autumn 1975 pp. 6-18 and reprinted numerous times since then. The version used throughout this thesis is the one contained in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (1992). It is, without doubt, one of the most cited and published articles on cinema; and therefore one of the most influential. Written at the height of the second wave feminism, Mulvey utilises psychoanalytical theory, both Freudian and Lacanian, as a political tool in order to deconstruct the signifying practices of "classical narrative cinema". She contends that gender representation in cinematic narrative "reflects" patriarchal oppression and normalises the unequal division between men and women by representing the male subject as active and assertive, and the female object as passive and inactive: functioning merely as visual spectacle for the male gaze.

<sup>10</sup> Totaro, Donato (2002). The Final Girl: A Few Thoughts on Feminism and Horror. *Offscreen*. January 31. [Online]. Available at: [http://www.horschamp.qc.ca/new\\_offscreen/final\\_girl.html](http://www.horschamp.qc.ca/new_offscreen/final_girl.html)

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horror film works within a different conceptual framework to the American horror film. This is explored in greater detail in **Part I** of this thesis.

### **Beyond Oedipus: Anti-Oedipus?**

Psychoanalytical film theory has taken on all the attributes of a religious cult, complete with rites and sacred texts. Twenty years of obsessive innovations of “lack”, “castration,” and “the phallus” have left us with a stultifying orthodoxy that makes any fresh discussion impossible. It is time to recognise that not all problems can be resolved by repeated references to, and ever-more-subtle close readings of, the same few articles by Freud and Lacan. The psychoanalytical model for film theory is at this point utterly bankrupt; it needs not to be refined and reformed, but to be discarded altogether. (Shaviro, 1993: viii-ix)

Shaviro’s startling statement that we should abandon psychoanalysis as a theoretical paradigm altogether provides the premise for his restoration of the affective dimensions of the experience of cinema in his 1993 book *The Cinematic Body*. He suggests that psychoanalytical insistence on the representation of sexual difference ‘may lead us to elide or forget more fundamental questions about *how* power relations - especially including the hierarchized binary oppositions of gender - are in fact socially produced.’ (Shaviro, 1993: 20.1) In opposition to this Shaviro calls for a ‘subversive micropolitics of post-modern cinema.’ (Shaviro, 1993: 24.4), which is ‘affirmative and transformative’, evoking the capacity of the ‘cinematic apparatus to produce and multiply “lines of flight [...]”’. (Shaviro, 1993: 24.4). And although my theoretical methodology is situated in opposition to the psychoanalytical paradigm, as Shaviro’s is, I am less certain about discarding psychoanalysis altogether especially in the light of its importance for feminist film criticism. In terms of the American horror film, psychoanalysis has become “one of the rules” of the genre, stored as part of

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audience expectations. In addition to this is the manner in which in mapping out unconscious fears and anxieties, the horror film has become the prototypical text for discussions of the operation of classical film narrative as Lowry and deCordova suggest in “Enunciation and the Production of Horror in *White Zombie*”:

The horror film has typically served as an ideal site for the examination of the classical film text as symptom. [...] [T]he overdetermination of psychoanalytical terms in the horror film, which seems inherent in the genre’s emphasis on the viewer’s unconscious fears, has made it a fertile ground for the application of psychoanalytic methods to classical film texts. (Lowry and deCordova, 1994: 346)

Lowry’s and deCordova’s classification of the horror film within Schatz’s “genres of integration” foregrounds the centrality of the familial and the psychological in definitions of the genre. This is clearly demonstrated by reference to two of the most significant modern “psychological” horror films: Hitchcock’s *Psycho* (USA: 1960) and Powell’s *Peeping Tom* (UK: 1960). In my recently published article “Mario Bava’s *The Evil Eye*: Realism and the Italian Horror Film”<sup>11</sup>, I map out the ways in which both films offer popular [populist] readings of psychoanalysis by inscribing oedipalised narratives, which locate the causation of the desire and deviancy within the dysfunctionality of the nuclear family. Horror film has provided the paradigm for discussions of the functioning of classical narrative: ‘specific horror films have served again and again as subjects for the application of psychoanalytic methods in pursuit of larger generalisations about the classical film.’ (Lowry and deCordova, 1994: 346). In these terms psychoanalysis has offered a broad base through which to understand the ideological functioning of the classical film narrative with its emphasis on family,

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<sup>11</sup> POST SCRIPT: Essays in Film and the Humanities. *Vol. 21, no. 3, Summer 2002*



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heterosexuality and “reactionary” morality. It is one thing to argue that we need to approach post-modern texts, which often as in the case of Wes Craven’s *Scream* self-consciously “break the rules”, in terms other than those psychoanalytical paradigms – as Shaviro does - and quite another to deny its applicability to more classical examples of the genre, such as *Psycho* and *Peeping Tom*. If as I suggest psychoanalytical paradigms are not applicable to the *giallo*, then it is because they operate outside of those paradigms, either self-consciously or unconsciously, and within different culturally and historically specific frameworks.



**Figure 3:** Abject Terror Personified  
Sally in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*

And there can be little debate that the modern [American] horror film is often problematic in its simplistic representations of gender and concentration on female victimisation: as the screaming face of Sally and the extended shots in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper, USA: 1974) would seem to demonstrate [Fig 3]. And there should also be little doubt that feminist film theory has been essential in identifying some of the ideological implications of the construction of gender in horror film. This is the argument put forward in The General Introduction to *The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality*: ‘Prior to *Screen*’s interest in promoting these new areas, film theory was dominated by an impressionistic approach to criticism which did not address textual construction or the screen-spectator relationship.’ (Screen, 1996: 2).

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The most important of early feminist accounts of cinema is without doubt Laura Mulvey's seminal "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" published in 1975; as already mentioned. Mulvey's diagnosis of the gendered imbalance of classical narrative, irrespective of the validity of the psychoanalytical basis of her argument, foregrounded the way in which male characters were privileged over female characters: in terms of positioning within the frame; use of *mise en scène*, and placement of the cinematic gaze. Drawing on the Freudian concept of scopophilia, Mulvey argues that the [male] spectator alternates between voyeurism and fetishism, gaining visual pleasure both through the illusion of activity and agency signified by the masculinisation of the spectator position and the spectacularisation of "woman" as erotic object for the [male] gaze. In these terms, there is little room available for the female subject as spectator, apart from either a "fantasy" of masculinity or the alternative, a narcissistic identification with the female character[s] as erotic objects.

Feminist accounts of questions of genre and gender in the horror film need to be understood in the light of working within, rather than against, Mulvey's original thesis. Between 1983 and 1987, three of the most influential articles appeared that continue to inflect the manner in which gender representation is theorised in the horror film, all of which derive from Mulvey's psychoanalytical model of visual pleasure and narrative cinema.

The first was Linda Williams's 1983 article "When a Woman Looks", in *Re-Vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism*, exploring the psychological links between the

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“monster” and the female spectator.<sup>12</sup> In 1986 Barbara Creed introduced the term the ‘monstrous feminine’ into theoretical discourse with her much published “Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection” [Screen, 27, no. 1. (January-February 1986)]<sup>13</sup>. And a year later, Carol Clover’s discussion of the “Final Girl” appeared [“Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film” in *Representations*, no. 20 (Fall 1987)].<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> In “When a Woman Looks”, Linda Williams utilises Mulvey’s theory of visual pleasure in her analysis of the relationship between the figures of the monster and that of female characters within the narrative. In the horror film, according to Williams, the *mise en scène* draws a line of similarity between the monster and the terrified heroine, which draws attention to what she calls ‘their similar status within patriarchal structures of seeing.’ (Williams, 1996: 18). Williams suggests that the monster is coded in terms of sexual difference, and lack, and therefore aligned both in terms of narrative and spectacle in the position of the terrified female “spectator”: ‘[T]hen what the woman “sees” would only be the mutilation of her own body displaced onto that of the monster.’ (Williams, 1996: 20)

<sup>13</sup> Creed’s argument is similar to Williams in that it interrogates the iconographic relationship between the monster and “woman” in horror film. However whilst Williams talks about the monster and the figure of the woman as “doubles”; Creed locates her argument around the representation of the monster as “woman”. The centrality of images of the “primal scene” which provide the foundation of her reading, like that of Linda Williams, constructs the ideal/implied spectator as male. And the importance of sexual difference in the determination of the “monstrous-feminine” symbolically inscribes male castration anxiety: even if in Creed’s scenario it is the woman as “castrator” rather than “castrated” who is the object of simultaneous desire and fear. Commenting on the end sequences of *Alien* (Ridley Scott, USA: 1979), Creed contends that the eroticisation of Ripley’s body allows a normalisation and naturalisation of the ‘display of woman as reassuring and pleasurable sign.’ She continues: ‘The final sequence works, not only to dispose of the alien, but also to repress the nightmare image of the monstrous-feminine, constructed as a sign of abjection within the text’s patriarchal discourses.’ (Creed, 1996: 63).

<sup>14</sup> Although on the surface, Clover’s discussion of the female heroine in the slasher film, or the “final girl”, seems to offer a more positive model for female spectatorship than that proposed by either Williams or Creed, it remains confined within the gendered positions of male/subject and female/object. The Final Girl, according to Clover, attests to the existence of cross-gendered identification in the horror film: neither fully feminine nor fully masculine: she crosses over binary distinctions. But possibilities of this fluidity of the gaze that Clover writes about, is undermined by her contention that the final girl acts as a surrogate for the male spectator. And the possibility of female spectatorship is unveiled as a masculine fiction: ‘If the slasher film is “on the face of it” a genre with at least a strong female presence, it is in these

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In “Introduction - Psychoanalysis in/and/of the Horror Film”, Steven Schneider (2001) points out these “feminist-influenced psychoanalytical theories of horror [...] can be understood as revisions, rather than outright rejections, of the original Mulveyian paradigm.”<sup>15</sup>

It is the importance of these feminist accounts that makes me reluctant to render psychoanalysis, as Shaviro does, as “utterly bankrupt”. Clover’s discussion of the ‘final girl’ and Creed’s the ‘monstrous feminine’ can help us tease out some of the nuances of gender difference in the American horror film. And, without doubt, have opened up the critical study of horror beyond essentialist discussions of male violence.

At the same time, to utilise these accounts wholesale to the theorisation of non-American horror films is highly problematic, in that these accounts are constructed predominantly through analysis of American horror films. And when they do discuss non-American texts, as in Barbara Creed’s *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, feminism and psychoanalysis*, no attention is paid to the cultural and historical location of the films. This is exemplified in her discussion of the witch in film in which in concentrating only on the abject nature of the witches, she ignores the iconographic and historical resonance’s of Dario Argento’s *Suspiria* which links the witches’

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figurative readings a thoroughly strong male exercise, one that finally has very little to do with femaleness and very much to do with phallocentricism.’ (Clover, 1996: 98).

<sup>15</sup>Schneider, Steven Jay (2001). Introduction - Psychoanalysis in/and/of the Horror Film. *Senses of Cinema*. Issue 15, July-August. [Online]. Available at: [www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/01/15/horror\\_psych.html](http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/01/15/horror_psych.html)

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academy to both Fascism and Nazism.<sup>16</sup> At best this is an oversight demonstrating a lack of knowledge about the films, at the worst a form of [unconscious] cultural assimilation of difference.

It is in opposition to this type of meta-narrative application of psychoanalysis to non-American films - is Donato Totaro's article "The Final Girl: A Few Thoughts on Feminism and Horror"<sup>17</sup>. Totaro highlights how traditional feminist models of female spectatorship, mainly constructed through analyses of American horror film (and via Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"), prove inadequate to the more sexually explicit and liberated European horror film. As Totaro points out we cannot apply these models, based on analyses of predominantly American horror film, wholesale to the more perverse structures of European [and in this case Italian] horror film. This is because the Puritanism of America's past, means that American horror [and the theoretical models it gives rise to] is unable to fully address issues of female sexuality outside of traditional models of gender - those models that I have already suggested are transgressed in Argento's *giallo*. Totaro continues by suggesting that Clover and other feminists restrict their analyses by view of the fact that they rely more or less solely on the reductive form of the American horror film:

[C]lover and other feminists deprive themselves of great potential material with their near exclusive dependence on American horror. American horror,

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<sup>16</sup> Creed argues that 'In the horror film, the representation of the witch continues to foreground her essentially sexual nature. She is usually depicted as a monstrous figure with supernatural powers and a desire for evil.' (Creed, 1992: 76). For Creed, the witches in *Suspiria* function merely to 'reinforce the stereotypical image of the witch as a malevolent, destructive, monstrous figure whose aim is destruction of the symbolic order.' (Creed, 1992, p77).

<sup>17</sup> Totaro, Donato (2002). The Final Girl: A Few Thoughts on Feminism and Horror. *Offscreen*. January 31. [Online]. Available at: [http://www.horschamp.qc.ca/new\\_offscreen/final\\_girl.html](http://www.horschamp.qc.ca/new_offscreen/final_girl.html)

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like its popular culture in general, is generally prudish and too deeply entrenched in a Puritan past to really engage in sexuality, which is so important to the horror film. (Totaro: 2001<sup>18</sup>)

One only has to think about the films of Jean Rollin and his predatory woman vampires, for example *Le Frisson Des Vampires* (1970), *La Rose De Fer* (1973) and *Fascination* (1979), or the extraordinary films of Amando de Ossorio, *Night of the Sorcerers* (1974) and *Lorely's Grasp* (1976) or indeed Joe D'Amato's sexualised horror fantasies, *Caligula: The Untold Story* (1997) and *Erotic Nights of the Living Dead* (1980) - to begin to see the limitations of the oedipalised Americana models, which in persisting in situating female sexuality in phallogentric terminology, are unable to provide a model for engaging in the multiple and molecular becomings of female identity outside a binary relationship with the molar male subject. These models - as Totaro points out - not only fail to come to terms with the iconography of the female killer, as attractive rather than repulsive, but also cannot account for the emphasis on male violation and victim hood in many European horror films:

in the European horror film there are many instances where (a) the victims are exclusively or mainly male, and (b) the male victim/hero is sexually attracted to the female killer, not repulsed, as with the monstrous-feminine and hence there can be no disavowal of her femininity.<sup>19</sup>

In my thesis, I utilise Mira Liehm's (1984) discussion of *la dolente*, the "sufferer", in *Passion and Defiance: Film in Italy from 1942 to the Present*, as providing a mechanism for understanding the excessive representations of female sexuality and

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<sup>18</sup> Totaro, Donato (2002). *The Final Girl: A Few Thoughts on Feminism and Horror. Offscreen*. January 31. [Online]. Available at: [http://www.horschamp.qc.ca/new\\_offscreen/final\\_girl.html](http://www.horschamp.qc.ca/new_offscreen/final_girl.html)

<sup>19</sup> Totaro, Donato (2002). *The Final Girl: A Few Thoughts on Feminism and Horror. Offscreen*. January 31. [Online]. Available at: [http://www.horschamp.qc.ca/new\\_offscreen/final\\_girl.html](http://www.horschamp.qc.ca/new_offscreen/final_girl.html)

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suffering in Argento's *giallo*: this helps to contextualise the use of pietistic imagery in *The Stendhal Syndrome* as a strategy through which to negate Anna's "monstrosity" and the frequent references, as already cited, to Shakespearean heroines that are a defining feature of Argento's *gialli*. I also draw on P. Adams Sitney's (1995) useful analyses of the iconographic dimensions of Italian film from *Vital Crises in Italian Cinema: Iconography. Stylistics. Politics.* to demonstrate the manner in which Italy's vast resource of visual images, drawn from Catholic iconography and Renaissance painting and poetry, maps out the interlocking relationship between the iconographic and the political in Italian film. In Landy's words:

To the present, the cinema has relied on the affective potential of the face and of the body that inheres also in a long tradition of painting and photography, a tradition that is inseparable from considerations of gender, sexuality and power, which are in turn subject to historical change as well as continuity. (Landy, 2000: 2).

And it is, I argue, only by contextualising the *giallo* within these traditions, that we can begin to understand the manner in which representations of gender and sexuality in Argento's films challenge traditional theoretical paradigms, displacing them for a more powerful politics of "becoming": beyond a linear ideology of time, beyond point-of-view and beyond the either/or binaries of conventional understandings of gender and spectatorship in the horror film. At the same time, locating Argento's approach to cinematics predominantly through Deleuze's work on cinema allows us to situate the cinematic-image within its own specificity as a distinct art form, even whilst it draws on earlier traditions in painting and photography. This is a pedagogy of the image, the cinematic-image is defined through its own terms and operations, rather than being situated as a mapping of a pre-existing framework. Argento as both philosopher and practitioner of that philosophy allows a particular fertile ground for

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the mapping out of a new conceptual space from which and through which to rethink cinema generally, whilst always being aware of the cultural and historical location of texts.

## **Structure**

**Part I** presents a short but detailed discussion of Italian film as both national and international cinema in terms of both economics and aesthetics. *Chapter One* explores the relationship of Italian film to Americanism during the period of fascism; a relationship which is crucial to our understanding of the manner in which the iconographic is closely tied to the political in the *giallo* in the 1960s. It also introduces the concept of “la dolente”, the sufferer, to considerations of gender in Italian film through an analysis of Visconti’s *Obsession*. *Chapter Two* argues that the *gialli* can be most productively analysed in terms of Deleuze’s time-image, as this approach does not subsume cultural difference under the facade of sameness. Locating the emergence of the *giallo* within Mario Bava’s *The Evil Eye* (1962) and *Blood and Black Lace* (1964), I consider how the *giallo*’s approach to questions of genre and gender is excessive of traditional feminist models.

**Part II** offers a set of analyses, in chronological order, of Argento’s *giallo* from his 1970 directorial debut: *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* to his final Diva film in 1996: *The Stendhal Syndrome*. In *Chapter Three*, I take issue with psychoanalytical readings of Argento’s *giallo* through a close analysis of the foregrounding of the colonial critique in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*. Through a series of detailed **analyses of key scenes** I demonstrate the manner in which the film textually resists



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psychoanalytical interpretation through the deconstruction of temporal-spatial coherence and continuity. I argue that conventional feminist interpretations of gender in horror film are not able to account for the fluid pleasures that are inscribed in Argento's violent and violating women. *Chapter Four* examines the relationship between sight and sound in Argento's second *giallo*, *The Cat O'Nine Tails* (1971) using Deleuze's discussion of the "components of the time" from *Cinema 2: The Time Image*. I suggest that the disjunction between sight and sound insists that we approach the cinematic-image in a new manner.

*Chapters Five* and *Six* look at the centrality of the "powers of the false" and the "crises in the truth" in Deleuze's delimitation of the time-image within *Four Flies on Grey Velvet*, and *Deep Red*. In my discussion of the powers of the false, I put forward the argument that the falsifying narration of Argento's *Four Flies on Grey Velvet* draws our attention to the limitations of traditional models of analysis, based upon the unproblematic construction of the Cartesian cogito. The film's detailed exploration of childhood memory, I argue provides a line of flight from gender identities and normative constructions of identity. In *Chapter Six*, I offer an alternative "historical" reading of trauma in which I contend that the inability of the 'witness' as colonial other to bear witness in Argento's *Deep Red* embodies an implicit and explicit reference to the Holocaust which subverts traditional gendered readings of Argento's *gialli*. *Chapter Seven* locates Argento's *Tenebrae* as signalling metaphorically and literally the end of his-story through the death of the central male protagonist. In this chapter, I bring together Deleuze's discussion of non-chronological time with Deleuze and Guattari's original critique of Oedipus in order to explore the displacement of history, identity and gender. By drawing an analogy between the attraction and

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repulsions of the desiring-machine of the body-without-organs and Deleuze's concept of the *impulse-image* in *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, I place the *impulse-image*, and its violent becomings, in opposition to the dominant psychoanalytical readings of *Tenebrae*.

The last three chapters discuss the manner in which Argento's female led *giallo* - or his "Diva trilogy" - construct a feminist poetics at odds with the diagnosis of male sadism as the formative structuring force of the horror film. In these chapters, I use Deleuze's earlier work outside of cinema in order to explore what I suggest are the feminine bodily spaces of his Divas. In *Chapter Eight*, I consider the foregrounding of the masochistic contract in *Opera* through Deleuze's reconfiguring of the discourse of masochism in *Coldness and Cruelty*<sup>20</sup>. *Chapter Nine* relocates the anorexic and abject body of Aura in Argento's *Trauma* in terms of the resistances of the girl-child to Oedipal subjectivity. Bringing together Deleuze and Guattari's "becomings" with the writings of poststructuralist French feminists and Feminist readings of Deleuze, I argue that *Trauma* constructs an anti-oedipal politics of [female] resistance against the patriarchal medicalisation and pathologisation of the [female] body. I extend my assemblage of Deleuzian thought and feminist theory in the last chapter, *Chapter Ten* on Argento's *The Stendhal Syndrome*, which explores the interconnections between the body without organs of Deleuze and Guattari and the newly born woman of Cixous. I end by arguing that the bodily textuality of *The Stendhal Syndrome* inscribes a female gest - or feminine imaginary.

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<sup>20</sup> Deleuze, Gilles (1989 [1967]). *Coldness and Cruelty*. In McNeil, Jean (translator). *Masochism*. New York: Zone Books. pp. 9-142

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In my conclusion, I consider Argento's critical and creative legacy, in terms of his influence on non-Italian films: Cindy Sherman's feminist "slasher", *Office Killer* (USA: 1997), the graphic and brutal rape-revenge film, *Audition* (Takashi Miike, Japan/South Korea: 1999); the low-budget American film *Kolobos* (Daniel Liatowitsch and David Todd Ocvirk, USA: 1999) and *Evil Dead Trap* (Toshiharu Ikeda, Japan: 1988)

## **Beginnings**

The War demonstrated the potential for the use of cinema in information and propaganda and it also consolidated the belief in the broader, indirect economic significance of the cinema. (Forbes and Street, 2000: 6)

The 1930s and early 1940s are crucial years in the history of Italian film, during which Italian film developed as an identifiable national cinema with a recognisable production, distribution and exhibition network. The funding of new studios, *Cinecittà*, which opened on the 21st of April 1938, was one of the most significant economic developments during this period, allowing the centralisation of film production. Its ten sound stages provided the production sites for two thirds of all films made. (Nowell-Smith, 1996: 35). And by the end of the 1930s, the state 'had a powerful distribution chain, a chain of first rate cinemas and a major production facility (Wagstaff cited in Forbes and Street, 2000: 15).

During the same period, theory, aesthetics and politics would inform the shape and direction of the cinematic-image with the setting up of an internationally renowned film school - *Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia* - and the first publication of *Bianco e Nero* (Black and White), a journal on film aesthetics, which published articles by Umberto Barbaro, Luigi Chiarini and Rudolf Arnheim. Michelangelo Antonioni and Roberto Rossellini are just two of the famous names who passed through the doors of *Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia*. The importance of the relation between practice and aesthetics was formalised in 1934 when the first Venice Film Festival took place.

However important national developments were, the shape of Italian national cinema was also dictated in response to the increasing of the Hollywood product over

domestic films: both in economic and consumer terms. In 'Art Cinema as Institution', Steve Neale locates the emergence of "art" cinema in Europe in the 1920s as a direct economic response to Hollywood's popularity and the various attempts through legislation to restrict: 'the flood of Hollywood product.' (Neale, 2002: 114). For Maltby and Vasey the emergence of "art" cinema as a series of identifiable national cinemas is both political and cultural: 'Bourgeois cultural nationalism defined mass culture as American in order to define itself against national cultures. In their assertion of the ideas of boundaries, these nationalisms required an Other against which to define themselves. 'American culture' served that purpose for different European elites during the 1920s and 1930s as at other times.' (Maltby and Vasey, 2002: 191).

Both Maltby and Vasey's and Neale's discussion of Hollywood film as the "Other" against which national cinema defined itself during the inter-war period helps to explain the later anti-Hollywood stance of neorealist films such as *Bicycle Thieves* (De Sica, Italy: 1948) and *Rome, Open City* (Rossellini, Italy: 1945) in which American culture is aligned with both fascism and degeneracy: the giant poster of Rita Hayworth watching silently as the bicycle of the title of the former is stolen and the visual iconography of American cultural decadence and consumerism forming a degenerate backdrop to fascism in the later. The political ideas of the Frankfurt School, and in particular Gramsci, are also important in the anti-capitalist stance of neorealism and form part of the rich intellectual backdrop to film aesthetics and politics in the 1930s and 1940s. Neorealism's implicit criticism of American culture can be considered a cinematic expression of the Frankfurt School's critique of the Hollywood machine as later laid out in Adorno and Horkheimer's seminal 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception' in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*

(*Dialektik der Aufklärung*: 1944). For Adorno and Horkheimer, as Gramsci, the cathartic pleasures of the culture industry provided a mode of explanation for the failure of the communist revolution and the rise of fascism: ‘Capitalist production so confines them [the consumers/workers/employees] body and soul, that they fall helpless victims to what is offered them. [...]’<sup>1</sup> In *Italian Film*, Marcia Landy argues that the ideas of Gramsci’s writings on the “Southern Question” can be seen in the work of film-makers such as Visconti, The Taviani Brothers and Pasolini.<sup>2</sup>

But Italian film’s [and literature’s] relation with American culture is not as simplistic as this suggests. Instead as much as it is evident that “Americanisation” was perceived with fear and anxiety by the fascist state in Italy at a time in which fascism was attempting to construct a people with a unified language; in Italy in the 1930s American culture was providing young intellectuals with a voice outside of official fascist culture. So much so that American culture became the site of an unofficial counter-culture and the main impetus for the development of the neorealist aesthetic outside the restrictions of the fascist regime. This American influence on neorealism is at odds with the anti-Hollywood stance of many of the films categorised within the movement. Pierre Sorlin foregrounds the dualistic relationship that Italian culture had with America in the 1930s: ‘Hollywood, in its epics, its war films and its comedy of manners films, represented an abstract world, ‘a world of terror’ or ‘life as a dream’, as could be read on the posters.’ (Sorlin, 1996: 107) This paradox is highlighted by

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<sup>1</sup> Adorno, Theodor and Horkheimer, Max (1944). *The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass deception*. [Online version] available at: <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/adorno.html>

<sup>2</sup> ‘In discussing the vexing historical problem of the Italian South, Gramsci had explored the ironic fact that there was no sense of unity between the workers in the North and the peasants in the South, the consequence being not only the ongoing suppression of southern but the assimilation of northern workers into the reigning hegemony, even when this was not in the best interests of either group’. (Landy, 2000: 152).

Visconti's *Obsession* (Italy: 1942), seen by many as a direct predecessor of neorealism, which is loosely based upon James M. Cain's pulp fiction *The Postman Always Rings Twice*.<sup>3</sup>

Nearly twenty years later, the central character, Nora, in Mario Bava's foundational *giallo* *The Evil Eye* (Italy: 1962), is first seen reading an American pulp fiction whose lurid cover and images of death prefigures the content of the ensuing narrative. This influence is also made explicit in Argento's first *giallo*, his only adaptation of a literary text, *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* (Italy: 1970), which is based upon an American pulp fiction, *The Screaming Mimi* (Fredric Brown, 1949). Intertextual and iconographic references to American literature and film are the rule rather than the exception in the *giallo*. Another example is Fulci's *giallo* *The Black Cat (Il Gatto Nero*: Italy 1981) which is a free translation of Edgar Allan Poe's classic. Settings and characters also often draw a less implicit relation to America and American culture. New York is the location for Fulci's misogynist *giallo* *New York Ripper (Lo Squartatore di New York*, Italy: 1982), labelled "repugnant" by critics for its pornographic content and the central character in Mogherini's *The Pyjama Girl Case* (1978), played by Ray Milland, is an American retired detective living in Italy. Iconographically the *giallo* is similar to *film noir* in its distorted mise-en-scène which reflects the protagonist's fading sense of reality. Baroque camera angles and framings serve as a further indication of the influence of pulp fiction's cinematic successor: *film noir*. And as much as the *giallo* is influenced by American cultural forms, the *giallo* is largely responsible for the reinvention of the psychological horror film in the late 1970s, the "slasher" film, even if this influence is often not credited.

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<sup>3</sup> It is interesting to note that the idea for the project stemmed from a meeting between Renoir and Visconti and indeed the version used for the film was the French translation rather than the American text itself.

This complexity of the relation between American and Italian culture and film necessitates that we understand the *giallo* in both national and international terms without reducing it to a set of codes and conventions unlocated culturally, historically and aesthetically.

In these terms if we consider the form of the *giallo* separate to its contextualisation within the wider picture of Italian national cinema in which by 1960s the use of American culture is both paradoxical and political, we run the risk of reducing the complexity and specificity of the gialli to an Italian copy of an American original. The *giallo* becomes in these terms Italy's version [copy] of the American psychological thriller [original] and Bava's 1962 *The Evil Eye*, an Italian *Psycho*. As we will see in *Chapter Two*, the manner in which *The Evil Eye* self-consciously quotes Hitchcock's text makes it difficult to ascribe to this viewpoint. Whilst existing accounts of Argento's films, such as those proposed by Xavier Mendik and Alan Jones, take into consideration the fact that the films are Italian and not American, by utilising models derived from American films these accounts ultimately subsume their cultural specificity and historicity.

In opposition to this, I argue that the manner in which the *giallo* takes up pre-existing American [and at times British] cultural forms can be viewed as a form of counter-cultural resistance, which allows a critique of the existing [Italian] political order in the same breath as it foregrounds the hegemonic processes of American imperialism and colonialism. This argument is more fully developed in my discussion of Argento's *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* in *Chapter Three*. In this chapter, I situate the emergence of this unofficial cultural resistance through its relation to political, economic and aesthetic developments in Italy during the fascist regime.



Drawing on Andrew Higson's nuanced exploration of the term 'national cinema' in his article 'The Concept of National Cinema', I contend that the growth of national cinema in Italy - like elsewhere in Europe - during the 1930s and 1940s is economic; textual; consumer-based and aesthetic. And whilst I am mainly concerned with questions of aesthetics, it is the intimate relationship between film as commodity and film as art which helps explain the complexity of Italy's dualistic relationship with America: a relationship which is essential to our understanding of the evolution of the *giallo* as a distinctive and discrete genre in 1960s Italy.

At the same time, questions of the cinematic text itself are important. Just as the *giallo* draws on the codes and conventions of Italian film as specifically national cinema, its transgressive approach to gender representation also needs to be contextualised within the wider picture of Italian national cinema. Of particular importance to my later arguments is the manner in which representations of masculinity and femininity are culturally inflected, and historically responsive. Drawing on Mira Liehm's discussion of gender in *Italian film in Passion and Defiance: Film in Italy from neorealism to the present* (1984), I explore how the figure of the femme fatale as sufferer (*la dolente*) is different from conventional representations of the so-called fatal woman, most often associated with American *film noir*. This provides the foundation for my subsequent argument that the figure of the woman-as-monster in the *giallo* cannot be understood within the strict binarisms of American theoretical models of horror. Intertextual comparisons in Argento's *giallo* of his leading ladies to Shakespearean heroines, Monica to Lady Macbeth in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* and Aura to Ophelia in *Trauma*, also provides evidence of the extra dimension of suffering that relocates his heroines outside the conventional.

As Visconti's *Obsession* is in many ways a forerunner of the *giallo*, it provides an excellent case-study as to the mechanisms by which the figuration of gender and sexuality in Italian cinema are excessive of and subvert the traditions of gender representation in the American horror film to which the *giallo* is often compared. Through an analysis of the exploration of disenfranchised masculinity and its sympathetic characterisation of the 'femme fatale' in Visconti's seminal text, I argue that the political critique which leads the fascist state to ban *Obsession* is communicated through the transgression of normative gender, sexuality and identity roles. This will provide the foundation for my ensuing analyses of Argento's *giallo* in which I suggest that gender subversion in Argento's work is always political.

In my analysis of *Obsession*, I introduce the main elements of my theoretical methodology, which will be developed through my analyses of Argento's *gialli*, by drawing on Deleuze's thesis of the cinematic image "in crisis" and locating this crisis historically, culturally and textually. Whilst Visconti's film predates Deleuze's schemata for "crisis in the action image", I suggest that the intellectual spaces of Visconti's approach to cinematic narrative and in particular to time and space textually exemplify this "crisis" and the need for a new form of cinematic thought outside of conventional structures which can in some way articulate post-war angst - although Visconti's film is made just before the end of World War Two. In *Obsession*, the potentiality of "becoming" displaces the fixity of "being" as metaphorically exemplified by the characters wanderings in and out of the Po valley and the open road, which signifies freedom and transformation. Directed before the end of the War and in a country torn apart by fascism, *Obsession* is very much a film of its times. Unlike the later neorealist movement there is little hope for the

characters trapped in Visconti's fatalistic narrative. Freedom is always beyond the horizon, and it is death that is the ultimate signified of the open road.

### **Italian Film as National Cinema**

To identify a national cinema is first of all to specify a coherence and unity; it is to proclaim a unique identity and a stable set of meanings. The process of identification is thus invariably a hegemonising, mythologizing process, involving both the production and assignation of a particular set of meanings, the attempt to contain, or prevent the potential proliferation of other meanings. At the same time, the concept of a national cinema has almost invariably been mobilised as a strategy of cultural (and economic) resistance; a means of asserting national autonomy in the face of (usually) Hollywood's international domination. (Higson, 2002: 133).

In 'The Concept of National Cinema', Andrew Higson outlines four broad approaches to the study of national cinema. Firstly, the economic approach which focuses on questions of exhibition, distribution and production. Second is the text-based approach, which explores questions of world-view, style and projections of national character and nationhood. Thirdly the exhibition or consumption-led approach which raises questions around cinema as consumable commodity i.e. what sort of films are audiences actually watching? The last approach is what Higson terms the criticism-led approach in which national cinema is conceptualised in terms of aesthetics, reduced to the products of quality art cinema, and more popular forms which 'appeal [...] to the desires and fantasies of the popular audiences' are neglected. (Higson, 2002: 132-133).

Higson's delimitation of different approaches to national cinema is useful in so far as it stresses the limitations of privileging one method of classification over the next. Instead we need to understand the growth of national cinema in Italy - like elsewhere in Europe - during the 1930s and 1940s is economic; textual; consumer-based and

aesthetic. To see Italian film merely in terms of the aesthetic is to negate the impact that economic and political concerns have on the evolution of the cinematic-image. Indeed, consumer's desire for the imaginary space of America would be one of the main reasons that Italian film sought to mimic and imitate Hollywood film. And in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Italian directors such as Riccardo Freda and Mario Bava would repackage their films to make them seem more American. The most blatant example of this is Freda's 1959 production of *Caltiki Il Mostro Immortale* (*Caltiki, The Immortal Monster*). For exhibition purposes, Freda changed his name to Robert Hampton and Mario Bava, the cameraman on the film, became John Foam. That this was successful once again highlights the importance of economics in influencing the shape of cinematic aesthetics: 'Caltiki was received, and reviewed in Italy as an American movie (as it was, for that matter in the United States itself) and prove a reasonably successful article. (Clarens, 1967: 190). And as we shall in the next chapter, Mario Bava's first *giallo* *The Evil Eye* (1962) was shot with two different endings: one specifically for the American market.

### **National Cinema and the Economics of Film Production**

In economic terms, the fascist state managed to transform the Italian film industry from a fragmentary and eclectic industry concentrated in the hands of amateurs and enthusiasts into a viable economic industry. In direct response to the perceived threat of Americanisation due to the popularity of Hollywood films, the fascist state set up the *Ente Nazionale Industrie Cinematografiche* (ENIC) under Stefano Pittaluga in 1938. The ENIC had a dual function: firstly to control imports of foreign films and secondly, to ensure that domestic films were in line with fascist ideology for both domestic and foreign consumption. The ENIC was considerably more

successful than its predecessor the *L'Unione Cinematografica Italiana* (UCI): set up in 1917 and bankrupt by 1927. Similarly an attempt to regulate imports by quotas in 1927 - 10% of all screen space to be devoted to Italian films - was also unsuccessful as it was unrealistic, the film industry was not integrated enough to be able to produce the number of films to fulfil this quota. By the time the ENIC was set up, 90% of all films screened in Italy were foreign; and the main percentage were unsurprisingly Hollywood produced films.

The ENIC had some success as figures for 1938 and 1939 demonstrate: production of films going up from 33 in 1938 to 45 in 1939. The traumatic political and economic upheavals caused by Italy's participation in World War Two meant that this success was short-lived and by the late 1940s, domestic production was once again subsumed under the more popular American imports. Less successful however was the ENIC's objective to control the content of domestic films and to produce only films that were supportive of fascist ideology. This view is shared by most critics of Italian film but perhaps best expressed in Bonadella's insightful history of *Italian Film: From Neorealism to the Present*:

in spite of the regime's theoretical interest in influencing all levels of Italian society, its impact upon the Italian film industry was somewhat less pervasive; indeed, only a small percentage of the over seven hundred films produced during the fascist period can be truly termed Fascist or propaganda films. (Bonadella, 1989: 18)

This would be important in terms of the later neorealist movement and its search for a new image of thought as mapped in the "crises in the action-image" that the neorealist aesthetic provoked in its fragmentary and disjointed narratives; weak connections; dispersive reality and focus on the urban voyage 'detached from the active and affective structure which supported it, directed it, gave it even vague

directions.’ (Deleuze, 1992: 208). In line with other writers on Italian cinema, such as Bonadella cited above, Deleuze argues that at the end of World War Two, Italy had at its ‘disposal a cinematographic institution which had escaped fascism relatively successfully.’ (Deleuze, 1992: 211). And it is this relative freedom from state interference that enables Italian film’s reconfiguration of the possibilities of the cinematic-image.

At the same time, the neorealist aesthetic needs to be situated against the monumental reconfigurations of the recent and historical past which are most associated with fascism. Detailing either ‘colonial wars or moments of Italian imperial glory, either under Mussolini or in a more distant past.’ (Bonadella, 1989: 28) these films attempted to construct a unified Italy and stable [masculine] self. Examples are *The White Squadron* (Genina, Augusto: 1936) set during the African Civil War and *The Siege of Alcazar* (Genina, Augusto: 1940). *L’Armata Azzurra* (*The Army in Blue*, Righelli, 1942) is described by Vernon Jarrat as the first film which ‘can genuinely be described as Fascist propaganda’ (Jarrat, 1951: 38). However Mussolini’s comments on Alessandro Blasetti’s *Sole* (*Sun*, 1929) as ‘the dawn of the Fascist film’ (cited in Wvyer, 1989: 149) suggest that the union between state ideology and the cinematic image was already in place as early as 1929. Significantly, Angela Dalle Vacche calls our attention to the manner in which the cinematic spectacle was inseparable from the ‘spectacles of national unity and impressive displays of popular consent’ which Fascism staged in ‘order to homogenize composite audiences’ (Vacche, 1992: 23).



**Figure 4:** Theatrical constructions of space in *Rome, Open City*

But to think of neorealism and Italian film in the 1940s merely in terms of a reaction against these historiographic metafiction is to overlook the aesthetic influence of fascist film. This is Marcia Landy's argument in her Deleuzian reworking of Italian film history. Landy contends:

‘The history that these films offer bespeaks a recognition both of the fragility of historical events and the role of cinema at the time to produce an other politics, a politics of style, commensurate with the theatricality sought by the regime in its ceremonials and rituals and that cinema was capable of creating in another register.’ (Landy, 2000: 70).

As much as neorealism attempts to divorce itself from fascist film and ideology, the politics of style or theatricality can be clearly seen in films such as Rossellini's *Rome, Open City* (*Roma Citta Aperta*) in which the open staging of the fascist quarters where the interrogation of the priest takes place is clearly theatrical in its origins and aesthetics [see Fig. 4].



**Figure 5:** “All the world's a stage”: Horror as theatre in Michele Soavi's *Stagefright*

Over forty years later in the genre of the *giallo*, this theatricality remains a constant theme. In some cases the staging of a play provides the setting as in Michele Soavi's *Stagefright* [Fig.5] and Dario Argento's *Opera*.

At other times, the sheer baroque nature of the framing is used to foreground the narrative's play on artifice as in Mario Bava's *A Bay of Blood*.

So whilst we often think of shifts in cinematic aesthetics in terms of a “break” with a previous cinematic form, we can often find traces of that visual past in that newly configured image. And although there is a noticeable “crises” in modes of narration which coincides with the end of World War 2 and the fall of fascism in Italy, that crises is made possible in part because of the specificity of Italian film as national cinema. That this politics of style is as important as an understanding of the “crises” in the action image is to the form of the *giallo* as will be demonstrated in my analyses of Argento's films.

### **National Cinema and Patterns of Consumption**

But as Higson points out in his definitions of national cinema, cited previously, national cinema is not merely a question of production but also one of consumption. Not only were audiences more likely to have seen Hollywood films, but popular Italian genres such as the *commedia all'italiana*' [comedy Italian style]; the



adventure film [which transformed in the peplum film in the 1950s] and the perennial favourite the melodrama [associated mainly with the *divismo* - the Italian star system] continued to be made during the fascist regime. Nowell-Smith describes *commedia all'italiana* as 'a satirical form spiced with elements of social and moral criticism and originally a mixture of comedy and drama [...]' (Nowell-Smith, 1996: 38).

Whilst more commonly associated with films in the late 1950s, the roots of the genre can be traced back to the work of Mario Camerini and Vittorio De Sica in the 1930s and 1940s. (Nowell-Smith, 1996: 38). With its sharp take on bourgeois values and domestic setting, Camerini is most associated with the 'telefonata bianchi' ('white telephone' film): 'upper-class comedies named for their inclusion of a white telephone in the boudoir' (Landy, 2000, 50). For example, *I'll Give A Million* (1935) and *Il signor Max* (Mr. Max, 1937). There seems to some debate over whether these films can be seen as articulating fascist ideology. On the one hand John Wyver states that 'Films like these, with their very mild social criticism, offered tacit support for the regime' (Wyver, 1989: 149), whilst Marcia Landy suggests that the films 'are not easily relegated to the position of mere frivolous and vacuous texts serving the Fascist cause by diverting audiences from political and social realities.' (Landy, 2000: 50). Perhaps even more significant is the fact that these Italian comedies were very similar in form and content to Hollywood comedies of the same era - or the Screwball Comedy to be precise. This is the argument put forward by Pierre Solin:

We are tempted to ascribed to Fascism such features such as the reverence for women, the importance of family life, the dependence of woman and the overvaluation of nationalism. In fact, the same characteristics can be found in pictures made in Hollywood or democratic European countries. (Sorlin cited in Landy, 2000: 70).

This similarity between Hollywood films and Italian films was not solely confined to the comedy but was, as Landy points out, more pervasive: ‘The comedies, the historical spectacles, and the costume dramas - in short, the sound films of the Ventennio (the almost twenty years of Fascism) - are often comparable in technique and perspective to many of the films produced in Hollywood, a source of inspiration for Italian commercial filmmakers.’ (Landy, 2000: 50). This is understandable if we consider the figures of domestic and foreign films shown in Italy immediately before and after the end of the First World War. In the decade immediately preceding the First World War, only one third of films screened in Europe were American (Nowell-Smith, 1996: 24). By 1916, a very different picture was emerging with American films accounting for between 75 and 90 per cent of all films screened in Italy, France, Spain and Britain. Figures for cinematic exhibition and distribution in Italy vary. At the lower limit 68% of all films exhibited were American, with the national production accounting for only 6% of all films screened (Jarrat, 1966: 30), at the higher end figures produced by the British Film Institute locate the total percentage of American films screened in Italy at 90% (Wvyer, 1989: 148). Even given the discrepancy in the figures, it is easy to see that Hollywood film dominated Italian screens and imaginations, explaining in part why Italian films of the 1930s had so much in common with Hollywood products. This was a situation that would define Italian film from the 1920s to the present day. In Bonadella’s words:

A single fundamental feature of the Italian film market has remained constant from the end of World War I to the present day: the total percentage of Italian-made films distributed within the country at any one time has never risen above approximately one-third of the total number of films in circulation. The results have been predictable: the Italian cinema has never dominated its own home market, even in those years when the quality as well as the quantity of its product have been most favourably received abroad. (Bonadella, 1989: 11)

In 'Temporary American Citizens' Maltby and Vasey focus on Europe's response to Hollywood's dominance during the early 1920s and 1930s. They use as an example a House of Commons debate on film legislation that took place in Britain in 1927 in which a 'Conservative Member of Parliament quoted a Daily Express article claiming that British viewers 'talk America, think America, and dream America. We have several million people, mostly women, who, to all intent and purpose are temporary American citizens.' (Maltby and Vasey, 2002: 181) These words express fears and anxieties around what was seen to be cultural contamination and degradation: commonly known as 'Americanisation of the world'. But for ordinary people in Italy and elsewhere in Europe, Hollywood films offered an imaginative space outside of the harsh reality of everyday life in the interwar period. Maltby and Vasey suggest that 'It was in their own cultures that these audiences imagined America, imitated Hollywood, and irritated their native bourgeois nationalists.' (Maltby and Vasey, 2002: 185).

Even the fascist regime acknowledged the influence of Hollywood on Italian people when a photograph of Tyrone Power and his wife Annabella on honeymoon in Italy, featured in Italy's lifestyle magazine, *L'Illustrazione Italiana* [Milan, 30 July 1939 and 15 October 1939], was used as propaganda to promote the importance of family values. The manner in which American culture was a central part of the communication between state and people during fascism demonstrates some of the complexities of the relationship between Italy and America, which continued to reverberate in modern Italian film and are important to our understanding of the generic specificity of the form of the *giallo* as it emerges in the 1960s as discussed in Chapter Two.

The fact that Italian film during the era would utilise and copy Hollywood styles comes as no surprise. But America's influence was not merely confined to Hollywood film, but also perpetuated in other art forms, and in particular literature which would play an important part in the coming aesthetic of neorealism. The part that America played as a space of imaginary and imaged freedom to young intellectuals during fascism has come to be known as the "American myth".

### **The American "Myth": ideology, politics and counter-culture**

Around 1930, when Fascism was beginning to be "the hope of the world", some young Italians happened to discover in their books America – an America thoughtful and barbaric, happy and truculent, dissolute, fecund, heavy with all the past of the world, and at the same time young, innocent. For several years these young people read, translated, and wrote with a joy of discovery and of revolt that infuriated the official culture; but the success was so great that it constrained the regime to tolerate it, in order to save face. (Pavese cited in Bonadella, 1989: 196)

Pavese's statement helps to elucidate the reasons as to why American culture was seen by young Italian intellectuals as a source of inspiration during the restrictive years of the fascist regime. Implied, whilst not explicit, in Pavese's words is that the appropriation, reappropriation and translation of American cultural forms took the form of an unofficial, counter-cultural revolt. This is Sitney's argument: 'American writing, and its translation and publication in Italy, came to take on an aura of intellectual resistance.' (Sitney, 1995: 43). In direct contradiction to the fears around Americanisation or America 'as a place of fear', is this new imaginary [imagined] America as 'a space of hope'.

And it is this love-hate relationship between Italy and America which is central to understanding the complexity of the later genre of the *giallo*'s relationship with

American culture. By the 1960s, there is a long standing tradition in Italian film for utilising American genres as a form of unofficial and counter-cultural protest. Only by contextualising this tradition as a historical “event” at a particular point in time in response to specific economic and political events that we can begin to understand the *giallo*'s relationship with American film in the 1960s outside of a simplistic “origin/copy” binarism.

It is the publication of *America primo amore* (*America First Love*) in 1937 which best encapsulates the dichotomy of Italy's love-hate relationship with American culture. *America primo amore* documents two years that the writer Mario Soldati spent in America. A commentary of American life in the 1930s which included substantial discussion on Hollywood film, Liehm calls the book ‘a lucid portrait of an industry and a country seen with a mixture of irony and love.’ She continues: ‘It was one of the most important books of the so-called “American myth,” which marked the Italian cultural scene of the thirties, referred to as the “decade of translations”’. (Liehm, 1984: 35). Whilst there is little doubt that American film and literature also provides a counter-cultural impetus elsewhere in Europe, in particular as seen in the French New Wave and Godard's *A Bout De Soufflé*, it is perhaps in Italy that this counter-cultural movement originates. Talking about the ‘flood’ of American literature into Italy in the 1930s, Liehm foregrounds its impact on Italian culture and intellectual thought: ‘There are few nations where American literature made such an impact on an entire generation.’ (Liehm, 1984: 37). Translations of well-known American writers such as Hemmingway, James Cain, Theodore Dreiser, Ezra Pound, Herman Melville, and Steinbeck took place during the 1930s and a new Italian literature was born inhabited by a new type of Italian character: ‘Its heroes came from the country: some were primitives, some half-wits, some tramps - characters close to those of Faulkner's

## Chapter One: **Italian film history: the early years**

### *Iconography, aesthetics and politics*

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Sanctuary and of Melville's *Billy Budd* and *Moby Dick*' (Liehm, 1984: 37). The key text of this period was Vittorini's *Conversazione in Sicilia* (In Sicily, 1941) - a book which Liehm describes as the neorealist's bible. (Liehm, 1984: 37). And whilst the later movement of neorealism would attempt to deny its "Other" literary origins through its overt critique of "Americanism", it is evident from Liehm's analysis of Pavese's earlier essay on Sinclair Lewis (1930) that neorealism was influenced by American culture and in particular literature:

Through his analysis of *Babbitt*, Pavese spelled out his own literary program, which had influenced the development of his writer-peers: the search for life in the provinces, the discovery of a national character, the superiority of the spoken language over the written one, the importance of dialect (slang), and the rupture with existing literary rules. For him, the aim of literary creation was an objectivity attained through the prism of poetic synthesis. (Liehm, 1984: 37).

Many of the above characteristics came to mark neorealism out as a distinctive art form. For example in *Obsession*, not only is the film set in the provinces, but the use of dialect leaves significant parts of the film untranslatable. The search for a new national character is apparent in key neorealist films such as *Rome, Open City* and *Bicycle Thieves* based around new formations of community and identity outside of fascist structures. In opposition to the naturalistic approach to cinema and its concentration on the 'moment' of the present, was calligraphicism which presented a very different world to that of the almost romanticised neorealist movement:

One axis of the filmmaking of the late 1930s and early 1940s was identified with calligraphism, a preoccupation with form through the creation of a highly pattern, claustrophobic, and destructive world where violence and aggression are commonplace. The central characters in the films were often somnambulists, depraved noblemen, avaricious priests, or mad and suicidal women, characters often derived from past literary works and set in the past, though not exclusively. (Landy, 2000: 13)

Associated with directors such as Luigi Chiarini (1900 - 1975) and Renato Castellani (1913-1985), calligraphers adapted authors such as Pushkin, Matilde Serao, Antonio Fogazzaro and Luigi Capuana and works of 'high' art rather than 'popular' culture. Expressionist in its concentration on formalist concerns, calligraphic cinema was inward looking and based almost exclusively around key Italian literary texts. And whilst neorealism was notable for its concern with addressing social and economic issues, calligraphism sought to divorce the cinematic-image from politics and into the sphere of aesthetics. Films such as *Via delle cinque Lune (The Five Moon Street)* and *La bella addormentata (The Sleeping Beauty)*, [1942] both directed by Luigi Capuana are considered classic examples of calligraphism. (Liehm, 1984: 32). The fact that both films attempt a naturalistic depiction of rural life would seem to suggest that they are close in content to neorealism but as Liehm points out in her discussion of *The Sleeping Beauty*: 'the rustic tragedy remains confined to the narrow range of provincial populism permeated with nineteenth-century fatalism, and the film is so beautifully photographed that it appears contrived.' (Liehm, 1984: 33). These two strands in Italian literature and film-making would come together to produce one of Italian film's most enduring and important films, Visconti's *Obsession*. *Obsession* both anticipates neorealism whilst continuing with the formalist concerns of the calligraphic movement. And whilst 20 years separate Visconti's film from the first *giallo*, Bava's *The Evil Eye*, in its use of American culture; exploration of the fragility of gender positions in a war-torn society and personification of the lens of the camera; problematisation of space and time; *Obsession* can be viewed as a direct precedent of the genre.

**Obsession: the politics of parody**



**Figure 6: “Pulp Fiction”:** the most recent cover for *Obsession*

Visconti’s heuristic encounter with Cain’s novel underscores a major influence on Italian culture at this time, as American fiction was to prove a decisive external stimulus to the rise of neo-realism. English-speaking audiences familiar only with the masterpieces of post-war Italian cinema too often overlook the fact that “neorealism” is a term which has come to characterize a given moment in cinematic history but also a significant trend in Italian literature of the same period. (Bonadella, 1989: 25)

Released in 1942 to a general outcry by the fascist state and Catholic church, Visconti’s *Obsession* acts as a bridge between the old spectacular and monumental histories of fascism and the everydayness of neo-realism. More melodramatic than films such as *Bicycle Thieves* (De Sica, 1948) and *Rome, Open City* (Rossellini, 1945) and less ‘overtly’ real at the level of plot, Visconti’s adaptation of Cain’s *The Postman Always Rings Twice* [Fig 6] offers the spectator a series of frescos of Italian life far removed from the idealised constructions of Italy central to fascist discourse. In Derek Duncan’s words: ‘In retrospect, Visconti said that he wanted to make a film that was absolutely Italian’. (Duncan, 2000: 97) The anti-capitalist stance of Visconti’s film and the stark realism of its approach to national identity proved so offensive to the prevailing regime that at its premiere in Salso, holy water was sprinkled in the auditorium by an Archbishop.



Visconti achieved in *Obsession* a magnificent linkage between his tragic protagonists and their environment-their tawdry living quarters, the provincial inn, the streets of Ancona or Ferrara, the sandbanks of the Po River. Extremely lengthy medium shots, a typical feature of Visconti's mature style, allow the director to follow Gino and Giovanni (played brilliantly by Massimo Girotti and Clara Calami) as their destinies unfold and become shaped by their surroundings. (Bonadella, 1989: 28)

Set against the backdrop of Po Valley and the rarefied spaces of Ancona and Ferrara, Visconti translated Cain's familial saga into a dark and dispersive narrative of dispossession and alienation. Although the basic plot remains - a young drifter (Gino) forms an obsessive relationship with an older married woman (Giovanna) and together they murder her older, bourgeois husband (Bragana) - Visconti makes a number of changes both in terms of plot and of aesthetics which challenge the simplistic passion - deception - retribution triad of the 'original'.

In particular, the very tempo of the narrative - over 140 minutes of cinematic time - in which the main emphasis is a detailing of the physical landscape and objects within that landscape, breaks with normal conventions surrounding character motivated plot. As such, Visconti's *Obsession* is not just thematically different to the American adaptations of Cain's novel [Rafelson: 1981 and Garnett 1946], but by locating action within landscape as determining character unsettles the casual-effect link of action-orientation cinema.

Whilst *Obsession* falls outside of Deleuze's schemata for what he calls the "crisis in the action-image [1948: Italy; 1958 France; 1968 Germany (Deleuze, 1992: 211)], in its disruption of cause and effect, Visconti's film clearly signals the beginning of a major change in the aesthetics of Italian cinema; closely linked to the political. This is in fact what Deleuze himself contends in his discussion of *Obsession*: 'In Visconti's film, we witness a very subtle change, the beginnings of a mutation of the general notion of situation.' (Deleuze, 2000: 4). Central to this change is the presentation of character trapped within and by an unforgiving landscape which gives cinematic expression to the general malaise of a country on the verge of defeat, and a people who had suffered under twenty years of fascist rule. The sensory-motor situation is replaced by what Deleuze names 'the stroll, the voyage and the continual return journey.' (Deleuze, 2000: 208).



**Figure 7.** The opening sequences of *Obsession*

The opening credit sequences clearly demonstrate this [Fig 7]. Vast open spaces and wastelands are viewed from behind the windscreen of a speeding truck as the credits

roll up the screen. Instead of an establishing shot which would provide us with a definite location within the space of the cinematic world, the spectator is forced to inhabit a disembodied spatiality [cinematic subjectivity] in which the temporal ordering is determined by the speed of the truck. All the spectator can gather about the positioning of the inn is that it is in the middle of a deserted space. The series of voyages that Gino takes from the inn to the surrounding cities, by truck, by train and by car, offer the viewer no more geographical certainty than the opening. In his discussion of *Obsession*, Duncan suggests that whilst the use of landscape renders the film 'recognisably Italian', there is little 'in the film to locate the events in a country marked by twenty years of fascism.' (Duncan, 2000: 97). Or using Deleuze's words: 'it is a question of undoing space, as well as the story, the plot or the action.' (Deleuze, 2000: 208).

This destruction of conventional cinematic time and space in *Obsession* is one of the film's defining features, and is reflected not just in the coming neorealist movement but within the later form of the *giallo* which explores the fragmentation of subjectivity in a world without totality or linkage (Deleuze, 2000: 208). At the same time, the baroque camera angles and burgeoning camera-consciousness stresses a tension between old forms [calligraphism] and new forms of cinematic expression [neorealism]. By situating neorealism as a mode of discursive engagement with society at the level of the cinematic-image, Deleuze is able to argue that Visconti, Antonioni and Fellini 'are definitely part of neo-realism'. (Deleuze, 2000: 4) This is similar to Kolker's argument, when talking about Antonioni's *Il Grido*, in *The Altering Eye*:

The characters are part of, and undone by, architecture and its sterile lines. The monumental forms of the contemporary world are the signs of their entrapment and isolation; they become reduced figures amid landscapes made

barren by the artefacts of cities and heavy industries. Despair and impotence replace communal activity entirely, and emotion collapses into entropy.<sup>4</sup>

The differences between Visconti's film and the better known American adaptations of Cain's pulp fiction: Garnett (1946) and Rafelson (1981) are significant and help to elucidate the manner in which *Obsession* works in opposition to classical notions of the cinematic image. In the American versions, the narrative is clearly divided into two parts - the initial meeting of the couple and lead-up to the murder, and their eventual retribution at the hands of the law. The murder of the husband is a key sequence in both films: and is particularly violent in Rafelson's 1981 film, although the film is better known for the on-screen chemistry between its stars, Jack Nicholson and Jessica Lange and the now [in]famous kitchen table sequence. The centrality of the murder of the cuckolded husband [and the brutality in the 1981 film] in both American versions operates to disengage the viewer's sympathies from the central characters, and opens up a space for retribution and eventual closure. In its American form, *The Postman Always Rings Twice* operates within a traditional narrative trajectory: from order (equilibrium) "the family"- to disorder (disequilibrium) "the affair" and the "murder", to reorder (reequilibrium) with the capture and punishment of the leading protagonists. The reactionary politics of the Reagan era, as in Hays Code Hollywood, could not allow "immorality" to succeed over "morality": crime had to pay.

Significantly in Visconti's film, the story of the crime and its lawful resolution becomes incidental rather than pivotal which subverts the conventions of "retribution and resolution" central to the narratives of the American films. Instead the film ends

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<sup>4</sup> Kolker, Philip. (1982). Chapter 2. *The Altering Eye: Contemporary International Cinema*. [Online version]. Available at <http://otal.umd.edu/~rkolker/AlteringEye/Chapter2.html>

with Giovanna's [and her unborn child's] futile death on the side of the road. Denying the audience the spectacle of the husband's death, or indeed the deferred lead-up to the crime central to the better known American adaptations, and making the murder of a husband a spur of the moment event brought on by the awfulness of Bragana's desire for children; Visconti produces a text in which the blame for the events, lies with the changing physical landscape in which characters are almost unable to act. And in the end, the landscape catches up with Gino and Giovanna, functioning as the *mise-en-scène* of their eventual entrapment: not at the hands of the law but by the uncontrollable forces of nature.

Unlike later neorealist films in which the possibility of redemption and new beginnings is symbolised by the figure of the child, all hope is lost with Giovanna's and her unborn child's deaths. At the conclusion of *Obsession*, the landscape has literally absorbed the characters and their actions and robbed them of their ability to respond affectively to their changing situation.

Giovanna refuses to leave the inn, a symbol of her desire for continuity and security, until the police are almost at the door, and although Lo Spagnolo offers Gino on several occasions the chance of escape; torn and tortured by his passion for Giovanna, Gino is rendered unable to act on his desire for the freedom offered by the open road.

It is clear that in Visconti's *Obsession* the ability of characters to either act or react and thus motivate and change a given situation is impeded by their surroundings. As such, *Obsession* not only prefigures the films of feted Italian "auteurs" such as Antonioni and Fellini but also the more populist genre of the *giallo* in which protagonists [outsider] becomes trapped in a nightmarish, pulp fictional universe over

which they have little or not control. Further, the deconstruction of character as motivational factor in the narrative trajectory also provides us with a direct link between Visconti's brand of neorealism and the *giallo*: as does the accidental encounter, which leads to death. In an abortive attempt to escape his fate, Gino flees to the city. Whilst staying with Lo Spagnalo, however he accidentally encounters Giovanna and her husband on the way to a singing concert - an encounter which leads to the death of Bragana. For Gino, there is no escaping from his "obsession" for Giovanna and the tragic consequences of that obsession.

### **The Male Gaze**



**Figure 8:** Desire outside the binary: Lo Spagnalo and Gino in *Obsession*

I'll teach you that streets aren't only for girl-chasing (Lo Spagnola to Gino in *Obsession*)

The addition of the character Lo Spagnalo is significant. Sexually ambiguous, La Spagnalo undermines the dominant heterosexuality of the original text and problematises traditional theorisations of the male gaze. *Obsession* maps out a fluidity of desire outside the normative binaries of heterosexuality, as embedded within the familial, through the transmission and transference of the gaze between Giovanna, Gino and Lo Spagnalo. The subversion of the conventions of the [male] gaze is signalled early in the film during the first meeting between the two primary protagonists, Giovanna and Gino. The camera follows Gino as he saunters into the inn, and passes from the public space of the bar into the private [domestic] space of

the kitchen. Caught framed within the doorway from one space to the next, Gino is object rather than the subject of the gaze as the camera slowly and seductively traces the muscles of Gino's torso. Shot as from the point of view of Giovanna sat on a table - placed in a superior position to the standing Gino - the male body freezes the narrative and functions as object 'to-be-looked-at'. Turning Mulvey's words around, we could argue that: '[...]he holds the look, and plays to and signifies [fe]male desire' (Mulvey, 1992: 19). For Richard Dyer in his discussion of "The Male Pin-Up", the fetishisation of the male body simultaneously open up a space for the female gaze whilst negating the connotations of passivity that accompany the looked-at: 'This does violence to the codes of who looks and who is looked at (and how) [...] some attempt is instinctively made to counteract this violation.' (Dyer, 1996: 267). And it is the correlation between power and muscles which allow the body to be both situated as object, whilst retaining connotations of physical [phallic] activity: 'Muscularity is the sign of power - natural, achieved, phallic.' (Dyer, 1996: 273). But Dyer is talking about the conventions of the male body as pin-up in American culture, and by association classical narrative, in which as Steve Neale points out, the assumption of the spectatorial gaze as male means that 'the erotic elements involved in the relation between the spectator and male image have to be repressed and disavowed.' (Neale, 1996: 286). By asserting the possibility and proximity of the homosexual male gaze through the character of Lo Spagnolo, it is clear that desire is *Obsession* cannot be contained within the space of visual pleasure as the prerogative of the white heterosexual male subject. Again, in this *Obsession* prefigures the later *giallo*, in which as we shall see questions of the stability of sexual and gender identity subversion of both the conventions of the [male] gaze and what is seen as the masculinisation of the spectator position.

And whilst it is difficult to argue that Visconti's film totally subverts the iconographic conventions associated with the representation of woman in film [Giovanna's body is fragmented by the camera's gaze when we first meet her], the objectification of Gino's body functions to problematise the male/object and female/subject binaries. This is clearly demonstrated in a later sequence in the narrative, which is set in a hotel room. Significantly, the room has only one double bed, which the two men are forced share [Fig. 8]. As Gino turns over to sleep, Lo Spagnalo lights a match and holds it over the prostrate body of Gino - its flickering light constructing the male body as object of desire. This scene is a contrast to an earlier scene between Gino and Giovanna. In the same way that Gino invests Giovanna's character through his gaze at their first meeting, Lo Spagnalo repeats the gesture by gazing upon Gino. Here bodily gestures and expressions illuminate narrative motivation, rather than explicit dialogue. Duncan suggests that it is not enough to simply see [as some critics have done] the sexualisation of Gino's [Girotti's] body as evidence of Visconti's homosexuality. Instead he points out how the construction of Gino as "improper object of desire" draws our attention to what he calls the "complexity and conventionality of how bodies are seen in cinema". Duncan continues:

By inverting the spectator's expectations of what men and woman usually look like on screen, Visconti successfully challenges commonplace ideas about gender. In particular he contests the very powerful ideas of gender roles and identity that circulated under fascism and found expression in Italian cinema in the 1930s and 1940s. (Duncan, 2000: 103/104)

Landy also suggests as much, when she states that the relationship between Gino and Lo Spagnalo means that: 'the much-vaunted concern in Italian culture with family solidarity is subject to critique.' (Landy, 2000: 214). By opposing the normative triangle of Gino, Giovanna and Bragana with the more fluid, polymorphous triangle of Giovanna, Gino, and Lo Spagnalo, Visconti deconstructs the overt heterosexuality



of Cain's text and directly addresses the mythology of the family central to fascist iconography of the national self. This is made clear throughout the narrative by the manner in which Gino's relationship with Lo Spagnola offers the possibility of escape from the entrapment of his obsession with Giovanna: "the familial" and the "heterosexual". This is highlighted, as Landy contends, at the level of visual iconography. The suffocating, closed and dark spaces of the trattoria which are associated with Giovanna are contrasted by the 'recurrent images of the open road, symbol of the nomadic life' as signified by Lo Spagnola. (Landy, 2000: 213). This juxtaposition of dark and light, entrapment and freedom, communicated at the level of visual iconography, upsets the normative heterosexuality of the familial drama by situating the homosexual as a possible alternative to the heterosexual.

### **La Dolente**



**Figure 9:** Giovanna as "la dolente" in *Obsession*

Just as unconventional as *Obsession's* exploration of masculine identity and sexuality, is Visconti's representation of female subjectivity. And whilst strong,

sympathetic protagonists could be found in early Italian film, fascist ideology came to narrowly define woman in terms of the domestic and the maternal.

Through the OND (Operazione Nazionale Dopolavoro) and ONMI (Opera Nazionale per la Maternità ed Infanzia<sup>5</sup>), the fascist state attempted to valorise a traditional womanhood whose job it was to maintain the integrity of the family. This ideology of what constituted a woman's place in the fascist state was cemented by the instigation of a "Mother's Day" on 24th December: significantly the day before Christ's birth. (Landy, 2000: 10/11). Confined to the home, women were excluded from politics and from the sphere of public life.

The figure of Giovanna in *Obsession* [Fig 9] is thus in direct contradiction to the fascist idealisation of woman as mother and nurturer. Visconti's sympathetic characterisation of Giovanna, the eponymous femme fatale, whose desire leads to her husband's and her own deaths, whilst not be a new characterisation, was in its own way as transgressive of fascist ideology as the unsettling sexuality of Lo Spagnolo. From desire to despair and finally death, Giovanna is the prototype of the Italian femme fatale as "la dolente": the sufferer, and as such defies classification and categories within simplistic binaries of good (virgin)/bad (whore) that define traditional representations of "woman". [Fig 10]

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<sup>5</sup> National Organization for Maternal and Infant Welfare

In *Passion and Defiance: Film in Italy from 1942 to the Present*, Marcia Liehm argues that it is the suffering of the Italian femme fatale that distinguishes her from her European and American counter-parts:

As a product of a matriarchal society, impressed with a strong psychic image of the Virgin Mary, she is not a vamp, the luscious beast of German and American films, but the sufferer (*la dolente*). (Liehm, 1984: 19).



**Figure 10:** A picture of "suffering": Giovanna and Gino in *Obsession*

Only by contextualising the character of Giovanna within this tradition can we understand how gender representation is both culturally inflected and historically responsive. Giovanna, as *la dolente*, brings a tragic dimension to the clichéd plot of *Obsession* which marks out Visconti's film from the American versions, and Cain's original novel. Whilst Gino's relationship with La Spagnalo offers him the possibility of freedom, there is no such path open to Giovanna: instead she has a stark choice between the security of the bourgeois family, her home and her livelihood and the uncertain insecurity of life with Gino.

The extent of Giovanna's suffering is marked out through the postures of her body, as she moves from desire to despair, and finally to death. In a crucial scene, after the murder of the husband, Giovanna and Gino return to the inn. In opposition to the fresco of daily life at the pub, Giovanna and Gino are left alone. Seeking consolation from Gino, Giovanna entreats him to eat with her. But Gino ignores her, and Giovanna's despair is marked on her body, as she slowly moves towards the kitchen. Sitting at the kitchen table and eating, Giovanna is a picture of suffering: her body slumped towards the table and the agony of rejection marked on her face. To return to Liehm's definition of *la dolente*: 'By making men suffer, she suffers more than they do, and she is the one who dies at the end of most of these films.' (Liehm, 1984: 19). Giovanna's bodily postures provide a visual representation of the "crises in the action-image" through which the conventions of time and space are transformed. As Deleuze contends: 'Even the body is no longer exactly what moves; subject of movement or instrument of actions, it becomes rather the developer of time, it shows time through its tiredness and waitings.' (Deleuze, 2000: xi). Time is made visible, tied to bodily becomings, excreted through postures and performance. This is shown in the sequence discussed, as Giovanna's body is shown first standing, then sitting and finally prostrate across the counter on which she was been slowly and mechanically eating her dinner. Sequences like these which map out the minutia of everyday life, do not function to drive the narrative forward and within the traditions of action orientated cinema would be considered inessential; but are essential in that they are evidence of a fundamental change in the conceptual framework of cinema itself.

This is a demonstrative example of what Deleuze means by the "crisis in the action-image" and the corresponding breakdown in the sensory motor schema on which the

action image is based. In *Obsession*, this change is inseparable from an identity politics, which challenges fascist ideology and associated iconography. Providing what Duncan's calls an alternative 'sexual economy' to that made familiar during fascism, Visconti's film challenged the fundamental importance of the family and traditional gender values to fascist ideology. It is no surprise therefore that the film was subsequently banned.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter I explored the intersection of economics, politics and aesthetics in the shape and form of Italian film in the 1930s and 1940s. In situating the national within the wider picture of the international, I showed how Italian culture looked to America in terms of both inspiration and imitation. That Italian film in the 1930s and 1940s shared many of the conventions of Hollywood film during that period is both economic and aesthetic. For audiences, Hollywood film provided an imaginary space outside of the reality of their lives during the trauma of the war. For young intellectuals, America represented a mythological space representing freedom from the restrictions of the fascist regime. These same factors, an understanding of cinema as both commodity and aesthetics, continue to define the shape and form of Italian film. It is also important to note that the binary distinction between "art" and "popular" cinema, as usually used to distinguish American from European and World cinematic forms, does not exist in Italian cinema. Instead, Italian film is noted for its lack of distinctions between "art" and "popular" cinema: as demonstrated in the often highly stylised surfaces of popular genres, such as the peplum film and the *giallo*.

Visconti's *Obsession* with its melodramatic framework and politicisation of cinematic aesthetics is a good example of the lack of distinctions between 'art' and 'popular' cinema in Italian film. It is little surprise therefore that the Italian horror film in the 1960s would share with Visconti's film a concern with permutations of gender and sexuality outside the conventional, or that it would utilise pre-existing American forms as a mechanism through which to do so.

## Introduction

The “glorious sixties” were made possible by an economic boom that offered young filmmakers the opportunity to express themselves in a variety of ways without creating, a consistent trend. (Liehm, 1984: 181).

The 1960s were, as Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, puts it ‘the annus mirabilis for Italian cinema’, with the share of box office receipts up to a unprecedented 50%. (Nowell-Smith, 1996: 5). No small part of Italian film’s success was its parasitic relationship to American cultural forms as demonstrated most notably by the emergence of *The Spaghetti Western* in 1964 with Sergio Leone’s *A Fistful of Dollars*, starring Clint Eastwood. It was, as Landy notes, a time ‘when cinema broke loose of its national moorings, financially and culturally, participating in what is now described as globalization.’ (Landy, 2000: 181). And it is within the immediate historical, political and economic climate, that we need to understand the emergence of the *giallo* as an identifiable and discrete genre, first within Mario Bava’s black and white thriller *The Evil Eye* (1962), and then formalised in the more baroque and violent *Blood and Black Lace* (1964).

As a foundation for my subsequent analyses of the *giallo* films of Dario Argento, this chapter explores the manner in which Bava’s two foundational *giallo* work outside our understanding of the relationship between gender and genre in the horror film. In particular, I focus on how the double representation of *woman-as-detective* and *woman-as-monster* in Bava’s *The Evil Eye* places the genre outside traditional feminist paradigms, which have been used to map out questions of gender and genre in the horror film: specifically Carol Clover’s interrogation of the female heroine in

horror - "The Final Girl"<sup>1</sup> - and Barbara Creed's mapping of female as monster in terms of both gender and sexuality - "The Monstrous Feminine"<sup>2</sup>. The *giallo*, I suggest, is resistant to oedipalisation, both in terms of character and narrative as seen in the manner in which both Bava's *gialli* consciously distance themselves from the psychoanalytical modes of narrative explanation; such as those utilised by Hitchcock's *Psycho* (USA: 1960) and Powell's *Peeping Tom* (UK: 1960). This is clearly demonstrated in Bava's *Blood and Black Lace* in which the police in persisting throughout the narrative to maintain a psychosexual motivation for the killer of a number of beautiful models working at an Italian fashion-house are rendered both incompetent and ineffectual: motivations for murder in the *giallo* are **never that simple**, or indeed so readily expressed through recourse to traditional iconographies of gender.

Both *The Evil Eye* and *Blood and Black Lace* clearly demonstrate the limitations of utilising models based upon the American horror film as a mechanism to understanding the textual play on power and gender which has become a defining feature of the genre over time; and especially through the success of the *giallo* films of Dario Argento. It is here I argue that using Deleuze's work on cinema to explore the narrative complexity of the *giallo* can be particularly productive as it allows us to think differently about the cinematic-image itself, rather than reducing it to a pre-existing framework. This is in opposition to those theorists of the *giallo* who continue to work within psychoanalytical frameworks: I use Gary Needham's recent

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<sup>1</sup> see Clover, Carol. (1992) *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*. pp. 35-41.

<sup>2</sup> see Creed, Barbara (1992). *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism and Psychoanalysis*. pp. 1-7



article "Playing with genre: An introduction to the Italian giallo"<sup>3</sup> as a prototype of this type of approach. In his article Needham makes this following statement:

The *giallo* is a paradigm case in defence of psychoanalysis. It solicits psychoanalytic interpretation and stages every oedipal scenario literally and spectacularly.<sup>4</sup>

In direct opposition to this, I situate the excessive and aggressive femininity of Bava's female protagonists which are not, I argue, easily assimilable into a dialectics of lack, castration and phallic signification<sup>5</sup> but necessitate a different and less reductive theoretical approach. Using Deleuze's work on cinema, and his earlier writings of capitalism with Felix Guattari, I propose an alternative model of flux and multiplicity beyond the binary of psychoanalytical discourse.

This chapter begins by locating the emergence of the *giallo* as genre within what can only be called the Americanisation of Italian film in the 1960s. Using Marcia Landy's discussion of Italian popular cinema in terms of a grafting in of national concerns onto popular forms of American culture, I show that the relationship between American and Italian film, whilst parasitical, is also both parodic and political. This is followed by a short explanation of Deleuze's discussion of the differences between the *movement-image* and the *time-image* in order to provide an introduction to the

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<sup>3</sup> Needham, Gary (2002a). Playing with Genre: An introduction to the Italian *giallo*. *Kinoeye: new perspectives on European film*. Vol 2, Issue 11, 10 June 2002. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.kinoeye.org/02/11/needham11.html>

<sup>4</sup> Needham, Gary (2002a). Playing with Genre: An introduction to the Italian *giallo*. *Kinoeye: new perspectives on European film*. Vol 2, Issue 11, 10 June 2002 [online]. Available at: <http://www.kinoeye.org/02/11/needham11.html>

<sup>5</sup> In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the figure of woman is constructed in terms of a relational "object" to the male subject. Gendered roles are determined by access to the phallus, even though it is an illusory rather than real object. In these terms, "woman" is not a subject in her own right, but rather the object that confirms male privilege under patriarchy.

terms that are used in my analyses of Bava's *The Evil Eye* and *Blood and Black Lace*.

Through a detailed discussion of key sequences from Bava's *The Evil Eye* and *Blood and Black Lace*, I foreground the manner in which traditional understandings of both gender and the gaze are transgressed through the use of mise-en-scène, iconography and framing. I draw on Dika's (1996) theorisation of point-of-view in the "slasher" film in "The Stalker-Film, 1978-81" as a marking a point of departure between more conventional uses of point-of-view in the horror film and the *giallo*. In working outside conventions of cinematic framing and the location of the gaze within that frame, I suggest that we can best understand the *giallo* using Deleuze's taxonomy of the *time-image*. This chapter then will provide the basis for the analyses of Argento's *gialli* in **Part II** of the thesis.

### **The immediate background**

Political developments in the late 1940s and early 1950s would play an important part in providing the framework for the success of Italian film production in the 1960s, as well as explaining the politicisation of cinematic narrative in the 1960s. It was the coming to power of the Christian Democrats in 1948, which irrevocably altered the course of Italian film history. In opposition to the low budget methods of filmmaking and leftist sympathies that defined the neorealist aesthetic of films such as *Paisà* (Rossellini: 1946) and *Bicycle Thieves* (De Sica: 1948), the new government favoured a more American system of studio-based productions. The Communist party was in disarray, and unable to provide a definable opposition. As such it was incapable of taking advantage of the unpopularity of The Christian Democrats, whose use of

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excessive force to quell demonstrations and strikes, was a source of disquiet to many of its supporters. (Sitney, 1995: 102). Instead it was the neo-Fascists that became a powerful political force in the 1950s as demonstrated by the fact that by 1957, The Christian Democrats were forced to form allegiances with them. Scandals were the norm as evidenced by both the events at Montesi in 1953 – described by Sitney as: ‘the death of a young woman on a beach near Rome in 1953, initially called an accident, [that] became the subject of a national obsession for four years.’ (Sitney, 1995: 103) - and the accusations of cover-ups and suppression of evidence by highly placed government officials. In Sitney’s words: ‘Political life had become a theater of decadence.’ (Sitney, 1995: 103).

At the same time, and perhaps somewhat paradoxically, there seemed to be a proliferation of intellectual and critical debate in journals such as *Nuovi argomenti*, *Officina* and *Il Contemporaneo*. Film journalism also flourished in both the traditional film journals *Bianco e nero* and newer ones such as *Cinema nuovo* and *Film critica*. (Sitney, 1995: 103). In her monograph on films of Dario Argento, *Broken Mirrors / Broken Minds* (1994), McDonagh highlights a discernable trend in European cinema at the time towards film directors having been film critics, naming Bertolucci, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Truffaut, Paul Schrader and Jean-Luc Godard. In terms of the Italian film industry, McDonagh points to the contradictions between ‘on the one hand the practical Italian film industry, with its relentless emphasis on genre and direct production practices’ and ‘on the other, the cerebral world of film criticism, with its inevitable analysis and intellectual distance.’ (McDonagh, 1994: 31). Significant also was the new theoretical space being mapped out in cinema with the French New Wave and in literature with the Nouveau Roman in which narrative

was being transformed from a linear signifying text into a non-linear and labyrinth structure against which the conventions of character and motivation were being deconstructed.

In Italy, both Michelangelo Antonioni and Federico Fellini came to prominence in the 1950s bringing these modernist notions of narrative to the Italian film in order to interrogate and critique consumer and cultural life. 1960 was a year of triumph for art cinema in Italy with the premieres of Antonioni's *L'avventura* [April], Fellini's *La dolce vita* [February] and Visconti's *Rocco e I suoi fratelli* [September]. It is central to point out, and key to our understanding of Italian film in the 1960s, that the delimitations between 'art' and 'popular' cinema did not [and do not] exist in the same form as in other European and American cinemas. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith highlights this in *The Companion to Italian Cinema*:

Significantly, however, all of cinema has been seen as one. Popular comedians (like Totò) or singers (Domenico Modugno) have appeared in films by 'art cinema' directors such as Pasolini, while top writers (like Ennio Flaiano) and directors (Bertolucci) have not hesitated to dirty their fingers with genres such as the spaghetti Western. Films by Fellini (*La dolce vita*) and Visconti (*rocco e I suoi fratelli/Rocco and his Brothers*) have been smash-hit box-office successes, while popular melodramas such as those by Raffaello Matarazo and horror films by Mario Bava or Dario Argento have been the object of cult admiration by intellectuals. (Nowell-Smith, 1996: ix).

This is evidenced by the fact that Mario Bava's films were premiered at 'art' house cinemas in France before going on wider distribution, as well as in the way that both Bava's and Argento's *gialli* also articulate similar political and cultural concerns of those directors that we associate with Italian 'art' cinema such as Antonioni and Fellini.

Due to Italian and American collaborations in the 1960s, Italy was placed second behind the United States commercially. According to Liehm: 'The thoroughly organized and prearranged Hollywood way of filmmaking merged with Italian craftsmanship, improvisation, and reliance on chance.' (Liehm, 1984: 182). The mythological genre, or peplum film, had proved to be extremely popular with domestic and international audiences with the first Hercules film *Le fatiche di Ercole* (*The Labors of Hercules*, Pietro Francisci, Italy/Spain: 1957) making 900 million lire alone in Italy. 19 more films followed, many funded either partly or totally by American money. And between the years 1956-1964, the *peplum* film accounted for 10 percent of Italian production: 170 films in all. In 1962, Dino De Laurentiis built "Dinocitta", large studios specifically for foreign film companies. It was out of this relationship that the *Spaghetti Western* emerged in 1964 with Sergio Leone's *A Fistful of Dollars* (West Germany/Spain/Italy). Again, quick to capitalise on success, the Italian film industry produced over 300 Spaghetti Westerns between the years of 1964 and 1972. Another significant direction in Italian film of the period was the mass production of the erotic film, introduced first by Alessandro Blasetti's *Europa di notte* (*Europe by Night*, 1957): an Italian/French co production. Liehm suggests that these films map out similar political concerns as those in 'art' cinema, in terms of 'unconscious revolt against the "idolization of the family", against the sacred image of "the mamma" and the "mother-wife-sister" mythology (expressed in all its complexity in Fellini's films).' (Liehm, 1984: 187).

This relationship between "popular" and "art" cinema on the one hand and Italian and American film on the other hand, helps to explain the formal aesthetics of the Italian thriller or *giallo* as it emerges in the 1960s: first with Mario Bava's *The Evil Eye*

(1962) and subsequently formalised in *Blood and Black Lace* (1964). It is not enough, as I suggested in *Chapter One*, to view the American influence on Italian film in purely negative terms but we also need to understand the manner in which it opens up an imaginary “other” space for the mediation of specific cultural and political concerns. We saw in *Chapter One* how Visconti's appropriation of American culture, in the form of his adaptation of James M. Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, *Obsession*, provided a suitable vehicle for a sustained political and allegorical critique of the institutions at the heart of fascist ideology including the family and heterosexuality. In *Italian Film*, Marcia Landy draws our attention to the nature in which the relationship between American and Italian film is not simply a question of parasitic imitations of the host culture.

In one view, the weighty presence of U.S. films and television can be taken as a prime evidence for the ubiquitous and devastating nature of North American economic cultural imperialism. Alternatively, Americanism can be interpreted as selective appropriation of the host culture on the part of the foreign culture for its own uses. (Landy, 2000: 182).

Using the *Spaghetti Western* as an example of the second definition of Americanism, Landy states: ‘The emphasis on landscape; demographic mobility [..]; the focus on brutality, brigandage, revenge, and criminality, and the stark competition for economic power - all are conditions that inhere in Italian folklore but can be grafted onto prevailing representations of Americanism.’ This “grafting” on of cultural concerns onto the form produced by the host culture, allowed directors, according to Landy, a frame for interrogating ‘political issues involving notions of power, economics, nation and cultural identity.’ (Landy, 2000: 184)

In *Vital Crises in Italian Cinema: Iconography. Stylistics. Politics*. Sitney maintains that the political is often communicated within Italian film through the use of the iconographic. This is clearly demonstrated with reference to two key texts of neorealism: Rossellini's *Rome, Open City* and De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves*. In *Bicycle Thieves* (sometimes inappropriately translated as *The Bicycle Thief*<sup>6</sup>), the search for the stolen bicycle allows a mapping of working class existence in Italy post World War 2. At the same time, the tripartite structure of the film - Friday, Sunday, Monday - is significant in allowing a more symbolic reading of the text in terms of religious imagery and iconography. Rossellini's *Rome, Open City* functions similarly: as a document on everyday life, this time set during the war, and as religious allegory.

[Fig. 11]



**Figure 11:** The torture of Manfredi: piestic imagery in *Rome, Open City*

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<sup>6</sup> The film is about bicycle thieves in the plural, and the reduction to the singular reduces the allegorical meaning of the narrative.

The final sequences of Don Pietro's [St Peter?] execution draw both verbal parallels, Don Pietro's words 'It is finished [...] forgive them they know not what they do,' and visual parallels, Don Pietro's bodily posture with bloody head and arms outstretched, with the crucifixion. According to Sitney, the politics of *Rome, Open City* lie in exactly the manner in which Christian and Resistance iconography is mapped onto each other. (Sitney, 1995: 11). This use of iconography to map out the political is, as we shall see, a dominant convention of Argento's *giallo*, especially in terms of his representation of woman.

It is useless to delude oneself about it: neorealism was not regeneration; it was only a vital crisis, however excessively optimistic and enthusiastic at the beginning. Thus poetic action outran thought, formal renewal preceded the reorganization of the cultural through its vitality (let's not forget the year '45). (Pasolini cited in Sitney, 1995: 1).

In her discussion of what Sitney terms "second vital crises" in Italian cinema (the first being that expressed by neorealism), Sitney points out how by 1963, there was a significant decrease in communal and collective activities in Italy. Not only did a substantial number of Italians no longer go to Church but over half owned televisions which suggested: 'a more passive and familial use of leisure time.' (Sitney, 1995: 207). This "atomization" of the individual, as Sitney calls it, was also expressed in Italian film with directors turning: 'toward the elaboration of private fantasies and other expressions of subjective psychology.' (Sitney, 1995: 208). In his address (which would later be published in 1965 as 'The Cinema of Poetry') to The Pesaro Film Festival in 1964, Pasolini talked about the growing international tendency towards 'a cinema of poetry'. Sitney describes this as an: 'obsessive emphasis on self-conscious technical gestures [that] indirectly represented the subjectivity of neurotic character.' (Sitney, 1995: 208).



Bava's 1962 film *The Evil Eye* with its neurotic heroine, and obsessive framings fits within Pasolini's definition of cinema as poetry, and as we shall see falls into Deleuze's definition of the *time-image*. At the same time, the use of the iconographic (as opposed to the psychological) in the first Bava's *giallo* and subsequently in Argento's provides a mechanism through which to critique patriarchy [the oppression of women], capitalism and at times, the imperialistic impulse: signified by the positioning of the American [and at times British] "Other" as spectatorial surrogate and decoder of textual ambiguity.

Existing theoretical definitions of the *giallo* however have a tendency to maintain the genre's similarity with more mainstream [American] forms of horror, which as we saw in the main introduction to this thesis, are often used as the prototypical texts for the application of psychoanalytical models of interpretation. An example of this can be found in *The BFI Companion to Horror* in which Kim Newman offers the following definition of the *giallo*:

A masked, black-gloved killer is stalking beautiful female victims. Suspicion is ubiquitous, because everyone is hiding something. Motivations are tenuous, murder methods grotesquely elaborate. Cinematic spectacle is foregrounded for its own sake, and there is a frankly perverse dwelling on violence. (Newman, 1996: 136)

The very first sentence of his definition immediately situates the genre within the known by its reference to the traditional gender positioning of the [American] horror film. And as we shall see, in the *giallo* not all the victims are female, and neither is the masked killer male. The *giallo* is perhaps best described as a hybrid of the horror/detective genre in that it offsets the viscerality of horror in the grotesque and

baroque “set-pieces” for which it is noted alongside the intellectualism of the detective thriller. In ‘The Italian Horror Film: What makes the Blood Drip So Well?’

Donato Totaro defines the “set piece” in the following terms:

A set piece is an elaborately choreographed sequence that usually (and although not exclusively) takes place in one location. In the Italian horror film set pieces involve one to three characters and (usually) features violence, gore and death. Fulci, Argento, Bava and Lenzi all, to varying degrees and styles, practice the art of the set piece.<sup>7</sup>

Its origins are usually traced back to the marketing of American [and British] thrillers and classical detective novels from 1929 onwards by Mondadori, one of the largest publishing houses in Italy. The lurid yellow covers of these books gave rise to the term “*giallo*” to describe them (*giallo* is Italian for yellow), in the same way that “*série noir*” in France were known as “black” novels.

In “Playing with genre: An introduction to the Italian *giallo*”, Gary Needham (2002a)<sup>8</sup> offers what starts out as an extremely useful discussion of the historical location of the *giallo* as genre: pointing out that the term *giallo* is: “less fixed as a genre than its written counterpart” and also that: “by its very nature the *giallo* challenges our assumptions about how non-Hollywood films should be classified, going beyond the sort of Anglo-American taxonomic industry in order to designate something

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<sup>7</sup> Totaro, Donato (1997). The Italian horror film: What makes the blood drip so well?. *Offscreen*. 10 July 1997. [Online]. Available at:

[http://www.horschamp.qc.ca/9707/offscreen\\_essays/italian\\_horro.html](http://www.horschamp.qc.ca/9707/offscreen_essays/italian_horro.html)

<sup>8</sup> Needham, Gary (2002a). Playing with Genre: An introduction to the Italian *giallo*. *Kinoeye: new perspectives on European film*. Vol 2, Issue 11, 10 June 2002 [Online]. Available at: <http://www.kinoeye.org/02/11/needham11.php>

specific.”<sup>9</sup> It seems strange, if not paradoxical, given Needham's understanding of the specificity of the *giallo* in terms of Italian national cinema, that he ends up by appropriating it within the dominant terminology [ideology] of psychoanalysis. This is evidenced by his statement: ‘The *giallo* literally begs for psychoanalytical inquiry and at the same time stages both the “analytical scene” and the “classic symptoms.”’<sup>10</sup> In Needham's terms, the *giallo* literally and metaphorically stages the Freudian primal scene as primary source of narrative disruption. The convention of the genre of the “witness”, which as we shall see is a specific convention of Argento's *gialli*, returning to the scene/seen of the crime in order to try and remember what is was [s]he saw, Needham “reads” in terms of the Freudian “nachtraglichkeit”. The multiple repetitions of murder which structure the narrative and form the “set-pieces” for which the genre is noted, is also theorised in Freudian terms as evidence of the “compulsion to repeat”.

This is similar to Robin Wood's meta-theorisation of of the American horror film in terms of repression of the “Other” as outlined in his essay “An Introduction to the American Horror Film.” Wood contends: ‘that in a society built on monogamy and family there will be an enormous surplus of sexual energy that will have to be repressed; and that which is repressed will always strive to return.’ (Wood, 1984: 177). I would suggest that Needham is drawing on this type of analyses of the American horror film in his discussion of the *giallo*: an approach which reduces the historical and political significance of the *giallo* to an imitation of a existing dominant

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<sup>9</sup> Needham, Gary (2002a). Playing with Genre: An introduction to the Italian *giallo*. *Kinoeye: new perspectives on European film*. Vol 2, Issue 11, 10 June 2002 [online]. Available at: <http://www.kinoeye.org/02/11/needham11.php>

form. This is an instance of what Deleuze and Guattari call in their discussion of the rhizome, “the representative logic of the tree”, which always finds what it seeks:

Its goal is to describe a de facto state, to maintain balance in intersubjective relations, or to explore an unconscious that is already there from the start, lurking in the deep recesses of memory and language. It consists of a tracing, on the basis of an overcoding structure or supporting axis, something that comes ready-made. The tree articulates and hierarchies tracings; tracings are like the leaves of a tree. (1988: 12).

Or appropriating Sitney's terms, we could argue that ‘viewed through the ‘distant optic of American criticism’, the *giallo* has lost both its political and allegorical significance. (Sitney, 1995: 13). And it is here by theorising the *giallo* within a Deleuzian taxonomy of the *time-image* that we are able to revisit the genre outside the constraints of pre-existing frameworks, and map the workings of its “‘perverse pleasures” beyond the binary.

### **The *giallo* as Time-Image**

The fact is that, in Europe, the post-war period has greatly increased the situations which we no longer know how to react to, in spaces which we no longer know how to describe. These were ‘any spaces whatever’, deserted but inhabited, disused warehouses, waste ground, cities in the course of demolition or reconstruction. And in these any-spaces-whatever a new race of characters was stirring, kind of mutant: they saw rather than acted, they were seers [...] Situations could be extremes, or on the contract, those of everyday banality, or both at once: what tends to collapse, or at least lose its position, is the sensory-motor schema which constricted the action-image of the old cinema.’ (Deleuze, 2000: i)

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<sup>10</sup> Needham, Gary (2002a). Playing with Genre: An introduction to the Italian *giallo*. *Kinoeye: new perspectives on European film*. Vol 2, Issue 11, 10 June 2002 [online]. Available at: <http://www.kinoeye.org/02/11/needham11.php>

In *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, Deleuze argues that the *time-image* emerged from the ashes of World War 2, which had deconstructed the determined and determinable spaces of Europe into a series of disconnected and spatially disparate any-space-whatevers. Within these spaces emerged a new 'race of characters' who 'saw rather than acted'. As a response to this, the sensory-motor schema articulated within the dictates of the action-image collapsed, and the image itself was called into crisis. What was needed instead according to Deleuze was 'a new type of tale [recit] capable of including elliptical and the unorganised, as if the cinema had to begin again from zero, questioning afresh all the accepted facts of the American tradition' (Deleuze, 1992: 211). And it is no coincidence that it was in Italy that this new image began to take form within the discourse of neorealism. Neither victor or outright loser, with a cinema which still worked within the dictates of the 'auteur' system and mainly unrestricted by the state: 'The Italians were therefore able to have an intuitive consciousness of a new image in the course of being born.' (Deleuze, 1992: 211/2).

In *Chapter One*, we saw some of the characteristics of this new image in my discussion of Visconti's *Obsession*. But this stage marks a transitional point between two types of cinematic-images: the *movement image* and the *time image*: the time-image is yet to be realised. Instead, neorealism articulates what Deleuze calls a 'crisis in the action-image' seen within the break down between action and reaction/cause and effect in Italian neorealism, and as prefigured by Visconti's *Obsession*.

In *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, Deleuze situates the action-image within the tradition of cinematic realism. Deleuze constitutes realism in the terms of milieu and modes of behaviour: 'milieux which actualise and modes of behaviour which

embody.’ He continues to a definition of the action-image as ‘the relation between the two and all the varieties of this relation.’ (Deleuze, 1992: 141). According to Deleuze, the action-image represents: ‘the universal triumph of the American cinema, to the point of acting as a passport for foreign directors who contributed to its formation.’ (Deleuze, 1992: 141). The action-image has two aspects: the large form and the small form. In the large form, character is situated as reactive and responsive to his/her environment. A character is placed in a ‘situation’ which demands a response; the character ‘acts’ to modify the milieu with or without the help of other characters which results in a ‘restored or modified situation, a new situation.’ (Deleuze, 1992: 141/142). Deleuze quantifies this using the “mathematical formula” SAS – situation(1)/action/situation(2) or ‘from situation to the transformed situation via the intermediary of the action’ (Deleuze, 1992: 142)<sup>11</sup>. This reads similarly to Todorov’s definition of classical narrative: an original equilibrium - disruption (leading to transformation) - renewed equilibrium. To illuminate, Deleuze offers as an example the genre of *Film Noir*:

From this point of view, the *film noir* describes the milieu, sets out situations, holds itself back in preparation for action and action which is precisely organised (the model of the hold-up for example), and finally emerges into a new situation, the most common being re-established order. (Deleuze, 1992: 145)

This is also the type of narrative trajectory that defines the form of the American horror film, especially in its modern psychological form [as deriving from Hitchcock’s seminal *Psycho*]: the realist settings; the pattern of male violence and female violation; and the re-establishing of patriarchal order by the overcoming of the monstrous [and usually male] disruptive agent.

The opposite of SAS (the large form) is the small form which moves from the action to the situation, towards a new action: ASA. Rather than the situation leading to a reaction on the part of character and thereby new situation, the situation emerges from the relationships between actions. Deleuze argues that within ASA the image is moved from the realm of the ethical into that of the comedic, although the small form of the action image is not restricted to comedy. This is a more economical form of the action-image than SAS and may in part be a response to practical and economic restraints, which necessitate an economy of action. Deleuze uses the films of Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton as operating within the remit of the small form of the action-image as 'comedy of manners'<sup>12</sup>.

The action-image is an essential component of what Deleuze terms the *movement - image* which operates within what he terms the realm of organic representation, a particular representation of history both pathogenic and structural, the only 'causes it understands are simple duels opposing individuals [...]' (Deleuze, 1992: 150). Again we could situate this within the form of the American horror film in which the narrative trajectory is, as Dika points, out only concerned with the relationship between the heroine [final girl] and the monster<sup>13</sup>. Organic representation is ruled by the fact that 'there must be a big gap between the situation and the action to come, but this gap only exists to be filled, by a process marked by caesuras, as so many

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<sup>12</sup> see Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*: 'Chapter 10 - The action-image: The small form', pages 160 - 177

<sup>13</sup> Writing about the victims in the "stalker" film, Dika states: 'Their activities are transitional, and, in terms of narrative development, static. It is primarily the killer, and to a lesser extent, the heroine, who have the means to drive the narrative forward, for only these two characters can both see and use violence.' (Dika, 1996: 89)

retrogressions and progressions.’ (Deleuze, 1992: 155). Modelled on early American film and German expressionism, the cinema of *the movement image* is also a ‘cinema of behaviour (behaviourism).’ Deleuze qualifies this: ‘behaviour is an action which passes from one situation to another, which responds to a situation in order to try and modify it or to set up a new situation.’ (Deleuze, 1992: 155). Rodowick locates the *movement-image* within American cinema: ‘This movement of action and reaction derives from an American ideology of will, a belief that the mastery of environments and opponent is inevitable and infinitely extendible.’ (Rodowick, 1997: 12)<sup>14</sup>. This ideology of will is also expressed in the American horror film in which difference [in the form of the other] is eventually overcome, and the continued operation of patriarchy and capitalism reaffirmed. This is evidenced by the original cycle of the “slasher” film, in which immoral behaviour leads to death and the “monster”, in Wood’s terms, constitutes a: ‘punishment for sexual promiscuity.’ (Wood, 1984: 193).

In direct opposition to the *movement-image* is the *time-image* in which the operation of cause and effect ceases to function, and characters are unable to react or transform their social milieu. This is the image that Deleuze contends that we first see being born in Italian cinema post World War 2. Nearly 40 years later, during what Sitney calls the second “vital crises” in Italian film, a new way of thinking about the cinema can be found in Italian film:

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<sup>14</sup> But as Rodowick points out Deleuze’s discussion of the *movement-image* is not restricted to the model provided by American film, the so-called classical model of narrative, but also films which use montage to construct meaning, including the films of Eisenstein: ‘Deleuze makes no distinction between avant-garde and narrative cinema [...] American silent film, the Soviet montage school, and the French impressionist cinema are all grouped in the first volume [The Movement Image].’ (Rodowick, 1997: 11)



From its opening moments, with heir lengthy shots of the refinery and of the waste deposits surrounding it - and the aimless wandering of Giuliana through this ostensible wasteland - the view is thrown into another realm of perception. (Landy on *Deserto rosso (Red Desert, 1964)*, 2000: 352)

In her discussion of *Deserto rosso (Red Desert, 1964)*, Marcia Landy (2000) argues that Antonioni's film brings to the fore issues around narrative and visibility. Landy contends that *Deserto rosso* articulates a new approach to cinematic narrative at the level of both content and form which resists simplistic interpretations: 'the film cannot be reduced to a simple sociological reflection on the "alienation" of the modern person in the modern industrial world' (Landy, 2000: 352). Or in Deleuzian terms, is not reducible to a behaviourist [or Americanised] model of cinematic narrative. Landy argues that what is at stake in Antonioni's vision of the world 'is the relation between seeing and understanding, [...] in ways that suggest there is no immediate relation between the two and [...] the work to be done by the spectator touches the status not only of cinema but of modern thought, its limits and its possibilities.' (Landy, 2000: 353). That we also see this reflected in the *giallo* should come as little surprise, giving the lack of distinctions that Italian cinema makes between 'art' and 'popular' film.

In the following analyses of Mario Bava's *The Evil Eye* and *Blood and Black Lace*, I show how the problematisation of perception, outside [beyond] point of view, challenges our understanding of the function of gender and its relationship with genre in the horror film, based as it is upon American models. This constitutes perhaps the *giallo*'s foremost challenge to traditional understandings of the "gaze" in horror film

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on which those paradigms are based, which situate the spectator as male, either physically or psychically, through analyses of the sutured space between the diegetic and extra-diegetic spectator, taking Creed's 'the monstrous-feminine' and Clover's 'the final girl' as the standard for discussions of the representation of gender relations and the methodology of the gaze in the horror film.

### ***The Evil Eye: the first "giallo"***

Influenced by the narrative conventions and aesthetic formalism of neorealism as much as by the forms of the horror and thriller genres, Bava's first *giallo* narrates the story of Nora Draiston (Leticia Roman), a naive young woman, who, while visiting her sick aunt in Italy, witnesses a murder one dark and rainy night after fleeing from the house where her aunt has suddenly passed away. With the help of an Italian doctor, Marcello Bassi (John Saxon), with whom she becomes romantically involved, Nora seeks to solve the mystery of what she saw that night, as the next morning the body seems to have mysteriously disappeared. These initial sequences set up what will become one of the main conventions of the *giallo*<sup>15</sup>, in generic terms: the foreign outsider (usually American or British) who accidentally witnesses a crime and then subsequently, and usually consciously, undertakes a private investigation into the mystery; not heeding warnings by the police or friends not to get involved.

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<sup>15</sup> Although this needs some qualification as the relationship between the detection strand and the outright visceral horror in the *giallo* varies from director to director and from film to film. For example, Mario Bava's *A Bay of Blood* (1971) dispenses with crime-detection strand altogether and Massimo Dallamano's *What have they done to your daughters* (1974) is more police-procedural than *giallo*: although both films are classified as *giallo*.

## Chapter Two: *Giallo*

### Bava's *The Evil Eye and Blood and Black Lace*

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Part mystery thriller, part romance and part *film noir*, *The Evil Eye* is very much more restrained than any of Bava's later *gialli* or indeed Argento's *gialli*: indeed it has a very low body count by *giallo* standards. Unlike the baroque and garish use of colour for which the *giallo* becomes known, as in Bava's next *gialli* *Blood and Black Lace*, *The Evil Eye* is shot in black and white consciously drawing intertextual connections both to Hitchcock's earlier *Psycho* and the genre of *film noir*, with which the *gialli* shares literary origins.

The multiplicity of its intertextual referencing is a distinguishing feature of Bava's *giallo*. Nora's experiences in hospital (after her collapse on the night of the murder), where she is accused of being a raving drunk, indicates a continuing dialogue with the work of Hitchcock (an innocent character's mistaken identity) as does the original title *The Girl Who Knew Too Much* (a clear reference to Hitchcock's *The Man Who Knew Too Much*). Newspaper clippings detailing the exploits of a so-called "alphabet Killer" self-reflexively refer back to the work of the Queen of Detective Fiction, Agatha Christie. And it is no coincidence that the first shot of Nora on the plane shows her holding a lurid pulp fiction. Just as Nora's ravings about a murder are dismissed as paranoia, her insistence on seeing herself as the next/fourth victim (her name begins with the letter "D") are attributed to her appetite for reading detective fiction. It is typical of the use of Commedia Dell'Arte<sup>16</sup> humour in the *gialli* that Nora

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<sup>16</sup> Commedia Dell'Arte is the ancient Italian improvisational masked comedy born in the Renaissance and performed until the first half of the eighteenth century. Troupes traveled city to city earning their living by performing comedies, farces, parodies and political satires in the streets, markets, and at carnivals and fairs. The performers drew from every day life material for their shows, harping on every class, custom, and law. The stock characters were universally identified by their individual costumes and masks and never changed regardless of what the scenario developed. The masks, usually leather, were inseparable from the actor throughout the performance, even if the character changes costumes. The mask is the driving force behind each character's

as a reader of detective stories finds herself trapped in the 'fictional' world of a detective story. This transgression of the boundaries between the real and the imaginary within the cinematic frame foregrounds the "fictionality" of the cinematic-image. In these terms, we can best understand the meta-textuality of the *giallo* and its relation to Americanism in terms of "bricolage".

In *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze and Guattari utilise Claude-Levi-Strauss definition of bricolage as a characteristic of desiring-machines: the production of a production:

the possession of a stock of materials or of rules of thumb that are fairly extensive, though more or less hodgepodge-multiple and at the same time limited; the ability to rearrange fragments continually in a new and different patterns or configurations; and as a consequence, an indifference toward the act of producing and toward the product, toward the set of instruments to be used and toward the over-all result to be achieved. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984: 7)

In consciously reworking the "old" [pulp fiction/the thriller/the horror film], *The Evil Eye*, defamiliarises and destabilises the conventions and readings associated with it; producing the "new" rather than reproducing the old.

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unique movements and dialect. The scenarios usually centered around the misfortunes of Pantalone, the senile old man, or a love triangle between the lovers and another character (Il Capitano, Arrlechino, or the Il Dottore). Commedia Dell'Arte. [Online]. Available at: <http://alpha.furman.edu/~dcummins/commedia/html>

**Woman-as-detective: Nora - *the final girl*?**



Figure 12: Nora as "the final girl" in *The Evil Eye*

The image of the distressed female most likely to linger in memory is the image of the one who did not die: the survivor, or Final Girl. She is the one who encounters the mutilated bodies of her friends and perceives the full extent of the preceding horror and of her own peril; who is chased, cornered, wounded; whom we see scream, stagger, fall, rise and scream again. (Clover, 1992: 35)

By focalising the narrative through Nora, Bava's *giallo* sets the trend for films such as John Carpenter's *Halloween*, and indeed can be said to be the foundational text for the "female heroine" or the 'final girl' rather than Hitchcock's *Psycho*<sup>17</sup> as often assumed [Fig 12]. At the same time, whilst Nora's naiveté and sexual inexperience are similar to those of the 'final girl' in the American *slasher* film, she is neither a target of male psychosexual fury or female revenge. Nora insists on solving the mystery of what she 'saw' that night, refusing to heed patriarchal warnings (the doctors) to leave the deductive process to the symbolic agents of the law (the police), and rejects, for much of the film, the amorous advances of Marcello Bassi.

The figure of Nora, like her murderous other, Laura, is oppositional to the more traditional renderings of female subjectivity in *Psycho* (Lila) and *Peeping Tom*

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<sup>17</sup> In *Psycho*, the narrative is not focalised through Lila and her input into the detection and revelation of the Norman is negligible. Therefore it is difficult to see how she can be seen as the model for the final girl as Carol Clover does in *Men, Women and Chainsaws* (Clover, 1992, 40/41).

(Helen), and those later configurations in the “slasher”/“stalker” genre such as Sally in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Hooper, US: 1974) and Laurie in *Halloween* (Carpenter, US: 1979). Instead Nora embodies a block of becoming, a line of flight, which resists traditional theorisations and recuperations, which situate ‘woman’ as ‘lack’ against the signifying body of ‘man’ and/or a cinematic substitute for the male spectator.

It is Nora's resistance to oedipalisation - to be contained with the either/or binary - which allows us to think outside of traditional critiques and understanding of cinematic spectatorship in the horror film, which can be traced back to Laura Mulvey's groundbreaking work on visual pleasure in the 1970s as discussed in my introduction to the thesis. Working from the same ‘one-sex’ model as Mulvey, Carol Clover in her discussion of the figure of the “final girl” in the “slasher” film substitutes female transvestism<sup>18</sup> for male transvestism.

The ‘final girl’, according to Clover, allows an acting out of an acting-out of male fears and desires which otherwise would be unacceptable within the conventions of filmic narrative and form. Clover contends: ‘The Final Girl is, on reflection, a congenial double for the adolescent male. She is feminine enough to act out in a gratifying way, a way unapproved for adult males, the terrors and masochistic

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<sup>18</sup> In “Afterthoughts on ‘Narrative Cinema and Visual Pleasure’ Inspired by King Vidor's *Duel in the Sun* (1946)”, Laura Mulvey asserts the possibility that the female spectator can identify with the dominant male hero: ‘She may find herself, unconsciously almost, enjoying the freedom of action and control over the diegetic world that identification with a hero provides’ (Mulvey, 1992: 29). But this “fantasy of masculinization” however only further functions to remind the female spectator of her lack and that she does not possess the phallus.

pleasures of the underlying fantasy, but not so feminine to disturb the structures of male competence and sexuality.' (Clover, 1992: 51). The gender displacement offered by the final girl, in Clover's terms, provides 'a kind of identificatory buffer, an emotional remove that permits the majority of the audience to explore taboo subjects in the relative safety of vicariousness.' (Clover, 1992: 51). Clover's analysis not only points to the limitations of the psychoanalytical mode of filmic interpretation, but the paradoxical manner in which many feminist understandings of the cinematic process end up in re-establishing patriarchal binaries.

The final girl, of course, has a rather longer and literary history. She can be found in the pages of the gothic, the atypical damsel-in-distress, terrorised and threatened, trapped and tormented. Emily in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (Ann Radcliffe: 1794) and the virginal and naive Antonia in Matthew Lewis's fevered adolescent fantasy, *The Monk* (1796) are two of the early examples, although the figure of the damsel-in-distress, in need of patriarchal rescue, persists in modern horror and romantic fictions:

The very words "Gothic heroine" immediately conjure up a wealth of images for the modern reader: a young, attractive woman (virginity required) running in terror through an old, dark, crumbling mansion in the middle of nowhere, from either a psychotic man or a supernatural demon. She is always terminally helpless and more than a bit screechy, but is inevitably "saved" by the good guy/future husband in the nick of time.<sup>19</sup>

Unlike her earlier precedents and American contemporaries, Nora constantly and consciously refuses the iconography of the terrorised woman-in-distress, the iconography that the doctors and police as agents of the symbolic attempt to define her by. In "Lady, Beware Paths Through the Female Gothic", Adrian Martin offers a

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<sup>19</sup> Martin, Adrian (2001). Lady, Beware Paths Through The Female Gothic. *Senses of Cinema*. Issue 12, February – March 2001. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/01/12/gothic.html>

short definition/description of continuance of gothic imagery in modern visual culture citing films such as Otto Preminger's *Whirlpool* (1949), Kathryn Bigelow's *Blue Steel* (1990) and television - *Buffy, The Vampire Slayer*. He defines the Female Gothic as 'a genre based upon instability, ambiguity and ambivalence, in relation to the very status of reality as much as to questions of identity politics.'<sup>20</sup> *The Evil Eye* with its female protagonist and blurred boundaries between the real and the imaginary works in many ways within this definition of the Female Gothic. And the disruption of visual perspective, which is central to the narrative structure, can also be seen within terms of the Gothic, as can the "frame" narrative. In *The Evil Eye*, however, the language of the gothic is imbued with the lack of meaning that distinguishes the postmodern art form. Talking about Argento's supernatural film *Inferno*, Chris Gallant states: 'the language of the Gothic is fleshed out, given layers, but refuses to convey any semblance of meaning [...] This brings the Gothic close to the postmodern concern with information overlaid [...] signs which are, but stand for nothing.' (Gallant, 2000: 31)

At the centre of this postmodern reworking of the conventions of the "female gothic" is the disruption of the conventions of visual perspective, central to the workings of the American horror film, which functions to deterritorialise simplistic gendered mappings. And, by focalising the narrative purely through the subjective and negotiated vision of Nora, the film works as a meta-commentary on the nature of seeing and its relationship to violence which by association implicates the spectator within the cinematic frame. Sharing Nora's vision, the spectator is situated as an

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<sup>20</sup> Martin, Adrian (2001). Lady, Beware Paths Through The Female Gothic. *Senses of Cinema*. Issue 12, February – March 2001. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/01/12/gothic.html>



active participant in the process of misreading the signifiers of gender and the codes of violence.

In his taxonomy of the *time-image*, Deleuze argues that the time-image is one in which actions and reactions are broken apart from each other, and instead we have a place of pure optical and aural situations that 'are fundamentally distinct from the sensory-motor situations of the action-image in the old realism.' (Deleuze, 2000: 3).

In these circumstances, we can no longer talk about identification between characters and viewers, because in the cinema of the time-image 'this identification is actually inverted: the character has become a kind of viewer.' (Deleuze, 2000: 3). It is

significant that Nora's encounter with the 'scene/seen' of the crime takes place after she has taken a knock on the head and is gradually returning to conscious awareness.

Transfixed to the spot and unable to act, Nora is the epitome of the cinematic spectator, forced to watch events unfold in front of her eyes with no power to influence the course of events. In the next chapter, I explore this inversion between viewer and spectator in greater detail through my discussion of Argento's *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*.

Not only does *The Evil Eye* invert the relations between character and viewer, but the narrative operates on multiple levels, shifting constantly between the domestic drama (the normative heterosexual relationship between Nora and Marcello) and the story of the investigation. Not constrained by the sensory-motor schema of the behaviourist and Oedipal models, *The Evil Eye* spends a significant amount of narrative space on unnecessary detailing and on the presentation of Italy as object for the touristique gaze, which rests uneasily with the *murder mystery* elements of the film. Needham

(2002a) talks about the murder on the Spanish Steps in *The Evil Eye* as 'representative of Italian cinema's selling of its own "Italian-ness" through tourist hotspots.'<sup>21</sup> Talking about Visconti's *Obsession*, Deleuze argues that the inventory of a setting marks the beginning of a crisis in the action-image and lays open the possibilities for the *time-image* in cinema: 'So the situation is not extended directly into action: it is no longer sensory-motor, as in realism, but primarily optical and of sound, invested by the senses, before action takes shape in it, and uses or confronts its elements. (Deleuze, 2000: 4). This is a 'geophysical description' rather than a geographical definition of landscape, a visionary aestheticism that confronts and constructs varying strata of reality, whilst refusing to choose between the two.

In "Mario Bava: The Illusion of Reality", Silver and Ursini, argue that Bava's films refuse to distinguish between illusion and reality: 'Bava situated his protagonists in a mutable world, composed of opposing spheres of influence, of shifting colors and times, of complements and atonalities.'<sup>22</sup> In the mutating world of *The Evil Eye*, Nora is situated as a typical *giallo* protagonist: unable to 'read' the image using a map of traditional gendered frameworks. Nora insists [and persists] in viewing the perpetrator behind the murders as male by positing a casual link between violence and masculinity. The final revelation that Laura, who has befriended Nora, is the murderer shatters Nora's [and by association the spectator's] entrenched assumptions around normative gender roles.

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<sup>21</sup> Needham, Gary (2002a). Playing with Genre: An introduction to the Italian *giallo*. *Kinoeye: new perspectives on European film*. Vol 2, Issue 11, 10 June 2002 [Online]. Available at: <http://www.kinoeye.org/02/11/needham11.html>

<sup>22</sup> Silver, Alain and Ursini, James [nda]. Mario Bava: the illusion of reality. *Images*. Issue 10. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.imagesjournal.com/issue10/reviews/mariobava/article1.htm>

As significant as the *woman-as-detective* trope of *The Evil Eye*, is the subversion of traditional representations of *woman-as-monster* in the horror film and therefore any easy correlations between gender and violence. The figure of Laura, I would suggest, cannot be appropriated within feminist critiques of the horror film, such as those proposed by Clover and Creed.

Carol Clover offers this traditional critique in *Men, Women and Chainsaws*: 'they show no gender confusion. Nor is their motive overtly psychosexual; their anger derives in most cases not from childhood experience but from specific moments in their adult lives in which they have been abandoned or cheated on by men' (Clover, 1992: 29). Barbara Creed, when discussing what she calls the "femme castratrice", or the psychotic female in the horror film puts a similar argument forward. She delimits two types of female psychopath: the first is the 'castrating female psychotic' (Creed, 1992: 123) who 'transforms into a monster when she is sexually and emotional unfulfilled [...]' and 'takes revenge on society, particularly the heterosexual nuclear family, because of her lack, her symbolic castration. (Creed, 1992: 122). The second type of female psychotic is the abused woman, represented as the castrating woman rather than the castrated woman of the former model, whose rage and revenge is 'almost always linked to some form of male exploitation.' (Creed, 1992: 123). Laura's behaviour cannot be understood as either an inversion of male psychosexual fury or as the traditional revenge motivation of women in horror.

This subversion of gender roles reflects the challenge of the *giallo* to more conventional forms and understandings of horror. Rather than an aberration as in the case of the later *slasher* film, gender transgression is the **norm** in the *giallo*.

**Woman-as-monster: Laura - *the monstrous feminine*?**

It is the figure of *woman-as-monster*, rather than *woman-as-detective*, which becomes the central trope of the *giallo*. In *The Evil Eye*, this role is filled by Laura Terrani (Valentina Cortesa), whose husband Nora saw removing the body of a dead woman her first night in Rome. In "Detection and Transgression: The Investigative Drive of the *Giallo*", Xavier Mendik argues that there is a disjunction between the rationality of the logic-and-detection model of the classical detective novel and the irrationality of the narrative trajectory of the *giallo*. Mendik suggests that the inability to detect in the *giallo* is connected to a fundamental insecurity in identity, and in particular linked into the mechanism by which: 'the process of detection reveals a murderer who transgresses the norms of gender expectation.' (Mendik, 1996: 35). In *The Evil Eye*, Laura Terrani not only transgresses gender expectations in that it is her, rather than her husband, who is the killer, but unlike her contemporary male counterparts, Norman in *Psycho* and Mark in *Peeping Tom* who are motivated by psychosexual fury, she kills for profit.

This situates Laura outside and beyond Clover's construction of female fury in terms of revenge, cited earlier. Clover also contends that female killers are not likely to suffer from psychosexual rage, unlike their male counterparts (Clover, 1992: 29). This is an argument that I will take issue with in my ensuing discussion of Argento's

discussion and in particular the figuration of the 'mother' in Argento's masochistic fantasy, *Opera*. In *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (1992), Barbara Creed is not only uncomfortable in viewing *woman-as-monster* as a feminist or liberated figure (Creed, 1992: 7), but her account of female pathology cannot account for the figure of Laura, who is not reducible to 'castrated other' or 'castrating mother'. Nor is Laura defined merely in terms of her sexuality, which for Creed defines representations of the "monstrous-feminine"<sup>23</sup>. Again, later chapters will extend this critique of Creed's reworking of Freudian fantasy within my analysis of Argento's *gialli*.

Whilst Laura descends towards the end of the narrative into a recognisable psychosis, there is method in her madness, in clear opposition to the frenzy within which the male monster in the psychological horror film operates. Having killed her sister, Laura then murders two other victims in order to suggest a psychosexual motivation that that would lead the police (as embedded viewers) off the right track. In fact this works only too well, as an innocent man is convicted of the murders incarcerated in prison, where he eventually dies, and Nora remains convinced until Laura reveals herself that it must be a man responsible for the killings.

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<sup>23</sup> Creed explains the use of the term the "monstrous-feminine": 'As with all other stereotypes of the feminine, from virgin to whore, she is defined in terms of her sexuality. The phrase 'monstrous-feminine' emphasizes the importance of gender in the construction of her monstrosity.' (Creed, 1992: 3). For Creed, the female monster cannot be understood simply as an inversion of the male monster, as the reasons why she horrifies the audience, are quite different to those raised by the male monster. (Creed, 1992: 3).

### **Beyond point-of-view: the inhuman**

Both Nora (*woman-as-detective*) and Laura (*woman-as-monster*) posit a challenge to traditional critiques of gender representation and relations in horror film. This challenge, as I have already argued is not just situated at the level of characterisation, but is expressed at the level of its “imagistic sign systems” (Sitney, 1995: 21) through which the mechanics and methodology of the “gaze” is theorised within the narrative.

In Dika's discussion of the use of point of view in the “slasher” film, she writes that: ‘the structure of identification in the stalker film allows the viewer to identify with the killer's look, but not with his character.’ (Dika, 1996: 88). This allows she maintains the audience to retain involvement with the actions on the screen, whilst absolving them of any moral culpability, which would come from actual identification with the killer. (Dika, 1996:89). Like Barbara Creed, Dika situates the gaze as ultimately male in that it is both controlling and sadistic. (Dika, 1996: 90). Again, I need to stress that I am not disagreeing with these models in terms of their applicability to the American horror film, especially in terms of the “slasher/stalker” genre, but elucidating the limitations of these models when faced by the more “difficult” and “intellectual” spaces of the *giallo* as metafilm. In the *giallo*, the gaze is no longer restricted to reflecting the traditional co-ordinates of vision but takes on a distinct consciousness of its own - unencumbered by the dictates of embodiment and ocular possibility. It is this use of the camera that situates the *gialli* as genre firmly within the conventions of *the time-image*.

Deleuze argues at the beginning of *Cinema 2: The Time Image*:

Even when it is mobile the camera is no longer content sometimes to follow the characters' movement, sometimes itself to undertake movements of which they are merely the object, but in every case it subordinates description of space to the functions of thought. (Deleuze, 2000: 23).

Bava uses the close-up and detail shot to great effect to dismantle the organic totality of both the body and the narrative and dismember the relation between the part and the whole. When visiting the apartment of the disgraced detective after a phone call, Nora is obsessively framed and reframed through a series of shots, caught in the doorway to the apartment, her body is doubly framed with light reflecting off the stark white walls of the apartment and illuminating Nora's frightened face. Utilising the detail shot, Bava's camera disassembles Nora's form offering the viewer a forehead, an eye, glimpses of stockinged legs. This excess of part shots deconstructs the iconography of faciality found in many American psychological horror films<sup>24</sup>. Switching from foreground to background, Bava's use of lighting further disconnects the gaze from embodiment: Nora in the lift: an ocular impossibility - a shot of the lift going up. When framed in the doorway (the door as a common feature in Bava's films through which to frame the body), the camera switches relentlessly from inside to outside: Nora looking in and the camera looking out.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Perhaps the best example of this type of faciality is *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* in which Tobe Hooper offers a vision of abject terror: the screaming face of Sally surrounded by her macabre captors.

<sup>25</sup> The best examples of this feature of the *gialli*, the fracturing and the fragmenting of the gaze can be seen in Argento's *gialli*, in particular the opening murder of *Deep Red* which is discussed in detail at the beginning of Chapter Five.

The creators invent obsessive framings, empty of disconnected spaces, even still lifes: in a certain sense they stop movement and rediscover the power of the fixed shot. (Deleuze, 2000: 22).

This disconnection of the camera from the gaze does not figure within traditional constructs of realist editing in which the camera as gaze is “positioned” as male and remains centred in the human even when switching between the point of view shot of the killer and victim as utilised to great effect both in Hitchcock's *Psycho* and Powell's *Peeping Tom* and the later “stalker” series of films. Dika argues that: ‘As pure subject, he is rarely held as the object of another's gaze. Instead, he has power over others, and, with it, the ability to generate the flow of narrative.’ (1996: 90). So whilst discussions of the male gaze can help elucidate the gender positioning of the American horror film, they are unable to account for the more fluid and intellectual pleasures of the gaze in the *giallo*.

Instead, the use of the part shot and the disembodied shot articulates what Deleuze calls a camera consciousness: ‘which would no longer be defined by the movements it is able to follow or make, but by the mental connections it is able to enter into. And it becomes questioning, responding, objecting, provoking, theorematizing, hypothesising, experimental, in accordance with [...] the functions of thought in a cinema vérité, which as Rouch says, means rather truth of cinema [verite du cinema]’ (2000: 23). Daniel Frampton's (1991) analysis of Deleuze's exploration of temporality as foundational quality of the cinematic image clearly illuminates the manner in which consciousness embodied within the camera articulates a new type of image that requires active interpretation on part of the spectator: ‘What Deleuze is pointing to here is a readable image, a thinking image that is most locatable when the camera moves and works autonomously, striving to stress such logical actions as



consequence, intention etc., and no longer just measure, tonality, rhythm and harmony, as in the movement image.'<sup>26</sup> Whilst in Dika's terms the "stalker" film operates within a dualistic system of point-of-view, which has been the subject of much critical theorisation, the machine assemblage of camera-eye in cinema of the *time-image* frees the image from a reflection of embodied perception and its connotations of male sadism.

*The Evil Eye* was shot with two endings, one for domestic distribution and one aimed at the American "dollar". In the American version of *The Evil Eye*, the film ends with Nora witnessing another killing: the murder of an unfaithful girlfriend and her lover. But this time Nora chooses to disregard it. In the Italian version, the film ends with Nora offering Marcello a cigarette from a packet given to her by a stranger on a plane who turned out to be smuggling marijuana. Suddenly she remembers that she smoked a cigarette from the pack the night she saw the murder and realises that the drugged cigarette and not her overactive imagination was probably the reason that she managed to confuse what she saw. The film ends with Nora taking the cigarette, crushing it and throwing the pack away.<sup>27</sup> The difference between the endings is significant. Whilst the American version suggests that we can choose not to look, the Italian ending undermines the look itself - finishing with a question mark over the veracity of the subjective visions of its neurotic heroine. The Italian ending has more in common with the gothic frame of the "Female Gothic": we could compare Nora to the figure of the governess in Henry James' *Turn of The Screw* for example.

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<sup>26</sup> Frampton, Daniel (1991). On Deleuze's Cinema. *Filmosophy*. July 1991. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.filmosophy.org/articles/deleuze>

<sup>27</sup> See Troy Howarth's (1999) review of *The Evil Eye* entitled 'La Ragazza che Sapeva Troppo (1962)'. [Online]. Available at: <http://utenti.lycos.it/mariobava/evileye.htm>

### **From psychoanalysis to schizoanalysis**

It is the figure of the *woman-as-monster* which marks one of the most significant divergences between the more simplistic contemporaneous workings of the American horror film and the *gialli*. Both *Psycho* and *Peeping Tom* have a central female protagonist and ultimately (although there is discussion as to otherwise) end up in situating violence as a “typical” male attribute. In *The Evil Eye*, the transgression of this link between violence and gender deterritorialises the drive towards knowledge embedded within the crime-detection strand of the *giallo*. This act of deterritorialisation is mapped out through the narrative's denial of psychosexual motivation and interpretation alongside its deconstruction of the traditions of the specular gaze. It is this overt denial of psychosexual pathology that we find most clearly demonstrated in Bava's second *giallo*, *Blood and Black Lace* (1964).

Set in and around a fashion house, *Blood and Black Lace* graphically details the murders of six beautiful young women - hence one of the film's alternative titles *Six Women for the Murderer*. In his review in *Deep Focus*<sup>28</sup>, Bryant Frazer argues that *Blood and Black Lace* is ‘clearly the first real slasher movie.’ Frazer continues ‘Its obvious inspiration, the black-and-white *Psycho*, was a model of restraint in comparison to Bava's over saturated nightmare of blood, skin, mannequins, and masks.’ The visual iconography of *Blood and Black Lace*, the fashion-house; the models; the mannequins; the use of masks; also functions to situate Bava's *giallo*

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<sup>28</sup> Frazer, Bryant (nda). *Blood and Black Lace / The Whip and the Body*. *Deep Focus*. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.deep-focus.com/flicker/dvd/bloodand.html>

within similar terms to 'art' house films such as Fellini's *La Dolce Vita*. In both films, the facade of consumer society is used as a mechanism through which to critique the bourgeois world, pictured as inherently immoral and facile. In 'Just another fashion victim: Mario Bava's *Sei donne per l'assassino*', Reynold Humphries argues that the use of iconography in the film 'creates a particular world that calls for a cultural and political reading.'<sup>29</sup> Humphries contends that the multiple visual connections that are made at a formal level between the models and the mannequins forms a critique of patriarchal culture's fetishisation and commodification of the female body [Fig 13]. He argues that this situates Bava's film apart from the "slashers" that followed:



Figure 13: The female body as commodity in *Blood and Black Lace*

'*Sei donne per l'assassino* has at its core the theme of sexuality based on profit and exploitation - the exploitation of the female body for profit, whether by a ruthless male or his equally ruthless female partner who in no way yields to him when it comes to getting the most economically out of patriarchal capitalism.'<sup>30</sup>

This is demonstrated in the manner in which there is no clear distinction in terms of violence or sadism between the murders committed by Morlacchi and Cristina. Alain Silver and James Ursini make a similar argument, although they view the film in less

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<sup>29</sup> Humphries, Reynold. (2001). Just Another Fashion Victim: Mario Bava's *Sei donne per l'assassino*. *Kinoeye: new perspectives on European Film*. Vol 1. Issue 7. 26 Nov 2001. [Online]. Available at:

<http://www.kinoeye.org/01/07/humphries07.php>

<sup>30</sup> Humphries, Reynold. (2001). Just Another Fashion Victim: Mario Bava's *Sei donne per l'assassino*. *Kinoeye: new perspectives on European Film*. Vol 1. Issue 7. 26 Nov 2001. [Online]. Available at:

<http://www.kinoeye.org/01/07/humphries07.php>

than positive terms, when they state that the beautiful young models: 'are perfect victims for Bava's patriarchal narratives because they epitomize the complacency and superficiality of the modern world.'<sup>31</sup> What both arguments do, however, is foreground the importance of the iconographic in terms of our understanding the *giallo* within the political framework of Italian film. As with *The Evil Eye*, psychosexual fury is once again embedded as causal factor for the murders only to be subverted.

As will become a common feature in the *giallo* and owing much to Visconti's barely veiled critique of the law in his 1942 adaptation of James M. Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice, Obsession*; the police are inscribed as both inefficient and ineffective as they fall into the psychological motivation trap laid down for them.

Believing that the killer must be a man propelled by sexual fury, they round up all of the possible male suspects and keep them overnight at the police station. To their mortification, however, yet another model is murdered that evening. This murder is committed by Cristina, the girlfriend of Morlacchi who committed the other murders, but the spectator has no way of knowing either the identity or sex of the murderer as [s]he is wearing a blank, white mask which renders the face as a "blank screen" [Fig 14].

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<sup>31</sup> Silver, Alain and Ursini, James [nda]. Mario Bava: the illusion of reality. *Images*. Issue 5. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.imagesjournal.com/issue05/infocus/mariobava3.htm>

As Hardy points out:



**Figure 14:** The "Blank Mask" of terror in *Blood and Black Lace*

Here, Bava dispenses with hypocrisy as the killer's face is reduced to a blank screen offering no comforting resistance for projective identifications by the male spectators, and representing a menacing 'every man' for female viewers. (Hardy, 1996: 166).

This strategy, which will become a convention of the *giallo*, functions not just as "mirror" of female fears around male violence as Hardy maintains, but more significantly disrupts gendered paradigms of that violence. And whilst the later American "stalker" film often borrows this mechanism of concealing the murderer's face - Jason's hockey mask in *Friday 13th* franchise is perhaps the most explicit example of this - in the case of the *giallo*, it has both cultural and political significance. Derived from the tradition of *commedia dell'arte*, masks function to connote theatricality and performance placing the *giallo* again outside the "realist" traditions of the modern American horror film.

Just as the "masking" of the murderer's face works within an iconographic rather than psychological system of referencing, *Blood and Black Lace* actively resists oedipalisation at a more overt textual level as I have already discussed. It becomes difficult, if not untenable, to appropriate the *giallo* for the furtherance of psychoanalysis as appropriate interpretative strategy for discussing the textual strategies of horror as a meta-genre.

**Conclusion: lines of flight**

The imitator always creates the model, and attracts it. The tracing has already translated the map into an image; it has already transformed the rhizome into roots and radicals. It has organized, stabilized, neutralized the multiplicities according to the axes of significance and subjectification belonging to it. It has generated, structuralized the rhizome, and when it thinks it is reproducing something else it is in fact reproducing itself. This is why the tracing is so dangerous. It injects redundancies and propagates them. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 13)

It is clear that both Mario Bava's *The Evil Eye* (1962) and *Blood and Black Lace* (1964) are resistant to interpretation within traditional psychoanalytical paradigms. In these terms Needham's (2002) that the *giallo* 'begs for psychoanalytical inquiry' is one not supported by the evidence of either *The Evil Eye* or *Blood and Black Lace*. By situating the *giallo* within the immediate political and aesthetic climate of the 1960s, we saw how the genre utilised "Americanism" as a form through which to interrogate questions of gender, cultural and national identity. In terms of generic conventions, we saw how the *giallo* brings together the intellectualisation of the crime-detection film, in *The Evil Eye*, and the visceral and more immediate world of horror, as in *Blood and Black Lace*. In these terms, it is clear that the *giallo* often exceeds attempts at generic description in terms of dominant Anglo-American theories. In my discussion of the relationship between gender and genre, I argued that the excessive femininity of *woman-as-detective* (the figure of Nora in *The Evil Eye*) and *woman-as-monster* (Laura in *The Evil Eye* and Cristina in *Blood and Black Lace*) can not be explained within the binary models of traditional feminist paradigms and necessitate a different methodological approach to their patriarchal resistances.

## Chapter Two: *Giallo*

### Bava's *The Evil Eye and Blood and Black Lace*

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In this chapter, I have started a continuing critique with psychoanalytical modes of interpretation, concluding as Deleuze and Guattari did in 1980, that this method of interpretative thinking is 'dangerous' in that it is a self-referential model: it finds [constructs] what it seeks and fails to explore or explain the lines of flight, or intensities, that are an inseparable part of the *giallo* as genre. Instead using Deleuze's taxonomy of the *time-image*, we saw how the deconstruction of the "gaze" situated the *giallo* outside the binary dualistic point-of-view of the horror film (taking the "stalker" film as an example) and inscribed a more mechanical cinematics based around the inhuman rather than the human. This delimitation of the *giallo* in terms of Deleuze's *time-image* provides the model through which **Part II** approaches questions of genre and gender in Argento's *giallo*.

## Chapter Three: **The Difficulty of Detection**

*L'Uccello dalle plume di cristallo* (*The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, 1970)

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### **Introduction**

the archetypal source of Eurocentric detective fiction is the story of Oedipus, whose task is to solve a riddle, or mystery, in order to arrive at a (specific) resolution, or truth. (Gosselin, Adrienne, 1992<sup>1</sup>)

In this chapter, I utilise Deleuze's taxonomy of the *time-image*, as introduced in the previous chapter, in order to explore the multiple ways in which Dario Argento's first *giallo*, *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* (*L'Uccello dalle plume di cristallo*: 1970) problematises not only the process of detection but also the very possibility of detection. The difficulty of detection in Argento's directorial debut, as in his subsequent *gialli*, is one, which is inscribed by the transgression of gender, sexuality and identity norms. This has had the consequence that many theorists of Argento's work (Mendik, 1996/2002, McDonagh, 1992, and Needham, 2000/2002) have sought recourse to the meta-narrative of psychoanalysis in order to explore and explain this difficulty.

But as I argued in *Chapter Two*, the formation of the *giallo* as genre within the films of Mario Bava, textually resists this form of appropriation by invoking only to deconstruct the figure of Oedipus as authority-figure (father). We saw how psychoanalysis functioned as a trap in *The Evil Eye* and *Blood and Black Lace* for the naive spectator - including the police - to avert attention from the real identity of the criminal: a ploy which results in further acts of murder and mutilation. Similarly Argento's first *giallo* appears to be a traditional psycho-sexual murder mystery - a number of young women are brutally attacked and murdered by a masked assailant in



### Chapter Three: **The Difficulty of Detection**

*L'Uccello dalle piume di cristallo* (*The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, 1970)

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scenes of surprisingly erotic intensity - only to subvert this 'reading' by the revelation (as in Bava's films) that the murderer is in fact a woman herself.

In my analysis of *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, I want to disturb and displace the dominant readings of Argento's *gialli* by situating Deleuze's taxonomy of the *time-image* as a position from which we can map an alternative model to the problem of gender difference and transgression in horror film. I draw on Frank Burke's recent (2002) retheorisation of *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* in "Intimations (and more) of colonialism"<sup>2</sup> in order to explore how the foregrounding and critiquing of the colonialism acts to destabilises simplistic understandings of gender transgression based around male aggression and female victimology.

Following this, I discuss the implications of the *female-as-killer* and the focalisation of key scenes through the female gaze. In considering the centrality of female aggression, I suggest that the psychosexual fury of Monica in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*; the highly eroticised scenes of woman on woman violence (and by association sex); multiple references to homosexuality; the repeated disruption of masculine epistemology, and the transgendering of the gaze functions to construct a politics of becoming which is not reducible to the either/or and/or one-sex model of conventional feminist analysis. I draw on Liehm's discussion of "la dolente", as

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<sup>1</sup> The Psychology of Uncertainty: (Re)Inscribing Indeterminacy in Rudolph Fisher's *The Conjure-Man Dies*. *Other Voices*, v.1, n.3 (January 1999). [Online]. Available at: <http://www.othervoices.org/1.3/agosselin/harlem.html>

<sup>2</sup> Burke, Frank (2002). Intimations (and more) of colonialism: Dario Argento's *L'Uccello dalle piume di cristallo* (*The Bird With the Crystal Plumage*, 1970). *Kinoeye: new perspectives on European Film*. Vol 2. Issue 11. 10 June 2002. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.kinoeye.org/02/11/burke11.php>

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introduced in *Chapter One*, to elucidate the tragic and sympathetic dimensions of Argento's woman, as first introduced into the genre with the figure of Monica.

#### **The model of detection**

In *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, Deleuze distinguishes between the crime film and the detective film in terms of the operation of the action-image. The crime film provides an example of the large form of the action-image (SAS) in which the narrative moves from 'situation (or milieu) towards actions which are duels' (Deleuze, 1992: 164). In opposition to this is the detective film which 'moves from blind actions, as indices to obscure situations' (ASA). In a post-war Europe, Deleuze argues 'we hardly believe any longer that a global situation can give rise to an action which is capable of modifying it - no more than we believe that an action can force a situation to disclose itself, even partially.' (Deleuze, 1992: 206). In the *giallo* we can clearly see how this crisis in the linkages between 'situation-action, action-reaction, excitation-response' (Deleuze, 1992: 206) are substituted by pure optical and aural situations. The mode of ellipsis (fundamental to the functioning of the detective film) no longer forms the type of narration but instead belongs to the situation itself and in doing so functions to efface the distinction between the character and the viewer. In Godard's reflexive reconfiguration of American noir in *A Bout De Soufflé*, (*Breathless*: 1960), the goal-orientated function of its repeatedly evoked counterpoint (through cinematic posters, stills, and in particular Michel's camp adoption of the personae of Humphrey Bogart), is subverted as lines of connection between action and reaction take flight. As Bordwell and Thompson argue: 'In *Breathless* the plot moves in fits and starts. Brief scenes - some largely unconnected to the goals - alternative with long stretches of seemingly irrelevant dialogue.' (Bordwell and

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Thompson, 1997: 400). In *Breathless* we can see all five of Deleuze's delimitations of a new image born in the aftermath of World War 2: 'the dispersive situation, the deliberately weak links, the voyage form, the consciousness of clichés, and the condemnation of the plot.' (Deleuze, 1992: 210).

In a similar manner to Godard's *Breathless*, Argento's *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* utilises the conventions and clichés of the detective film in order to suggest an alternative to traditional understandings of the possibilities of the cinematic image. The film itself is a loose adaptation of a little known pulp fiction *The Screaming Mimi*, Frederic Brown. Needham (2000: 88) suggests the narrative, derived from Brown's novella, is largely incidental to the 'visual dynamics' of Argento's *giallo* and its cold, sharp camera angles and claustrophobic framing.' Diametrically opposed to this is McDonagh's analysis (1994, 40-45), which maintains a dialectical relationship between Brown's novella and Argento's film. The relationship between Argento's *giallo* and the classical detective novel has also been extensively explored by Mendik (1996).

#### **The difficulty of detection**

Argento's first film draws on the conventions of the *gialli*, which by 1970 were largely established: the central protagonist as 'outsider' who accidentally witnesses a crime and undertakes, despite warnings, an unofficial investigation into the motivations of the crime and identity of the attacker, and nearly loses his/her life in the process. In *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, the outsider is Sam Dalmas (Tony Musante), an American writer on a 'sabbatical' in Rome, who, one night, is witness

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to what seems to be an unmotivated attack on a woman, Monica Ranieri (Eva Renzi) in the art-gallery owned by her husband, Alberto Ranieri (Umberto Raho). Increasingly obsessed with discovering the identity of the attacker, Dalmas undertakes an unofficial investigation and in doing so places both his and his girlfriend's, Julia (Suzy Kendall), lives at risk. And he continues to do so after repeated warnings by the unknown assailant and the advice of the police to leave the country. Like Bava's *The Evil Eye*, the protagonist does not so much discover the identity of the assailant - but rather the attacker has to reveal "herself" to him. And as in Bava's *The Evil Eye*, it is the protagonist's failure to look "beyond" conventional assumptions around gender and identity, which render him [her] unable to see the murderer's "true identity". Central to the disruption of gender and identity norms are the final scenes in which Sam Dalmas is positioned in the gothic role of "woman-in-peril" as Monica - having descended into total madness - terrorises him in the art-gallery which formed the site of the ordinary diegetic transgression. Appropriately [ironically] enough, Dalmas is only saved from certain death by the timely intervention of the police. Dalmas leaves Rome with his girlfriend irrevocably altered by his encounter with colonial "otherness".

#### **The theorematic**

In her discussion of Antonioni's work, Marcia Landy suggests that the figure of the outsider draws attention to the limitations of traditional forms of cinematic thought: 'The visitor from outside is the force that directs attention to something other than conventional sociological or psychoanalytic analysis, focusing rather on the problematic of the cinematic apparatus as the "outside" that enables the theorem to be

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realized and explored.’ (Landy, 2000: 356). Talking about Pasolini’s films, Landy elucidates: ‘On another, more important level, however, it is an exploration of cinema as an instrument of investigation, not solving but making palpably and frightening the implications of not *seeing* the problems and, hence, not thinking.’ (Landy, 2000: 356).

The dangers of *not seeing* and *not thinking* are a common theme in Argento’s *gialli*. It is in fact the failure to see *what is in front of our eyes*, which motivates the narrative trajectory of his *gialli*. In Argento’s later *giallo Deep Red* (1975), the central protagonist, Marc Daly catches sight of what seems to be a strange painting in the corridor of an apartment of a woman who has just been murdered. It transpires however that the painting was a mirror in which the face of the murderer was reflected. In assuming that the world can be fixed into a representative framework, Marc seeks to reduce the power of becoming to the fixity of being, and is therefore rendered unable to ‘see’. What Argento’s *gialli* describe instead is a world of visual indeterminacy, one constituted of virtual potentialities and affects, necessitating a reorganisation in our perceptual frameworks. In deconstructing transcendental systems of interpretation which situate the spectator as both disembodied and ungendered, Argento’s *gialli* express Deleuze’s concept of the theorematic, derived from Pasolini, in which ‘the outside of the problem is not reducible to the exteriority of the physical world any more than to the psychological interiority of a thinking ego.’ (Landy, 2000: 175).

### **Images of Violence**

You need to look [...] at the subtle way in which the imagery of the gallery sequence disorientates the viewer, settling up one set of expectations and then subverting them in a manner both unsettling and memorable. (McDonagh, 1994: 53)

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That it is impossible to reduce the cinematic textuality to either a sociological or psychological which exists “outside” of the diegetic space is made apparent in the [in]famous art-gallery sequence in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*. It is not just that the scene subverts our expectations around the roles of men and woman in horror film; but the manner in which this subversion is inseparable from disruption of the visual field and the disembodiment of the cinematic camera eye from traditional perspective. This is in clear opposition to the dominant ideology of classical film narrative, which dictates that the apparatus should be both invisible and unobtrusive, allowing both the ‘suspension of belief’ and the illusion of seamless realism. Instead of a fixed molar visual field, Argento’s modernist use of the camera cuts across visible spatiality of the screen into a series of disconnected and disembodied fragments through the subversive use of camera angle, mobility and the relations between in-field and out-field.

The setting for Dalmas’s encounter with the *optical drama* of the primary attack on his visual and aural senses is significantly a modern art gallery geometrically structured into a number of geophysical fragments. In *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, Deleuze argues that the optical situation of the time-image is divided into the ‘opsign’ and the sonsigns’ (Deleuze, 2000: 8-9 and 12-13). The *opsign* refers to the visual-image, and the *sonsign* to the sound-image. In *Chapter Four: The Components of the Image*, I discuss the signs of the audio-visual image in more detail. When Dalmas first catches sight of the attack, he is positioned at a distance across the road from the art-gallery. Once captured and captivated by this violent image, Dalmas moves closer to the scene. But instead of rescuing the distraught ‘female’ victim of the attack,

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Dalmas finds himself trapped in the space between the outer and inner glass doors to the gallery.

Inside, the gallery is divided horizontally like a theatre stage, with events happening on the balcony and then moving down stage to the centre. The gallery is separated from the 'outside' world by two glass doors constructing a separate space 'in-between' the two panes which is neither inside or outside: an impossible space in which Dalmas becomes trapped. The mise-en-scène inside is comprised of paintings on the walls, and a circle of modern architectural sculpture, metallic imitations of human flesh and a large steel hand will provide a further fragmentation of screen space: a place from which Monica can return Dalmas's gaze in an intensification of the deconstruction of faciality that I discussed in Bava's *The Evil Eye*. Deleuze's argument on the films of Dreyer seems applicable to this scene: 'the position of an outside as an instance which creates the problem: the depth of the image has become the pure viewpoint [..].' (Deleuze, 1992: 176)



**Figure 15:** The caging of the "colonial other" in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*

In this scene, the traditional characteristics of hard-boiled detection in which masculinity is association with action, agency and activity, are subverted. Instead the embedded detective, Dalmas, is stripped of all motor capacity, unable to either act or react to the disturbing images that are played

out in front of his gaze on the other side of the glass window. Dalmas's enforced inactivity and inability to determine the course of narrative events situates him in the

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position of passive femininity. This is codified by a series of sharp edits, which switch the perspective from Dalmas on the outside, to Monica on the inside. Whilst we have become used to sequences of violence and victimisation in the horror film being seen through the twin perspectives of the killer and his victim [the use of the subjective point of view of the killer to situate us within the visual field of the killer has become a convention of the psychological horror film as discussed in *Chapter Two*]; in this scene it is impossible to [re]locate the fluidity of the gaze within a simplistic division between the “killer” and the “victim” - not least because we have no idea at this stage that Monica is in fact the assailant. There are at least three gazes that circulate in the art-gallery sequence: Dalmas’s from the outside in, Monica’s from the inside out and a third “inhuman” gaze which constantly disrupts and cuts across the flow of visual information: on a number of occasions, the camera pulls back from the embodied point-of-view to offer the extra-diegetic spectator a panoramic vista of the setting and both characters positioning within the frame.

In *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, Deleuze names the action by which the camera captures the diegetic spectator in the process of looking as the *dicisign* (Deleuze, 2000: 32). An example of this takes place in the opening minutes of the sequence. At first a tracking shot is used to follow Dalmas as he crosses the road. A sharp edit indicates a move in direction and position of the camera, from centre front of Dalmas, to a place behind and to the left as he moves across the street. This offers the extra-diegetic spectator a panoramic vision of the scene that Dalmas is looking at. The camera then suddenly disposes with Dalmas, as it takes on an epistemological function and pans in on the gallery in which we can just glimpse a violent struggle in the top background. Another sharp edit and the camera position and angle switches



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to inside the gallery and a point in front of Monica as she struggles with the now out of shot assailant. At the same time as camera position and angle changes, so does the visual field of the shot: from panoramic long shot taken from outside, to close-up and part shot of Monica taken from inside. A further disturbance of visual perspective takes place as gradually the scope of shot changes to encompass the figure of Dalmas positioned in the distance, now occupying the background of the frame.

In the short shot sequence discussed previously, it is clear that the so-called rules of cinema – 180 degree rule, shot-reverse-shot – are constantly disrupted, and that what we see – what is contained in the scene/seen – is not determined by the limited visual field associated with classical cinema. This is clearly demonstrated by within the epistemological functioning of the camera in which, rather than being motivated by character, the camera seems almost oblivious to character at times: taking time to slowly and deliberately detail the setting of the action rather than being contained by the action itself: a 30 second pan of the walls of the gallery seems incidental to narrative and character motivation. This is what McDonagh means when she says that the sequence works to visually disorientate the spectator (McDonagh, 1994: 53). We can interpret this modernist use of the camera in which the movement of the “gaze” is not subordinated, either to the needs of the character or dictates of the plot, as articulating what Deleuze calls a ‘camera consciousness’: the sort of liberation of the cinematic gaze from the binary paradigm of objective/subjective that Hitchcock constrained by the commodity system, hints at, but is unable to fully demonstrate:

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Even when it is mobile, the camera is no longer content sometimes to follow the characters' movements, sometimes itself to undertake movements of which they are merely the object, but in every case it subordinates descriptions of a space to the functions of thought. This is not a simple distinction between the subjective and the objective, the real and the imaginary, it is on the contrary their indiscernability, which will endow the camera with a rich array of functions, and entail a new conception of the frame and reframings. Hitchcock's premonition will come true: a camera consciousness which would no longer be defined by the movements it is able to follow or make, but the mental connections it is able to enter into. (Deleuze, 2000: 23)

The repeated dislocation of the field of vision, the irrational cuts between shots and the insertion of the point-of-view of the camera as almost a character in itself maps out an alternative image of thought to that associated with the Cartesian cogito. Instead we have an image of thought in which 'the brain has lost its Euclidean coordinates and now omits other signs.' In particular the creation of a non-totalizable space 'between' the two glass doors which function to trap Dalmás - neither inside nor outside - demonstrates this. The fluidity of the fractured montage indicates that the cinematic-image is no longer that of movement but rather of time: 'The direct time-image effectively has as noosigns the irrational cut between non-linked (but always relinked) images, and the absolute contact between non-totalizable, asymmetrical outside and inside.' (Deleuze, 2000: 278).

We can also understand the art-gallery sequence in terms of a visual dramatics, which makes visible the break down in the sensory motor-schema, implicit within the workings of the action image, replacing the logical relation between action and reaction with the pure spectacular non-space of purely optical situations. Not only does the geometry of the gallery segment the cinematic frame into a series of fragmented and disconnected spaces - as the 'space' between the two doors attests - but it functions to position Dalmás as pure seer, rather than active agent. As Deleuze

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contends in his conclusion to *Cinema 2: The Time Image*: 'But he has gained in an ability to see what he has lost in action or reaction: he SEES so that the viewer's problem 'What is there to see in the image?' (and not now 'What are we going to see in the next image?').' (Deleuze, 2000: 272). It is not how one image relates to another, the causal-effect mechanism, but rather what it is that is contained within the image in and of itself which is privileged in this reworking of temporal-spatial coordinates of the cinematic-image.

In this scene, constant changes in scale, angle, perspective and proportion are marked through the use of "impossible continuity shots": high angled long shots are replaced with close up and detail shots which foreground the illogical gap - the editing process itself - within the shot sequence. The continual decomposition of cinematic space is mapped out through the multiplicity of framing and deframing: characters move in and out of the frame, the angle of the shot changes the visual field and angle and type of shot transform into a multiplicity of intensities which are not coherable into a continuous whole. The multiplication of perception in this scene can be situated within an act of perception which Deleuze calls the *engramme*: 'a fluid or liquid perception which passes continually through the frame.'. In this way, perception is no longer tied to the shot as consciousness, as within the action-image, but inscribes 'a gaseous state of perception, molecular perception' (Deleuze, 2000:32) which is in a continual state of flux - or cinematic becoming.

The use of the camera, and of time and movement in the art-gallery sequence also fits in with Deleuze's contention that the crisis in action - shown here through Dalmas's inability to reorganise the events in the art-gallery in a meaningful sequentially and

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spatiality - deconstructs the complementary of a 'lived hodological' and a 'represented Euclidean space' integral to classical formations of the cinematic image:

We can say, for example, that there is Riemannian space when the connecting of parts is not predetermined but can take place in many ways: it is a space which is disconnected, purely optical, sound or even tactile (in the style of Bresson). There are also empty and amorphous spaces which lose their Euclidean co-ordinates, in the style of Ozu or Antonioni. There are crystallised spaces, when the landscapes become hallucinatory in a setting which now retains only crystalline seeds and crystallizable materials. (Deleuze, 2000: 129)

Indeed it could be argued that the organisation of space in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* follows what Deleuze names 'Riemannian space' in that the crime scene takes the form of a pure optical drama, which disconnects the relations between inside and outside and foreground and background. It is also no coincidence that Argento's physical and mental landscapes call to mind earlier ones by Antonioni.

Discussing the sequence when Aldo and Rosina approach Virginia's gas station in Antonioni's 1957 film *Il Grido*, Chatman argues that the possible hope that the gas-station signifies is negated by the formal characteristics of the camera-work:

'The predominant appearance is flat, not only in terrain but also in dimensionality. Anticipating a later style, the shots of Aldo against flat nothingness cancel depth of field to create a sense of entrapment, like that of T.S. Elliot's Prufrock "pinned and wriggling on a wall".' (Chatman, 1985: 47).

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#### **Colonial cages and the politics of de-colonialisation**

This sense of entrapment is formative to the narrative dynamics of *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*. Dalmas is situated as analogous to the caged bird of the film's title, cut off from the world, whilst the world itself is freed from the limitations of traditional viewpoint. If the impossibility of fixing meaning is embodied within the deconstruction of the gaze from the determinate visual field of the spectator, then the multiple references to Dalmas, as analogous to the caged bird of the title, functions to undermine the association of masculinity with agency, and the gaze as connotative of imperialistic power. Not only has Dalmas written a non-fictional book on the preservation of birds close to extinction, but we should not miss the irony of the fact that when he goes to pick up his cheque for the book earlier in the film, he is surrounded by glass cages of 'stuffed' birds: a more unnatural form of preservation. Like the ginger cat in this sequence, who situated in a position of power over the trapped birds, but whose species end up on Alfonso's (the mad painter) dinner table, Dalmas ends up in as the object rather than the subject of the gaze, in the decolonisation of the colonial gaze that the gallery sequence signifies.

The birds also function as intertextual signposts to the work of Hitchcock, both to the stuffed birds in Norman Bates's office in *Psycho* (1960) and of course on multiple levels to Hitchcock's later *The Birds* - the sequence in the bird museum in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* works as a kind of perverse revision of the opening sequences in the bird shop in *The Birds*. This meta-textual allusion also performs a destabilisation of gender stereotypes in horror by substituting Sam Dalmas for the woman-in-peril, Marion Crane, in Hitchcock's text.

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In the gallery sequence, the links between the stuffed birds enclosed in their glass cages in the bird shop and Dalmas trapped in his glass cage are made explicit. In “Intimations (and more) of colonialism” (*Kinoeye*. Vol 2. Issue 11. 10 June 2002), Frank Burke offers a disruptive reading of the cultural connotations of the multiplicity of referencing to birds in *The Bird with a Crystal Plumage*. Burke suggests that the name of the bird with the crystal plumage, Causaso translating as ‘Caucasian’ and by implication ‘Whiteness’ links the film’s title to colonialism, especially when juxtaposed with the “Black Power” poster on the wall of Dalmas’s and Julia’s apartment. Burke contends: ‘It might initially seem a contradiction to give a victim of colonialism - a bird in a cage - the name of colonialism itself, however it is precisely the work of the coloniser to re-make everything its own image and name.’<sup>3</sup>

I came, I believed it, toured the country, saw all the monuments, and then there is the spaghetti, wine, theatres, great - only I am dead broke I haven’t written a line in two years. (Sam Dalmas at the beginning of *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*)

By association Dalmas signifies the occupation of Italy by America during the 2nd World War, in that he does nothing but ‘occupy Italy’. Burke elucidates: ‘Wartime occupation of Italy by the Americans was, of course, a principal foundation for the post-war cultural, political and economic colonisation of Italy by the United States.’<sup>4</sup> For Burke, Argento’s film becomes a space for an implicit critique of

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<sup>3</sup> Burke, Frank (2002). Intimations (and more) of colonialism: Dario Argento's *L'Uccello dalle piume di cristallo (The Bird With the Crystal Plumage, 1970)*. *Kinoeye: new perspectives on European Film*. Vol 2. Issue 11. 10 June 2002. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.kinoeye.org/02/11/burke11.php>

<sup>4</sup> Burke, Frank (2002). Intimations (and more) of colonialism: Dario Argento's *L'Uccello dalle piume di cristallo (The Bird With the Crystal Plumage, 1970)*. *Kinoeye: new perspectives on European Film*. Vol 2. Issue 11. 10 June 2002. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.kinoeye.org/02/11/burke11.php>

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colonialism, mapped in the multiple references to birds and the analogy between the collection and caging of animals and the colonisation of the other.

Burke's analysis helps to displace those readings of Argento's *giallo*, which reduce the textuality of *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* to a simplistic "mirroring" of gendered representations and relations. Instead he argues that violence occurs as a consequence of the colonial urge to occupy, conquer and cage the other, and not as a result of a ahistorical and acultural assumption of gendered violence: 'It is this world of people radically disassociated from themselves and their world, both agents and victims of colonising impulses, that violence explores.'<sup>5</sup>

Rather than a dialectical play of power, *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* maps out what Deleuze calls 'the death knell for becoming conscious', part of the classical conception of mapping polarities of power and oppression. This death knell, according to Deleuze, is 'precisely the consciousness that there were no people, but always several peoples, an infinity of peoples, who remained to be united, or should not be united, in order for the problem to change.' (Deleuze, 2000: 220). This is not an inversion of power, race or gender relations, a subversion of the master/slave analogy, but a more disruptive, less homogenised, politics of becoming, of multiple intersections, connections and interlappings between characters, in which the self is always in the process of "becoming-other": a politics of contamination and transmission.

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<sup>5</sup> Burke, Frank (2002). Intimations (and more) of colonialism: Dario Argento's *L'Uccello dalle piume di cristallo* (*The Bird With the Crystal Plumage*, 1970). *Kinoeye: new perspectives on European Film*. Vol 2. Issue 11. 10 June 2002. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.kinoeye.org/02/11/burke11.php>

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It is in this sense that we can begin to rethink the importance of the gallery sequence as a meta-textual interrogation of cinematic spectatorship using Burke's terms. Between the glass doors, Dalmas, is situated as coloniser and colonized simultaneously - in his desire to colonise the other, he finds himself instead in a glass cage of his own making, rendered silent, helpless and unable to react to the optical drama that unfolds before his eyes. For Burke: '[T]he gender issues that are so central to the film are "produced" within this context of (male) alienation, colonisation and self-colonisation, opening up the possibility for a strong critique of masculinity.'<sup>6</sup> Indeed, Burke argues the narrative resolution resists the attempts of colonising masculinity to assert itself by reference to the disruptive effect of female violence. Not only can Ranieri's copycat killing be seen as an attempted appropriation and colonisation of Monica's authentic rage but '[t]he hermetic enclosures of the television studio and also the airplane where Julia and Sam presumably find happy 'containment' ever after, just reinstate the problematic conditions that gave rise to the film's violence.'<sup>7</sup> Burke's analysis can be used to destabilise Needham's more reductive thesis, which sees the *giallo* as a form that is used to 'promote the non-national' by 'a tendency to exaggerate and exploit the "foreign" through the tropes of travel and the tourist's gaze.'<sup>8</sup> It is difficult to see how the critique of colonisation

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<sup>6</sup> Burke, Frank (2002). Intimations (and more) of colonialism: Dario Argento's *L'Uccello dalle piume di cristallo (The Bird With the Crystal Plumage, 1970)*. *Kinoeye: new perspectives on European Film*. Vol 2. Issue 11. 10 June 2002. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.kinoeye.org/02/11/burke11.php>

<sup>7</sup> Burke, Frank (2002). Intimations (and more) of colonialism: Dario Argento's *L'Uccello dalle piume di cristallo (The Bird With the Crystal Plumage, 1970)*. *Kinoeye: new perspectives on European Film*. Vol 2. Issue 11. 10 June 2002. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.kinoeye.org/02/11/burke11.php>

<sup>8</sup> Needham, Gary (2002a). Playing with genre: An introduction to the Italian giallo. *Kinoeye: new perspectives on European Film*. Issue 2. Vol. 11. 10 June 2002. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.kinoeye.org/02/11/needham11.php>



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and the violence implicit within the imperialistic impulse can be “read” as actively promoting the non-National: in fact, it does the very opposite. Rather than selling ‘Italian-ness’, the *giallo*, as Bava’s *The Evil Eye* and Argento’s *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, creates an-other Italy - a dark and deviant gothic space - far removed from the picturesque Italy of tourist brochures. By the end, Dalmas and Julia can’t wait to leave Italy, and return to the “civilised spaces” of America!

#### **Questioning Gender**

Much of what has been written on the films of Dario Argento has concentrated on the subversion of the visual and visible signifiers of femininity to the exclusion of discussion of masculinity. This is no doubt due to the influence of feminist paradigms on the function of gender in horror film (Clover et al), via Mulvey, on accounts of Argento’s *giallo*. It is clear, however, that it is questions of masculinity and the function of “man” as source of ultimate and stable signification that is being addressed in Argento’s early *giallo*. Needham’s analysis (2000), although problematic in its retaining of the psychoanalytical meta-narrative, foregrounds the manner in which *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* can be seen as offering a counter-paradigm to the conventional iconographies of the classical thriller in which masculinity is associated with agency and activity by the ‘themes of victory and defeat and a movement towards order and control’. (Needham, 2000: 92) Needham contends that Argento’s *giallo* articulate the impossibility of mastery - and by association masculinity - in their disruption of the traditional conventions of detective fiction/film:

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Gender identities in Argento's films are never fixed. Dalmas' masculinity is constantly unstable and through his detective pursuits he hopes to attain mastery and control over the situation, only to ultimately lose it. (Needham, 2000: 92)

In *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, the intimate relationship between the difficulty of detection and the instability of gender identity lies on the heart of the film's transgression: it is the fact that the assailant in the art-gallery sequence is "female" that renders Dalmas unable to detect, as he cannot assimilate the signifiers of aggression with the cliché of woman as victim, the traditional trope of the classical thriller. Deleuze draws our attention to the functioning of the cliché, citing Bergson he states that: 'we do not perceive the thing or the image in its entirety, we always perceive less of it, we perceive only what we are interested in perceiving, or rather what is in our interest to perceive, by virtue of our economic interests, ideological beliefs and psychological demands.' (Deleuze, 2000: 20).

It is Dalmas's economic interests and ideological beliefs, which demand that the perpetrator of the series of violent attacks on women must be a male sadist who takes pleasure from female victimisation. As such, in a similar manner to Inspector Morrisini - the official detective - he identifies only those visual signifiers of the subsequent scene/seen of the crime, which fit, into his culturally biased gendered framework in which the entrenched iconography of passive femininity is constructed in relation to the active, agency of masculinity. This is evident in the manner in which his transcription of the events for the police omits the visual indeterminacy of the scene of the crime replacing it with the linguistic determinacy of masculine discourse. Utilising gestures to augment language, Dalmas not only reconstructs the

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events into a coherent chronology but also constructs the space of the scene/seen into a determinable and determined continuity.

I was on my way home and I was walking in front of the gallery [Dalmas points outside] and I saw these lights [Dalmas points up the stairs]. I looked up here and saw these two figures struggling.

In discussing 'Thought and the Cinema', Deleuze distinguishes between the relationship between the action-image and thought (as in cinema of the movement image) and thought in the time-image. In relation to American cinema, Deleuze posits the following model of thought: 'The action-image could go from the situation to the action, or conversely, from the action to the situation; it was inseparable from acts of comprehension through which the hero evaluated what was given in the problem or situation, or from acts of inference by which he guessed what was not given [...]. (Deleuze, 2000: 163). This model of thought is one, which predominates, in the traditional detective novel and the crime-detection film: the hero's act of evaluation restores chaos to order through the intermediary of language and symbolic restructuring. In Fredric Brown's *The Screaming Mimi*, language provides the protagonist, Sweeney, with a weapon against the hysterical and violent Yolanda<sup>9</sup>.

In *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, hard-boiled language is unable to replace chaos with order, and transgression with regulation. Not only is male language unable to reintegrate the visual signifiers of disruption within its gendered bias; but the scene/seen of the crime signifies a different model of thought and perceptual framework, which is resistant to appropriation by reference to traditional modes of interpretation. This insertion of the problematic means that: 'far from restoring

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the scene/seen of the crime signifies a different model of thought and perceptual framework, which is resistant to appropriation by reference to traditional modes of interpretation. This insertion of the problematic means that: 'far from restoring knowledge, or the internal certainty that it lacks, to thought, the problematic deduction puts the unthought into thought, because it takes away all its interiority to excavate an outside in it, an irreducible reverse-side, which consumes its substance.'

(Deleuze, 2000: 175)

### **Repetitions and Revisions**

Conventional narrative is obliterated as the motif of vision and its relation to a new way of thinking about cinema comes to the fore. Instead of an overarching "story", the spectator is given fragments of narratives that cannot be neatly organised and unified. (Landy, 2000: 352).

Landy's description of the reworking of the conventions of cinematic narration in terms of the reconfiguration of the motif of vision and revision of conceptual frameworks is particularly relevant to deconstruction of narrative integrity and visual coherence in Argento's *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*. Perhaps even more important that the originary crime scene/seen of the crime in Argento's *gialli* is its secondary repetitions and revisions as the embedded diegetic detective/spectator attempts to organise the disconnected sequence of visual signifiers into a coherent and intelligible narrative. McDonagh highlights how the impact of the scene/seen of the crime is not contained within the time and space of the actual event, but continually repeats in fragmented form to undermine the holistic integrity of the subsequent narrative:

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<sup>9</sup> see the final confrontation with Yolanda, 1949 pp. 240-247

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Just as Dalmas is unable to pin down the piece of the visual puzzle that doesn't fit, he is unable to solve the mystery of the unknown assailant. What is at stake here, and posed by the sequence in the art-gallery, is the logical rationality of detection in which the detective combines the narrative clues in order to unmask the narrative transgression and restore moral equilibrium to the inherent deviancy of the narrative suggested by the originary diegetic crime.

In his position as [hardboiled] detective, Dalmas must, like Hammett's Continental Op: 'deconstruct, decompose, deploy and defictionalize that 'reality' and to construct or reconstruct out of it a true fiction, i.e. an account of what 'really' happened.' (Marcus, 1974: xix). In other words, Dalmas must construct order from chaos and pin down the floating signifiers of the visual enigma to their verbal signifieds. But as we have seen the visual indeterminacy of the crime scene [seen] means that neither Dalmas located within the imaginary, nor Inspector Morrisini in the symbolic, are able to reconcile their embedded understanding of the conventions of detection which are constructed around a traditional iconography of male violence and female victimhood. Even the final denouement allows no recuperation of male ideals or ideology, as trapped under a large statue Dalmas is once more rendered into the position of passive femininity by the aggressive-feminine.

In "Mirrors of Madness: Paul Auster's New York Trilogy", Steven E. Alford elucidates the differences between traditional hardboiled forms of detection as embodied within the figure of the Continental Op, and more post-modern detection as figured in Paul Auster's work. Alford contends that the blurring of boundaries between the fictional and the non-fictional and inside and outside means that 'the

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solution to the mystery is not the discovery of the “criminal other,” but how the other is implicated in the self-constitution of the investigator.<sup>10</sup>

Similarly *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* works outside its embedded self-referentiality to hardboiled forms of fiction, for what we could call in Alford's terms a “post-modern fiction of difference.”<sup>11</sup> This helps to foreground the manner in which the colonial other's confrontation with the colonised is not simply the assertion of binary oppositions, but a method of questioning the ideological functioning of those oppositions. Utilising Alford's argument around Paul Auster, I would suggest that the relationship between Dalmás (the coloniser) and Monica (the colonised) can be viewed as central to the deconstruction of systems of knowledge based around a self/other division, as: ‘Along the way, however, confidence in their autonomy is undermined, and they increasingly see themselves as being controlled and, ultimate, constituted as themselves by the other’<sup>12</sup> as demonstrated by the final confrontation in the art-gallery.

#### **The Perverse Pleasures of the Female Gaze?**

Argento's first *giallo* is at its most subversive in its articulation of uncontrolled and uncontrollable aggressive-femininity. In order to map out a way in which Deleuze's taxonomy of the *time image* can provide a textual space for retheorisation of female

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<sup>10</sup> Alford, Steven E. (nda). *Mirrors of Madness: Paul Auster's The New York Trilogy*. [Online]. Available at: <http://polaris.nova.edu/~alford/articles/ausidentity.html>

<sup>11</sup> Alford, Steven E. (nda). *Mirrors of Madness: Paul Auster's The New York Trilogy*. [Online]. Available at: <http://polaris.nova.edu/~alford/articles/ausidentity.html>

<sup>12</sup> Alford, Steven E. (nda). *Mirrors of Madness: Paul Auster's The New York Trilogy*. [Online]. Available at: <http://polaris.nova.edu/~alford/articles/ausidentity.html>

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spectatorship, I want to return to the beginning of the film and to the credit sequence and to consider what the framing of the narrative through the female gaze means for a feminist theorisation of the relationship between gender and genre. Indeed I argue that read retroactively the credit sequences function to problematise theories of the male gaze, and the gendered division of narrative/spectacle.

Whilst these opening images can be seen as offering the extra-diegetic spectator supplementary information regarding the identity of the killer, the main impact of the sequences is as a transgressive counter paradigm to the normative constructions of the investigative gaze as inherently masculine, if not necessarily male. In *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, this normative paradigm is performed by the positioning of Dalmas in the role of detective and articulated through his [misguided] attempts to utilise the logic and language of rational detection, as inscribed in the classical form of detection, in an attempt to restore symbolic order. The over codification of the visual signifiers of masculinity and femininity in the opening sequence therefore anticipates the embedded mis-reading of Dalmas, the diegetic spectator, whose gender bias renders him unable to reconcile the visual image with the verbal signifier.

The credit sequences seem at first to directly address the extra-diegetic spectator as male. The focus of the camera's gaze is a young woman dressed in red walking down a street. An unseen camera, arrests movement, and freezes the woman's body into a series of photographic stills. This appears to be a typical fetishisation of the female body: its fragmentation and possession through the cinematic lens as symbol of the male gaze. A cut to a lingering close-up of a selection of sharp and penetrating shining knives laid out on a red cloth table, framed by a pair of black leather gloves,

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links the gaze to sexual violence and serves as a further signifier that the concealed diegetic spectator is male. And if we are still not clear about the connotations of gaze and male [sadism], the selection of one of the knives, its blade glistening, violently and repeatedly thrust through the stilled image of the female body makes the implicit explicit.

As such, the text inscribes a relation between the investigative gaze and textual violence: a violence, which seems at this stage to be constructed around the traditional male/subject and female/object binarism. At the same time, the embodiment of the spectator within the cinematic frame, and the use of hand-held photography and tracking shots, means that the extra-diegetic spectator is forced to view the disturbing opening sequences through the visual field of the killer's point-of-view. In 'Threatening Glances: Voyeurism, eye-violation and the camera: from *Peeping Tom* to *Opera*', Chris Gallant argues that these 'psychopathic subjective shots' are a stable element of Argento's work. (Gallant, 2000: 13). As the gender of the diegetic spectator is concealed, a conventional 'feminist' reading via Mulvey (Clover et al), would read the sequence as enacting a primal escape from the threat of the female body through its investigation and immobilisation. The argument would be that in transforming the woman's body into an object through its framing and then fixation through the 'eye' of the camera, the male spectator is able to disavow the possibility of castration.

[...] the meaning of woman is sexual difference, the visually ascertainable absence of the penis, the material evidence on which is based the castration complex essential for the organisation of entrance to the symbolic order and the law of the father. (Mulvey, 1992: 21)



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On first viewing, the credit sequences of *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* appear to offer textual evidence of Mulvey's thesis as outlined in "Visual Pleasure". The concealed diegetic spectator, whose identity is a mystery until the conclusion of the narrative, actively objectifies the woman's body, fetishizing and fragmenting it within the doubled perspective of the [male] "gaze" and photographic camera "eye". Read retroactively, once Monica has been revealed as the killer, we can no longer situate the credit sequence within traditional feminist understandings of spectatorship, either within Mulvey's or those models derived from Mulvey (Clover et al), as they maintain masculinity as a privileged position. Indeed, these sequences deconstruct the assumption of three-dimensional spatiality with the masculine protagonist and critique the cliché of female objectification and its presentation within a one-dimensional spatiality. It is Dalmas, of course, is the ultimate "object" of the gaze when he is trapped between the twin doors of the art-gallery: in his glass cage.

We can therefore re-read the opening sequences as constructing an alternative scenario of visual and sexual pleasure, in direct antagonism to the usual scenario in which the woman spectator is forced into a transgendered position in order to identify with the protagonist-hero of the narrative, or into masochistic identification with the victim. In *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, it is the male spectator who has been forced into the position of transgendered identification and whose identity is consequently called into question. As such Argento's *giallo* dramatises the illusionary nature of patterns of cinematic identification in the thriller genre, and it is

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the male spectator rather than the female who is uncomfortable in their transvestite clothes.<sup>13</sup>

It is clear therefore that the eroticism of the opening credits in which Monica is surveying her next victim cannot be explained through appropriation of traditional psychoanalytic terminology. In doing so I would argue that *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* subverts ideologies of cinematic pleasure, which are constructed through the objectification of the female body. The male fantasy of control and knowledge as articulated in the form of the detective thriller is undermined by the *woman-as-killer* in her appropriation of the male gaze: as demonstrated by the opening sequences which are focalised through Monica's point-of-view, and the subsequent gallery sequence in which Monica reflects back Dalmas's investigative gaze. As Mendik argues the ultimate revelation that the killer is not male but female serves to 'fragment the spectator's alignment to the text.' (Mendik, 1996: 46) and disestablishes normal patterns of identification attributed to male visual pleasure. For both the diegetic spectator, Dalmas, and the extra-diegetic [male] spectator, the female appropriation of both the signs of masculinity and the male gaze not only destroys visual pleasure but raises irresolvable questions about the very possibility of a "gendered" identity, both inside and outside the cinematic space. This sequence therefore not only posits an immediate state of disequilibrium but also anticipates the subversion and transgression of gender and genre made explicit in the visual enigma postulated through the subsequent art-gallery sequence. The cliché of male violence linked into

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<sup>13</sup> This argument around the illusory nature of female empowerment, or 'fantasy of masculinisation' as Mulvey puts, can be found in her follow-up essay to "Visual Pleasure", entitled "Afterthoughts inspired by *Duel in the Sun*". (see 1992, pp. 29-37)

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the power of looking is inscribed, only to be subsequently undermined by the revelation of Monica Raineri, not as victim, but as violator.



Strangely she did not identify herself with the victim but with her attacker.

**Figure 16:** Monica as Lady Macbeth in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*

Whilst the victims in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* are exclusively female which, despite some critic's contentions, is not symptomatic of Argento's *giallo* as a whole; the fact that Monica is the killer disrupts the gender dynamics of the dominant paradigms of the relationship between genre and gender, and in particular those put forward by Clover (1992) and Creed (1992) as discussed in *Chapter Two*. In terms of Clover's argument around the "final girl", we could argue that Dalmas's [sexual] obsession with Monica allows no disavowal of her femininity which would situate make her a suitable surrogate - at a distance - for the male spectator. And the sympathetic positioning of Monica, as both victim and violator, as in Argento's later rape-revenge *giallo* *The Stendhal Syndrome* (1996), I would suggest places her outside Barbara Creed's reductive account of the female killer in terms of the "monstrous-feminine", as does the iconographic referencing in the art gallery sequence to Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth: when Monica holds out her bloody hand towards the camera, and Dalmas, our surrogate spectator. That this is not the only reference in Argento's work to Shakespeare's tragic female protagonists as I mapped

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in my main introduction, is important. It adds a tragic and Operatic [Shakespeare via Verdi] dimension to the character of Monica, which is far removed from the more “common” and “understandable” figures of female protagonists in the American horror film, and in particular the later “slasher” genre.

Monica is neither mannish -as in Clover’s model - or monstrous - as in Creed’s model - but rather performs a line of flight from traditional models of gender in the horror film. In her choice of woman as objects of her murderous desire - stalking and objectifying her victims before eventually killing them - and the highly charged and eroticised murder scenes in which she ‘symbolically rapes’ her victims, Monica defies classification, categorisation and colonisation in the oedipal theatre of desire. Neither as in *The Evil Eye*, is there is a simplistic whore/virgin binarism on which the narrative can reassert a ‘good’ patriarchal femininity as the cost of a ‘bad’ femininity, the cut to Julia’s face (“good”) when the embedded psychologist is talking about Monica (“bad”) functions to construct lines of similarity between the characters which upset these binary distinctions.

And whilst both obviously and overtly Monica shares some characteristics with the figure of the femme fatale that we find in noir fiction and film, she cannot be “read” or “appropriated” within that terminology. In *Chapter One*, I suggested that the figure of Giovanna in Visconti’s *Obsession* was an example of “la dolente”, or woman as “sufferer” which has figured in Italian film from its earliest days and can be traced back to religious iconography of the Virgin Mary. This also again asserts the importance of the connection between the political and the iconographic in Italian film, which as we saw in *Chapter One* helped to explain the particular shape and form

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that the cinematic-image takes in Italian cinema. In *Italian Film*, Marcia Landy situates the Italian femme fatale's transgression in terms of her refusal to conform to social and cultural expectations. Writing about the figure of Sofonisba in *Cabiria*, Landy describes her as: 'the incarnation of passion, defiance of the social order, and finally of self-destructiveness.' (Landy, 2000: 263). Landy further foregrounds the "protean" character of "constructions" of the feminine in Italian cinema, contending that: 'the figure of woman exceeds conventional conceptions of male and female. Resisting fixed identification, femininity is synonymous with uncertainty, with that which is disruptive to the world of the masculine protagonist and to the social order. Its threat and its power lies in its protean character.' (Landy, 2000: 261/262). We need to situate the characterisation of Monica, and her tragic dimensions, within the specific nature of Italian cinema, in order not to reduce her multiple becomings to the singular and simplistic binaries of self and other which constitute feminist understandings of the horror film generally.

It is clear that this production of female fury in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* and Argento's subsequent *gialli*, is not only not reducible to traditional psychoanalytical interpretations of female monstrosity, but insists on a different methodological approach to this problematisation of the cliché of woman and gendered violence in the horror film - one which does away with the fixation of molar identities and instead focuses in on the perverse pleasures of becoming.

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### **Conclusion: feminist reconfigurations?**

The 1970s were a time for the investigation of film language by philosophers, semioticians, cineradicals, and filmmakers. In particular, psychoanalysis and Marxism became, for many Italian critics and filmmakers, the ingredients necessary for understanding the nature of impact of cinematic production and reception. (Landy, 2000: 357)

Argento's first *giallo* forms the prototype for all his subsequent *giallo*: the 'not-so-innocent foreigner'; a narrative enigma which takes the form of an originary disruption in the visual; a number of grotesque and baroque set-pieces which defamiliarise the traditional grammar and iconography of cinema; and a littering of comedic marginal characters taken from the pages of the traditional form of Commedia dell'Arte. This separation of *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* into a series of identifiable thematics however fails to address the major issues around gender and genre that Argento's first *gialli* raises and refuses to resolve. Situating the film within the intellectual climate of the 1970s and the corresponding investigation of cinematic language helps to explain its foregrounding of gender and identity politics. We can see *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* as participating in the poststructuralist project, which Verena Andermatt Conley in "Becoming-Woman Now" defines in the following terms: 'They write away from a unified subject for whom the other is merely a mirrored reflection of the self. They search for other structures - or structures other - unknown, not yet here, always to come, which cannot easily be identified by language.' (Conley, 2000: 19).

At the core of *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* is an interrogation of the language through which identity is constructed, and in particular the conventions and codings

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of gender as integral to identity formation. The attributes of activity and agency associated with masculinity in modern detective fiction are subverted through the figure of Dalmas who is trapped and alienated, both literally and metaphorically, by the foreign culture than he inhabits. The opposite binaries of passivity and immobility, which formalise figurations of the feminine in classical narrative, are thrown into chaos by the unrecognisable femme fatale, or la dolente, Monica Ranieri. This destabilisation of gender norms is articulated not just thematically but structurally, in the problematisation over systems of knowledge and rationality and the fragmentation of narrative coherence. Working outside the conventions of classical narrative and within the remit of the *time-image*, *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, introduces the notion of becoming to that of fixed identities.

## **Introduction**

In contrast, what happens when the irrational cut, the interstice or interval, pass between visual and sound elements which are purified, disjunctive, freed from each other? (Deleuze, 2000: 249).

In my analysis of *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, I introduced the main elements of my thesis. This argument is twofold. Firstly, Argento's *gialli* are not reducible to a series of pathological symptoms, which literally 'beg' (as Needham 2002b contends) for psychoanalytical interpretation and indeed that they actively resist such an act of appropriation as demonstrated in my analysis of the origins of the genre in *Chapter Two*. Secondly, as I showed in *Chapter Three*, Deleuze's taxonomy of the *time-image* provides a possible alternative through which to begin to explore the operation of visual and aural excess for which Argento's *gialli* are noted without reducing the intensity and multiplicity of their textual spaces to the fixed spaces of gendered binaries.

In this chapter I use Deleuze's discussion of "the components of the image" in *Cinema 2: The Time Image* order to examine the relationship between the sight and sound in Argento's second *giallo*, *The Cat O'Nine Tails* (1971) and in particular to explore what happens when the visual and aural elements of the cinematic-image are used in disjunction from each other, as this is a defining feature of Argento's *gialli* and most clearly demonstrated in the mediation on "seeing" and "hearing" as thematic structure in *The Cat O'Nine Tails*. I argue that as cinema of the *time-image*, Argento's second *giallo* pushes the cinematic-image beyond the binary and into an affective state of "singularities" which are irreducible to a coherent and organic whole as central to more conventional horror films



Traditionally debates surrounding the relationship between the visual and the aural, which can be traced back to the coming of sound on film, privilege the primacy of the visual and accord the aural components of the image a secondary, relational status. Psychoanalytical approaches to Argento's *giallo* rarely discuss the importance of sound, but focus instead on this primacy of the visual in which the traumatic irruption of violence in the text is a reinscription of the inherent violence of the primary scene [seen] (Mendik, 1996, 2002 and Needham, 2002a). In this scenario, language functions as a supplement: the parental injunction, "no", which occurs after the original traumatic vision of difference and organises identity into a set of positions based around the primacy of the phallus. In the Freudian schema, gendered identity is constituted by the "sight/scene" of difference. The girl-child immediately recognises her status as "not-all", whilst the boy-child's distance from the body that signifies lack enables a more measured and temporal recognition of his status in the signifying order in terms of presence. In Lacanian terms it is the "the-name-of-the-father" as master signifier, which structures the "visual/visible" relations of difference within language. Both accounts maintain a primacy of the visual in that gender is constructed in relation to the visual [and biological] sign of difference. By focussing in on the *giallo* narrative as an attempt on the part of the [male] protagonist to master the anxiety caused by the "primal scene" [and by association the female body], psychoanalytical accounts reduce the multiplicity of the cinematic-image to one story – his/story.

In my analysis of Argento's *Cat O'Nine Tails*, I demonstrate how the use of sound - music, sound-effects and dialogue - effectively works to dislodge the primacy of the visual from its hierarchical privilege and constructs instead a 'new analytic of the image'

not reducible to the gendered binaries of traditional psychoanalytic paradigms or the synthesizing viewpoint of the transcendental spectator.

***The Cat O'Nine Tails - I like solving puzzles***

The second of Argento's so-called animal trilogy - sandwiched between *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* (1970) and *Four Flies on Grey Velvet* (1971), *The Cat O'Nine Tails* with its blind detective and convoluted and complicated plot twists and turns is also one of Argento's most interesting *gialli*. The defamiliarisation of the relationship between *seeing* and *knowing*, fundamental to the operation of Argento's *gialli*, is paradoxically nowhere clearer than it is in *Cat O'Nine Tails* in which the central investigative role is taken by Franco Arno (Karl Marden), a blind ex-newspaper reporter, who earns his livelihood by devising Braille crosswords. Whilst Argento's male protagonists suffer from an inability to understand what they see, Arno's blindness gives him an almost clairvoyant ability to understand without seeing. In *The Cat O'Nine Tails*, as in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, the world inside the text [cinematic reality] is no longer confined to the prescriptive dictates of cinematic 'realism' and the construction of a determinate, determinable and recognisable world - a functional reality - but is instead indeterminate, amorphous and lacunary - a material reality which takes on an autonomy outside the demands of the situation, composed of disconnected and emptied "any-space-whatevers" in which pure optical and sound situations become established. (Deleuze, 2000: 4). Again, this is much closer to Pasolini's description of poetical reality, as introduced in Chapter One, than traditional cinematic realism.

The film begins in one of these emptied “any-space-whatevers” - a deserted street where Arno is out walking with his young niece, Lori (Cinza De Carolis). As they pass a car parked on the curb, Arno overhears fragments of a conversation which seem to allude to an attempted blackmail plot. Arno’s apartment overlooks a medical research organisation, the Terzi Institute, and that night, he overhears sounds of a struggle. The next day, Arno discovers that what he heard was an attack on a security guard during what appears to have been a burglary: although nothing was taken. Obsessed with solving puzzles, Arno joins forces with Carlo Giordani (James Franciscus), a reporter, to investigate what happened at the Institute. Four brutal murders follow and Arno’s niece is kidnapped, before Casoni (Aldo Reggiani), a medical researcher at the institute, is unveiled as the murderer during the stunning end sequences which take place across the rooftops of the Institute and end with the falling body of Casoni down an empty lift shaft.

While *The Cat O'Nine Tails* was a commercial success, albeit not on the scale of *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, critical reaction has been less well disposed to Argento’s second *giallo*. As Mike Lebbing points out in his review of the film ‘This second part of the ‘Animal Trilogy’ has for some time been considered the weakest film in its director’s oeuvre (2000: 98), although as he concedes recently Argento’s 2001 *The Phantom of the Opera* has displaced *The Cat O'Nine Tails* from its position as Argento’s ‘worst’ film. McDonagh (1994) suggests the negative responses to Argento’s second *giallo* are perhaps a consequence of the fact that the film dispenses with the narrative linearity. But as she contends: ‘[T]hat’s a weakness only if narrative linearity is its goal.’ (1994: 69). That is if we insist on reading the film by reference to popular American models of cinematic narrative, or interpretative frameworks derived from these same models.

Instead McDonagh points out the lack of narrative linearity mirrors and frames the internal puzzle which constantly obstructs the film's protagonists attempts at detection: 'But *The Cat O'Nine Tails* is conceived - to use the metaphor supplied by Arno's profession - as a crossword puzzle in which catching onto the tricks concealed within the clues is as important as finding the solution.' (1994: 69). In opposition to McDonagh, Needham (2002b) provides an example of negative responses to the film, finding *The Cat O'Nine Tails* 'the least inspiring of Argento's Italian-made *gialli*' and argues that the film is a poor example of the genre contending that 'at the root of the film's mediocrity - that is, as an Argento product rather than a *giallo* - lies in its formal relationship with American cinematic models of detection and investigation.'<sup>1</sup> For Needham the film's major problem is that: 'by distancing itself from the *giallo*'s discursive support of psychoanalysis, shifting its allegiances in the direction of scientific rationalisation, *Il gatto* closes down the perversity inherent in deviant and oppressive familial relations.'<sup>2</sup> Aside from the obvious reductiveness of Needham's subjective response to *The Cat O'Nine Tails*, his argument is problematic on a number of levels. Firstly, he creates horror cinema as a homogenous discourse, mapped upon the American model, so that *The Cat O'Nine Tails* fails because it works outside of the centralisation of perverse familial relations in the American horror film post 1960; secondly and in direct conflict with this argument, he asserts that the film is a poor example of the *giallo* genre - it is not Italian enough; and thirdly and most significantly *The Cat O'Nine Tails* disrupts his thesis that the *giallo* insists on psychoanalytical interpretation (2000a).

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<sup>1</sup> Needham, Gary (2002b). From *punctum* to Pentazet, and everything inbetween: Dario Argento's *Il gatto a nove code*. *Kinoeye: new perspectives on European Film*. [Online]. Available at: [http://www.kinoeye.org/02/11/needham11\\_no2.php](http://www.kinoeye.org/02/11/needham11_no2.php)

<sup>2</sup> Needham, Gary (2002b). From *punctum* to Pentazet, and everything inbetween: Dario Argento's *Il gatto a nove code*. *Kinoeye: new perspectives on European Film*. [Online]. Available at: [http://www.kinoeye.org/02/11/needham11\\_no2.php](http://www.kinoeye.org/02/11/needham11_no2.php)

As I have already argued the *giallo*, and in particular Argento's *gialli*, are resistant to this sort of psychoanalytical appropriation. *The Cat O'Nine Tails* only 'fails', if like Needham, we judge the film against pre-existing models and/or interpretative frameworks. And if we see the film as an anomaly rather than perhaps the most overt expression of Argento's aesthetic, philosophical and political project to continually push against and extend the possibilities of the *giallo* as exploration of the potentialities of the cinematic image. What is particularly interesting about *The Cat O'Nine Tails* is that it overtly and explicitly engages in the importance of sound as a component of the cinematic-image and in doing so dislodges the visual from its traditional hierarchical position in interpretations of the operation of the filmic text. In disengaging the primacy of the visual, *The Cat O'Nine Tails* fulfils the potentiality of the aural component of the image, which traditionally the development of the technology of sound-on-film has attempted to suppress.

### **Sound-on-film**

many of the classic film theorists considered cinema an essentially visual medium. Even those who admit the importance of the aural dimension of film have generally not paid as much attention to it as they have the visual aspect of the medium. (Mast and Cohen and Braudy, 1992: 230)

The use of music in silent films can be traced back to the shadow puppet plays of Java, which were accompanied by a gamelan<sup>3</sup> orchestra. In both cases, music was accorded a secondary importance to the primacy of the visual image. According to Deleuze the

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<sup>3</sup> 'An ensemble of musicians playing tuned percussion instruments - mostly gongs, drums, cymbals and metallophones (similar to a xylophone but with metal bars instead of wooden ones.' (Nelmes, 1999: 69)

most profound theme of the visual image in the silent film was its ability to point to ‘an innocent physical nature, to an immediate life which has no need of language’; but an innocence shattered by the intertitle which functioned to ‘show the law, the forbidden, the transmitted order’ (1989: 225). Deleuze points out silent film was never ‘silent’ but merely ‘noiseless’ as the intertitle functioned to inscribe the dialogic and expository elements of the cinematic-image. Indeed Deleuze’s description of the use of the intertitle provides a counter-paradigm to those reconstructions of silent film as a source of visual truth, untouched by the contaminating effect of language as supplement. In early films, musical scores were a necessity, rather than an aesthetic, as it helped to “efface” the very mechanics of the visual images production; the large, and noisy machines which projected the earliest films.<sup>4</sup> Robert Spande terms film music as a contingent necessity, exhibiting what he calls the properties of a ‘*vanishing mediator*’: a ‘phenomenon which disappears necessarily from the field of its own effects.’<sup>5</sup>

The first use of sound-on-film<sup>6</sup> was in 1911, and produced by Eugène Lauste, who worked for Edison. It was not until 1927 and Warner Bros’s *The Jazz Singer*, a biopic of the life of Al Johnson, that audiences were introduced to the ‘talkie’. The coming of sound-on-film transformed the use of language in film, from the indirect speech-act of the intertitle, to the direct discursive I-You relation: ‘The speech-act is no longer connected with the second function of the eye, it is no longer read but heard.’ (Deleuze, 2000: 226). For those silent film directors, who considered film as an aesthetic, the

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<sup>4</sup> Spande, Robert (nda). *The Three Regimes: A Theory of Film Music*. *FilmSound.org*. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.franklinmarketplace.com/filmmusic.html>

<sup>5</sup> Spande, Robert (nda). *The Three Regimes: A Theory of Film Music*. *FilmSound.org*. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.franklinmarketplace.com/filmmusic.html>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.franklinmarketplace.com/filmmusic.htm>

<sup>6</sup> Other important developments in sound-on-film were the Vitaphone and Phonofilm in the mid 1920s.

coming of sound-on-film was viewed with great trepidation. In 1928 in "A Statement [On Sound]", the Great Russian innovators of montage - S.M. Eisenstein, V.I. Pudovkin and G.V. Alexandrov - expressed these fears when they argued that 'this new technical discovery may not only hinder the development and perfection of the cinema as an art but also threaten to destroy all its present formal achievements.' (Eisenstein, Pudovkin and Alexandrov, 1992: 317). For Eisenstein, Pudovkin and Alexandrov, the coming-of-sound was not a negative technological invention in itself, but rather they expressed fears that it would be used to commercialise cinema, removing it from the realm of aesthetics and bringing it into that of the commodity: 'it is most probable that its use will proceed along the line of least resistance, for example, along the line of satisfying simple curiosity.' They call instead for a 'contrapuntal use of sound in relation to the visual image [which] will afford a new potentiality of montage development and perfection.' (Eisenstein, Pudovkin and Alexandrov, 1992: 318). Against the concerns that the use of dialogue and sound-on-film would send cinema to a national grave, Eisenstein, Pudovkin and Alexandrov suggest that the contrapuntal method would strengthen rather than weaken international film and bring it to unprecedented cultural heights. In *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, Deleuze situates asynchrony rather than the contrapuntal, as the characteristic of the new audio-visual image of modern cinema. (Deleuze, 2000: 250).

In "The Components of the Image" Deleuze defines the distinction between silent film and the first stage of the talkie in terms of the operation of dialogic language in which the indirect mode of the silent film - the use of the intertitle - gives way to direct dialogic discourse in the sound film. The division of the cinematic-image in silent film between the visible image and readable speech gives way in the talkie to a different division, of

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the cinematic-image in which the visible becomes both problematised and denaturalised: 'What the speech-act makes visible, interaction, may always be badly deciphered, read, seen: hence a whole new rise in the lie, in deception, which takes place in the visual image.' (Deleuze, 2000: 229). In the first stage of the talkie, the dialogic - rather than the spectacular determines the aesthetics of the cinematic-image. This is what Deleuze means when he talks about cinema opening up to a 'sociology of communication' - a whole *mise-en-scène* or 'dramaturgy of daily life (uneasiness, deceptions and conflicts in interaction)' through which the rumour becomes 'a cinematographically privileged object.' (Deleuze, 2000: 227).

The innovation of sound-on-film, however, has mainly been driven forward by the dictates of continuity realism necessary in order to get the spectator to 'suspend belief' and allow a dualistic, narcissistic and voyeuristic relationship to be formed between the viewer and character: the opposite to Eisenstein's, Pudovkin's and Alexandrov's conception of 'contrapuntal montage'. Belton highlights how the 'quest for a sound track that captures an idealized reality' necessitates the construction of 'a world carefully filtered to eliminate sounds that fall outside of understanding or significance; every sound must signify'. (Belton, 1992: 326). At the same time, technological advances such as surround sound - the division of sound into multiple tracks - has meant that: 'instead of becoming better able to approximate the real and to efface its own presence, stereo sound remains marked by the nature of the system(s) it uses to create the illusion of space [...] no matter how "noiseless" it becomes, the system never quite disappears.' (Belton, 1992: 329).



### **Sound and the illusion of “reality”**

Belton's argument helps to focus our attention on how sound-on-film is driven by the ideological functioning of cinematic narrative - the need to maintain an illusion of reality which necessitates the effacement of the very mechanics of its production. This is an idealistic conception of aesthetics which can be traced back to the Platonic division between the world of the sensible and the world of the idea as constituted through the flickering images of the “real” on the cinematic wall of the cave. The control and constraining of cinematic production, exhibition and distribution by the capitalist machine, often in service to the ruling elite and/or the state, has always been a powerful means of constraining the subject through the regulation of desire. We can consider how both Hitler and Mussolini utilised the power of the image during the Second World War to mobilise and gather support: to construct a “people”, or indeed Foucault's argument around the pathologisation of sexual identity towards the end of the nineteenth century through the delimitation of appropriate and inappropriate desire through the privileging of the familial unit.

In “Aural Objects” Christian Metz contends that there is a ‘kind of primitive substantialism’ which is deeply rooted in our culture, traced back to conceptualisations of the *cognito* (Descartes/Spinoza), which privileges primary qualities - the visual and the tactile - over secondary adjectival qualities - sounds, smells and ‘even certain subdimensions of the visual order such as color.’ (Metz, 1992: 313). Talking about “off-screen sound” in the cinema, Metz argues that these cultural assumptions underpin the use of sound in the cinema: “the conception of sound as an attribute, as a nonobject, and [...] the tendency to neglect its own characteristics in favour of those of its corresponding

“substance,” which in this case is the visible object, which has emitted the sound.’ (Metz, 1992: 315). In his discussion of the “Ideological effects of the basic cinematographic apparatus,” Jean-Louis Baudry also contends that effacement of the cinematic apparatus is inevitably ideologically, whilst the foregrounding of its inscription allows a denunciation of ideology. Baudry states that whilst ‘concealment of the technical base will [...] bring about an inevitable ideological effect’, ‘its inscription as such, on the other hand, would produce a knowledge effect, as actualisation of the work process, as denunciation of ideology, and as critique of idealism.’ (Baudry, 1992: 302).

I demonstrated in my analysis of *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* in the last chapter how through their destruction of the dynamics of visual perspective and transgression of gender and identity norms, Argento’s *giallo* provide both a critique and commentary on traditional forms of (Cartesian) knowledge and masculine systems of rationality. By resisting the ideological effect of the classical cinematic narrative - the dictates of continuity editing and visual coherence - we are forced to confront both the fact that the cinematic-image is a “construction” of “reality” rather than a “reflection” of “reality” and our complicity in the perpetuation of that “reality”. This is in opposition to classical film narrative in which as Baudry contends: ‘Limited by the framing, lined up, put at a proper distance, the world offers up an object endowed with meaning, an intentional object, implied by and implying the action of the “subject” which sights it.’ (Baudry, 1992: 308). In other words, the phenomenological reduction of the cinematics of the filmic image acts to preserve the illusionary unity of the subject in which the world on screen is ordered through the synthesising viewpoint of the constituting subject:

The search for narrative continuity, so difficult to obtain from the material base, can only be explained by an essential ideological stake projected at this point: it is a question of preserving at any cost the synthetic unity of the locus where meaning originates [the subject] - the constituting transcendental function to which narrative continuity points back as its natural secretion. (Baudry, 1992: 309).

One of the ways that Argento's films threaten the synthesizing viewpoint of the illusory and ideological "subject" is through the disjunction between sight and sound (the visual and the aural dimensions of the image). This foregrounds not only the very mechanics of production, which ought to remain effaced, but functions to disturb the primacy of the image privileged in most [psychoanalytical] models of cinematic spectatorship. In *The Cat O'Nine Tails*, the disruption of the organic unity of the cinematic-image through the use of the interstice or gap between sight and sound means that the ideology of the transcendental subject, on which the continuity-editing system and the codings of classical film are built, is subverted. Just as the multiple clues of the puzzle refuse organisation into a coherent and meaningful unity, the textual play of sight and sound produces an affective image in which there are no fixed territories or points of origin and in which the irrational cut functions as a primary site of deterritorialisation.

### **The sound-image**

*But on each occasion, the irrational cut implies the new stage of the talkie, the new figure of sound.* (Deleuze, 2000: 249)

In *The Cat O'Nine Tails*, the primacy of the visual as constitutive of the cinematic subject/spectator is called into question by the breakdown of the hierarchical relationship between sight and sound. We have already seen that this breakdown is made possible by the coming of sound-on-film in the first stage of the talkie in which: 'the speech act is no

longer connected with the second function of the eye; it is no longer read but heard.' (Deleuze, 2000: 226). In early sound film, sound and dialogue remain a mere component of the visual image. In the second stage of the talkie, a new relationship is formed between sight and sound: what Deleuze calls a 'new asynchrony' in which 'the visual has no special claim to authenticity, and includes as many implausibilities as speech'. (Deleuze, 2000: 250). Moving from the realm of the visual into that of the audio-visual, this new cinematic image is marked by the autonomy of sound and the liberation of the speech-act from secondary reliance on the visual/visible: 'the talkie and the whole of sound have won autonomy [...]; they have ceased to be a component of the visual image as in the first stage; they have become a whole image apart.' (Deleuze, 2000: 250). Instead of binaries, we are now into the realm of singularities in which colour, music, sound, are each in and of themselves separate entities.

In the following analysis of *The Cat O'Nine Tails*, I demonstrate how the liberation the speech-act from the speaker; the insertion of the scriptable (the second function of the eye); and the use of discordant, asynchronous music works to produce a non-correspondence between the visual and the aural - 'a special relationship, a free indirect relationship.' (Deleuze, 2000: 261), situating Argento's *giallo* firmly within Deleuze's taxonomy of *the time-image*.

### **The speech act: liberation and revelation**

The opening sequences of *The Cat O'Nine Tails* use the liberation of the speech-act in order to deconstruct the traditional functioning of the 'eye' as privileged point of perception. The credit sequences take place as the mechanical-eye of the camera scans

over the deserted spaces of a dark and lonely street. As we struggle to distinguish objects within the blackness of the filmic space, the sound of a young girl's voice cuts across the emptiness of the physical space and a fragment of a conversation fills the visual void of the deserted space. The act of speech here acts as an image in and of itself, preceding and displacing the primacy of visual identification and localisation. In Deleuze's words: 'it has broken from its moorings with the visual images which delegated to it the omnipotence which they lacked.' (Deleuze, 2000: 250). This is further evidenced by the fact that following the speech-act, the camera does not immediately turn to offer us an image of the speaker, and by so doing creates a disjunction between the act and its placement [the use of the shot-reverse-shot structure]. Instead the camera focuses on the feet of Arno and Lori as they move from right of the frame into shot, and only then slowly reveals the identity of the speaker to us.

Significantly the very first visual image connotes blindness - the lack of sight - Arno's white stick finding the curb of the pavement. In this manner, the narrative inserts a gap between the aural and visual components of the image and maintains an irreducibility of one to the other. The cinematic-image is no longer a coherent whole in which sight and sound are implied and implicated in their relation - it no longer has spatial integrity - but 'there two 'heautonomous' images, one visual and one sound, with a fault, an interstice, an irrational cut between the two.' (Deleuze, 2000: 251). We have the fracturing of the organic image into two separate "tracks" - one composed of visual signifiers and one of aural signifiers which resist coherence into a united whole. The act of dislocation of the relationship between sight and sound is repeated seconds later, when we again hear a separate fragment of a conversation as Arno and Lori walk along the deserted street. Once again the sound image precedes the visual image and there is a noticeable gap

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between the act of speech and its embodiment. A car parked on the curb comes into view, and slowly the speaker comes into view. But - and this is central - the darkness of the inside of the car conceals the I-You (subject/object) relation of the speech-act, just as we are unable to glimpse the second person in the car. When Lori turns back towards the car - at the request of Arno - she too is unable to identify the other person in the car. Neither are we allowed to see what she 'sees' as the camera abruptly switches direction and instead captures Lori in the act of looking from the point of view of the concealed spectator in the front seat of the car. This sets up a visual disorientation by evoking a non-correspondence between the gaze and the image and between the function of sight to create a determinate visual field and its ability to reconcile the aural and the visual. In this scene, the irrational cut between sound and sight, the displacement of temporal connection between the two, constitutes the cinematic-image as archaeological and stratigraphic space: an image which needs not only to be seen, but read and recomposed in an active part of interpretation by the viewer:

Disconnected, unlinked fragments of space are the object of a specific relinkage over the gap: the absence of match is only an appearance of a linking-up which can take place in an infinite number of ways. In this sense, the archaeological, or stratigraphic, image is read at the same time as it is seen. (Deleuze, 2000: 245).

This separation of the visual and aural components of the image functions to impose discontinuity into continuity and the molecular within the molar. We capture events in the process of becoming, just as fragments of conversations are dislocated from the signification of the whole, the partial image of the event and the concealment of the second speaker works to dislocate the primacy of visual perspective in the framing of the cinematic-image. The disconnection of the speech-act from the speaker throughout the narrative works to deterritorialise the image from the conventions of linearity and

sequentially. An example of this takes place immediately after the murder of Bianca, the girlfriend of Calabresi, who knows the identity of the murderer of Calabresi. As the dead body of Bianca lies face down on the floor of her apartment, Giordani's voice is heard commenting on her murder and the scene shifts to the next day and Arno's apartment.

This works in a very similar manner to the "jump cut" introduced into cinematic grammar in Godard's *Breathless À Bout de Soufflé (Breathless: 1960)*. Bordwell and Thompson define the use of the jump cut in the following terms: '[T]ime is apparently omitted from the visual track but not from the sound track.' (Bordwell and Thompson, 1997: 403). In the scene from *The Cat O'Nine Tails* under discussion, Argento edits out whole sections of time with this almost unnoticeable jump from the previous night to the next day using the speech-act to align disparate spaces and temporalities. The speech-act temporally freed from the territoriality of an origin offers instead an affective becoming of time: or what Deleuze calls a 'direct image of time'.

An earlier sequence between Giordani and Bianca points to a similar disjunctive use of cinematic sight and sound. The scene takes place in what appears to be a roof-top bar (a deserted and disconnected any-space-whatever) - although Giordani and Bianca are the only people there - and is driven by a conversation between them as to which employees of the Terzi Institute are likely suspects. The narrative flow of the scene is broken up into discontinuous fragments of space and time. As the conversation takes place, there are constant shifts from the moving image - time as duration - to the still image as in a set of black and white photographs of the institute's employees - the immobilisation of time. Not only does the insertion of the photographic stills function once again to

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liberate the speech-act, but also on the two occasions that we return to Giordani and Bianca, the colour of the sky behind them indicates a considerable shift in time. From the daylight of the opening, through to the darkening evening sky and finally, a clatter of an ashtray on the table beside them and day has suddenly been transformed into night. In this sequence, whole chunks of time have been edited out, whilst the conversation remains continuous. This use of jumps in temporal sequencing can be compared to the use of the jump cut in Godard's *Breathless*, as already mentioned, which as Bordwell and Thompson suggest in their analysis of Godard's film: 'the jolts in picture and sound create a self-conscious narration that makes the viewer aware of its stylistic choices.' (Bordwell and Thompson, 1997: 404). And it is this making apparent of the cinematic mechanism which constitutes a very different relationship between the viewer and character outside of traditional conceptualisations of the mechanics of cinematic identification and suture.

### **The scriptable: the second function of the eye**

In *The Cat O'Nine Tails*, the speech-act operates at two levels. The first already discussed is the heard 'speech-act', the second inscribes what Deleuze calls the second function of the eye in that it injects scriptable elements of language into the visual (visible) image. It is not surprising that in his account of sound-on-film that Deleuze suggests that modern cinema has more in common with silent film than with early sound cinema. (Deleuze, 2000: 246). But it is not simply a case of modern cinema being seen as a return to an earlier mode of aesthetics, the insertion of the scriptable within the visual works instead to denaturalise a simplistic understanding of the operation of the cinematic-image. Deleuze contends: 'it is the visual image in its entirety which must be



read, intertitles and injections being now only the stipplings [pointillees] of a stratigraphic layer, or the variable connections from one layer to another, the passages from one to the other [...]’ (Deleuze, 2000: 246). We only have to think about the opening of Godard’s *Weekend* or Peter Greenaway’s *The Pillow Book* to see how this works and what Deleuze is getting at in his description of the audio-visual image as stratigraphic. This is an archaeological conception of the cinematic image in which the heard speech-act and the written speech-act operate as lines of flight, shattering narrative continuity and coherence, and fracturing notions of cinematic suture.

This use of the scriptable, both as an addition to visual knowledge and a mechanism of disturbing visual “truth”, is a significant feature of Argento’s *giallo*. Newspapers figure prominently: in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, newspaper cuttings allow Dalmas and Julia to reconstruct the past victimology of four young women who have been brutally murdered. Indeed most of Argento’s *gialli* play upon the mechanics of writing and reading: the most extended mediation of the scriptable is of course, Argento’s *Tenebrae* in which the book *Tenebrae* provides the cinematic frame through which the narrative flows. In *The Cat O'Nine Tails*, there are multiple references to this second function of the eye which acts not only to disconnect the speech-act from the voice but also to construct a multi-layered cinematic-image. Not only is the clue to the murderer’s identity written on a piece of paper hidden in the clock around Bianca’s neck, but there are constant reinterpretations of the visual into the scriptable through the use of newspapers: we see Calabresi’s death through the lens of a camera which captures his final moments; and then this is later transcribed into words when Lori is reading the newspaper to Arno. The fact that the figure of the murderer is contained in the edge of

the “cropped” photograph, which is used for the newspaper article, highlights the sign of the false within this seemingly most “realistic” and “reliable” of art forms.

The liberation of the speech-act and the injection of the scriptable asks us both to hear and read the cinematic-image. The sound-image as a component of the image can no longer be considered as a supplement to the visual dynamics of the text, and the image is not a question of surface and depth, but a multi-layered and archaeological construction which operates to problematise the ideology of cinematic identification and spectatorship.

Significant as well is the unconscious liberation of the sound-image in Argento's *giallo* as an effect of the very mechanics of their production. Post-dubbing remains the most popular means of adding sound-on-film in Italy even today. In “Direct Sound: An Interview” filmmakers Jean-Marie Straub and Daniele Huillet are highly critical of this process, seeing dubbing as an act of laziness on behalf of directors: ‘the dubbed film is the cinema of lies, mental laziness, and violence, because it gives no space to the viewer and makes him still more deaf and insensitive. In Italy, every day the people are becoming deaf at a terrifying rate.’ (Straub and Huillet, 1992: 320). For Straub and Huillet the use of direct sound is a moral and ideological decision, as the use of dubbing removes the effect of cinematic realism, in fact ‘there is no longer any truth.’ (Straub and Huillet, 1992: 322). They put forward the argument that the use of international casts and soundtracks is merely a cynical marketing strategy to provide national cinema with international audiences. There is certainly an element of truth in this statement, as directors such as Bava and Freda in the 1960s deliberately changed their names and the names of the films, even going so far as shooting different endings for different markets

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as discussed in Chapter One. Jarrett's (1951) example of *Fabiola*, a spectacular film on the grand scale, directed by Blasetti, recorded in a mixture of French and Italian seems to suggest that the use of dubbing cannot be seen merely as an outcome of purely commercial decisions, and can indeed encompass aesthetic concerns as demonstrated by Jarret's statement that *Fabiola* 'cannot be classed as commercial as a film of this sort spoken in French or Italian, is unlikely to recover more than half of the 8000,000,00 lire that is its reputed cost.' (Jarret, 1951: 75).

In their criticism of the use of dubbing in Italian Film, Straub and Huilet state that: 'dubbed films, transform a real space into a confused labyrinth and put the viewer into confusion, from which he can no longer escape. The viewer becomes a dog who can't find its young.' (Straub and Huillet, 1992: 322). The use of dubbing and the lack of synchronisation between voices and lips in *The Cat O'Nine Tails* functions to mirror the use of the aural components of the image in the film in that, either consciously or unconsciously, it acts to separate the speech-act from the speaker: a dislocation which compounded in those versions which are both dubbed and have subtitles.

But whether a deliberate aesthetic strategy or a conscious marketing ploy, the addition of sound to the visual image as implied by the system of post-dubbing allows a further disruption of the relationship between the speech-act and the speaker, in a similar manner to the use of subtitles which disrupts the viewers relationship with the visual image in the text. Whilst this is perhaps an unconscious effect of the Italian system of cinematic production, it does function to foreground the non-applicability of American models of cinematic spectatorship to European (and of course, World) cinema.

**Music: A speck of dust in the 'eye'**

According to musicians like Pierre Jansen, or, to a less degree, Philippe Arthuys, cinema music must be abstract and autonomous, a true 'foreign body' in the visual image, rather like a speck of dust in the eye, and must accompany 'something that is in the film without being suggested or shown by it. (Deleuze, 2000: 239).

Music is the final part of the sound-continuum that is important to consider when delimiting the qualities of the audio-visual image. It is once again a question of the whole and its parts which distinguishes the use of music in *the time-image* from its use in *the movement-image*. In *the movement image*, the sound and image form a "whole" based upon the idea of correspondence between what we see and what we hear: the "textuality" of the image is not called into question. In "Film, Form and Narrative", Alan Rowe highlights the manner in which film music is often used to anchor meaning and lead the audience into a 'preferred reading of the image.' (Rowe, 1999: 115). In other words, sound effects are part of "narrative realism"; in Rowe's words: "authenticating the images and informing the narrative attention.' (Rowe, 1999: 115). Deleuze expresses this in similar terms: 'it will be music which will be thought to add the immediate image to mediate images which represented the whole indirectly.' (Deleuze, 2000: 239). In modern cinema - or cinema in which *the time-image* predominates - the relation between aural and visual image is profoundly altered: music as a "foreign body" or a "speck of dust in the eye". Whilst there is still a relation between music and image: 'it is not an external correspondence nor even an internal one which would lead us back to an imitation; it is a reaction between the musical foreign body and the completely different visual images, or rather an interaction independent of any common structure.' (Deleuze, 2000: 239). The use of circus music in Franju's medical-horror film *Les Yeux Sans Visage (Eyes without a Face: 1959)* is a

demonstrative example of Deleuze's thesis. Instead of image and music forming a harmonious whole in which '[t]here would be a certain way of reading the visual image, corresponding to the hearing of the music;' in *Les Yeux Sans Visage*, the relation between sound and image inscribes instead 'an interaction independent of any common structure.' (Deleuze, 2000: 239).

Known [and noted] for their skewed and dysfunctional use of music, Argento's *gialli* provide a demonstrate pedagogy of the independence of music in the construction of the audio-visual image. Argento's use of music, as with sound, operates in direct opposition to both the dictates of narrative realism and the conventions of music in horror films. The importance of music in Argento's *gialli* has often been pointed out in discussions of Argento's *gialli*, although relegated to a secondary and provisional status vis-à-vis the visual image. Music is no longer a "vanishing mediator", but instead is liberated from the contingent necessity of the visual image and functions a line of flight, productive of singularities rather than reductive of binaries.

Simon Boswell's comments on his experience of composing music for Argento's later *giallo*, *Phenomena*, are particularly pertinent here:

This was a new in-between world where regular music metre was unimportant, where the rhythm of a piece could be dictated by the images that I was breathlessly watching. A place where sound could be explored to the full, beyond the conventional instrumentation of an orchestra or a rock band. (Boswell: 1984<sup>7</sup>)

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<sup>7</sup> Boswell, Simon (1984). Neither Mozart nor Hendrix. "Press Cuttings". *At: Simon Boswell Composer: Tripping the Light Fantastic*. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.simonboswell.com/html/press002.html>

And as Boswell recollects it was only when having discarded the conventional and the conventions of music for ‘a combination of harmonics and scraping a plectrum down the strings of an electric guitar’ was Argento finally happy with the music; proclaiming it “beautiful.”<sup>8</sup> Keith Emerson remembers a similar experience, working with Argento on the soundtrack of *Inferno*, stating that: ‘in hindsight when I look back, the music I wrote was a juxtaposition to what was really occurring on the screen’<sup>9</sup>. Using Verdi as a base, Emerson speeded up the tempo to four-five, making the “familiar” unfamiliar in the process.

The emphasis on the discordant and unusual amalgamations of voice and music form a major trope of Argento’s *gialli*. The soundtrack for *The Cat O'Nine Tails*, as for *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, bears the name of Ennio Morricone. The use of discordant music to add to create a nightmarish atmosphere to Argento’s films is also foregrounded in the recent publicity material surrounding the release on CD of the music from *The Stendhal Syndrome*, also composed by Morricone:

The word "delirious" applies in every possible sense here, as the predominantly monothematic score swirls around a central lullaby-style melody; the opening seven minute cue is a tour de force in itself, covering the entire opening sequence of the film, with a simple "la la la" voice gradually building into a crescendo of horrifyingly dissonant horns and strings. Morricone proves that he hasn't lost his ability to experiment, either, with chattering, indistinct voices often flitting between the left and right channels to create a nightmarish soundscape guaranteed to prevent anyone from listening to this before going to sleep.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Boswell, Simon (1984). Neither Mozart nor Hendrix. “Press Cuttings”. *At: Simon Boswell Composer: Tripping the Light Fantastic*. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.simonboswell.com/html/press002.html>

<sup>9</sup> Ferguson, Leon (1997). *Dario Argento: An Eye for Horror*. Documentary. MIA Video Entertainment

<sup>10</sup> *ScoreLogue - Imported: European Film Music*. [nda]. [Online]. Available at: [http://www.scorelogue.com/imported\\_feb.html](http://www.scorelogue.com/imported_feb.html)

In later *giallo*, from *Deep Red* onwards, Argento would take an even more active part in the composition of the musical soundtrack, starting with the soundtrack composed by Argento and played by his group, the Goblins in *Deep Red*.

Unlike the saturation of the cinematic palate through music in *Phenomena*, the music in *The Cat O'Nine Tails* could almost be called 'rarefied', only occasionally asserting its strange and discordant voice across the composition of the visual image. The music with which the film begins is almost like a lullaby, haunting and lyrical as Arno and Lori enter into the frame - this music becomes associated with Arno and Lori: their "theme tune". This harmonious music is juxtaposed with the more discordant and strange music that accompanies Casoni. Harmony and disharmony here work as a direct contrast, in a similar way as the insertion of the discontinuous into the continuous works with the operation of visual images. This almost "uncanny" use of music aligned with haunting vocals in this sequences operates a site of aural disorientation for the cinematic spectator. This aural disorientation is mirrored by the visual disorientation of the scene, shot from the disembodied point of view of Casoni as the camera shakes and jolts round corners, down corridors and pausing to watch the security guards as they go about their business. Here the visual and aural components of the image are no longer dependent on one another, are not reducible to an organic whole, rather connected by the irrational, acting as lines of flight rather than points of suture:

What constitutes the audio-visual image is a disjunction; a dissociation of the visual and the sound, each heautonomous, but at the same time incommensurable or 'irrational' relation which connects them to each other, without forming a whole, without offering the least whole. (Deleuze, 2000: 256).

### **The clairvoyant eye**



**Figure 17** Sight and Sound in *Cat O'Nine Tails*

A whole pedagogy is required here, because we have to read the visual as well as hear the speech-act in a new way.' (Deleuze, 2000: 247)

This disjunction between sight and sound means that we can no longer conceive of the cinematic-image as an organic whole but rather a combination of irreconcilable and unrecognisable fragments of voice, words, sounds, music. If we have to learn to hear the speech-act in a new way, we also need to learn to see the visual differently outside of traditional conceptualisations. In *The Cat O'Nine Tails*, Arno's clairvoyance suggests perhaps one alternative.

On a simplistic level the disjunction between sight and sound is inscribed within the primary doubling of Arno and Lori, later replaced by that of Arno and Giordani. In both pairings, blindness is privileged over sight, and the aural over the visual. While Arno



needs both Lori and Giordani to 'describe' the images that they see, only he can understand their significance. Mike Lebbing argues: 'Arno is blind, a cruel irony given the film's obsessive preoccupation with the visual. But he sees things in his mind, he hears things, and somehow he seems to know more than anyone else.' (Lebbing, 2000: 99). Giordani sees the watch around Bianca's neck, but it is Arno who realises that it contains the primary clue to the identity of the murderer. And neither Giordani nor Casoni are able to find the hidden piece of paper in the watch's secret compartment, instead it takes Arno's tactile sense of touch to uncover the clue.

In their discussion of Nicholas Roeg's *Don't Look Now*, Kinder and Houston argues that the use of clairvoyance functions to inscribe an expanded reality in which 'interpreting nonordinary reality within the film is a matter of life and death.' (Kinder and Houston, 1987: 57). This is demonstrated through John's failure to understand the meaning of his visions which ultimately lead to his death. In their close reading of the meta-textuality of *Don't Look Now*, Kinder and Houston argue that the clairvoyant function of the eye is embedded within the disruption of visual coherence and narrative linearity - the contamination of images by association; the rapid cutting between past, present and future and the insertion of cut scenes viewed through the doubled perspective of John and the blind clairvoyant, Helga (Kinder and Houston, 1987: 57 - 60). Kinder and Houston contend: 'the film's visual style confirms the existence of second sight.' (Kinder and Houston, 1987: 57).

The same is true for *The Cat O'Nine Tails* in that clairvoyance provides the main structuring force of the narrative. The film is structured through the non-logical and non-localizable space between Arno's blindness and his flashes of sight/insight and the

## Chapter Four: **Sight and Sound: The Components of the Image**

*Il gatto a nove code (The Cat O'Nine Tails: 1971)*

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disembodied all-seeing eye of the concealed murderer. This works to insert time as becoming in the gap between what is perceived and what is understood, or in Deleuze's words on *the time-image*:

there is produced a whole 'coalescence' of the perceived with the remembered, the imagined the known. Not in the sense that it used to be said: to perceive *is* to know, is to imagine, is to recall, but in the sense that reading is a function of the eye, a perception of perception, a perception which does not grasp perception without also grasping its reverse, imagination, memory or knowledge. (Deleuze, 2000: 245)

In *The Cat O'Nine Tails*, the manner in which the attempted burglary at the Institute is shot clearly demonstrates this gap between perception and understanding - a gap in which the spectator is asked to take an active part in the reconstruction of the filmic scene.

As Arno silently works on a puzzle in his apartment, a sound breaks through the absence of noise, and Arno turns perturbed. Immediately following the sound, we see a visual image of a man with his face on the ground. According to McDonagh, we are being asked the impossible which is to associate this visual image with Arno: 'This shot is seriously puzzling, since Arno is blind - otherwise it would be read automatically as a flashback to something of which he has been reminded by the identified sound.' (McDonagh, 1994: 70). But of course, this is not a recollection of something which has taken place in the past, but an actual image from the present - an ocular impossibility taking into account Arno's blindness. Further having 'seen' the image from Arno's 'perspective', there is a subsequent repetition and revision of the originary image - this time from a place outside the apartment.

This repetition of the image enacts both a spatial and temporal displacement by taking us to a point “before” the image of the man on the ground as focalized through the sightless eyes of Arno. In opposition to the fixed image “seen” by Arno, the camera captures the event as it is happening, from an earlier moment in time. Whilst Arno gazes sightlessly out of his window, down towards the grounds of the Terzi Institute immediately below his apartment, a close-up of a dilating eye frames and freezes Arno against the window. Then the temporal frame widens to capture the event as it is happening - rather than when it has ended - as in the previous image. This repetition and revision of the past becoming present inserts the discontinuous within the continuous breaking the rules of invisible editing associated with mainstream narrative. Just as it is impossible to reconcile the previous image with the blind gaze of Arno, disrupting visible signposting, the visualising of the event’s ‘before’ ruptures the temporal sequencing of the narrative. McDonagh contends: ‘The “flashback” in fact a view that’s the product of some sort of second sight; a sight which emanates from some strange space to which normal individuals have no access.’ (McDonagh, 1994: 72). McDonagh suggests that the subsequent image of Casoni in the Institute are focalised through the strange visual space made possible by Arno’s blindness, which means we are seeing images from a doubled point of view: Casoni’s gaze mapped out and within Arno’s clairvoyance.

Just as Arno’s flashes of sight/insight operate to defamiliarise the relationship between sight and knowledge, the reduction of the figure of Casoni to a singular, enlarged and disembodied eye provides another overt example of the strategy of visual disruption fundamental to the workings of Argento’s *giallo*. The freeing of the ‘eye’ from the face deconstructs the specular dynamics of the identificatory process: a hyperbolic cutting through of the faciality politics of molar identity which ‘opens a rhizomatic realm of

possibility effecting the potentialization of the possible, as opposed to arborescent possibility, which marks a closure, an impotence.' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 190).

The destruction of the fascist politics of faciality is central to the workings of the time-image. This is cinema of the anti-organism (organic) as opposed to that of organic representation. In *The Cat O'Nine Tails*, this opposition towards the organic is also mapped out in the manner in which Arno's flashes of sight/insight destabilises both temporal and spatial co-ordinates. In a later sequence, Lori describes the photograph taken of Calabresi falling in front of the train to Arno. As she does this, there are a series of images of Giordani working in the newspaper office. Then later when during a conversation between Giordani and Arno, Arno suddenly realises the significance of the clock around Bianca's neck, we once again have flashes, this time of an earlier event when Arno and Lori went to talk to Bianca - and we see a shot of Bianca's hands nervously playing with the clock around her neck. This is a double displacement as this was an action seen by Lori, who is absent at this point in the narrative. In abstracting the image both from space and time, Argento defamiliarises the relationship between spectator, screen and the seen - an archaeological approach to the cinematic image which cannot be assimilate into traditional patterns of understanding but instead calls on us to construct 'a new Analytic of the image' (Deleuze, 2000: 245).

The ambiguous landscape of mind and memory, the simultaneous production of impossible images seen from impossible viewpoints, and the contemporaneous evocation of separate spaces and times, mark the film's rupture with the conventional patterning of cinematic perception and thought, as inscribed with the film's explicit foregrounding of the narrative enigma. This disconnection of the act of perception from

the perceiver and the foregrounding of the perceptual process marks the moment from the visual image is freed from its relationship with speech in *The Cat O'Nine Tails*, and 'becomes an archaeological or rather stratigraphic section which must be read.' (Deleuze, 2000: 245). In doing so, *The Cat O'Nine Tails* falls into Barthes's category of the 'writerly' text, in that it operates in the realm of 'obtuse meaning' cannot be contained within pre-existing models of interpretation. McDonagh highlights the manner in which meta-theoretical interpretations seek to undermine the intensity of the cinematic image by making it sensible: 'If the reader adopts the scientific method to the task of reading a work of art (and many readers, especially critics, do), one theory must be found that can incorporate every diegetic element within its boundaries.' (McDonagh, 1994: 23) Needham's (2002b) thesis<sup>11</sup>, discussed earlier, that the lack of a psychoanalytical frame in *The Cat O'Nine Tails* means that the problem lies with the film rather than his methodology clearly demonstrates the limitations of the meta-textual approach to understanding the cinematic-image: this is in accordance with McDonagh's argument that: 'If no single theory can be proposed, the work may well be labelled as "incoherent."' (McDonagh, 1994: 23). Instead: 'Barthes' radical proposal is that all excess, all the meaning that falls outside the system or systems that determine the work's overall structure, forms its own system, one which may exist parallel or tangentially to the others.' (McDonagh, 1994: 23). Or as Kinder and Houston contend in their analysis of *Don't Look Now*, 'forces us to see in new ways and confront the problems of interpretation.' (Kinder and Houston, 1987: 57).

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<sup>11</sup> Needham, Gary (2002b). From *punctum* to Pentazet, and everything inbetween: Dario Argento's *Il gatto a nove code*. *Kinoeye: new perspectives on European Film*. [Online]. Available at: [http://www.kinoeye.org/02/11/needham11\\_no2.php](http://www.kinoeye.org/02/11/needham11_no2.php)

## **Two and Two make Five**

*A neat equation Italian style - whore equals liar equals murderer (Anna to Giordani in The Cat O'Nine Tails)*

It could be argued that the figure of Giordani offers an alternative to the disruptive visual fields of Arno and Casoni - and indeed a significant part of the narrative is focalised through Giordani as he interviews possible suspects including the beautiful young daughter of Terzi (the founder of the medical research institute), Anna (Catherine Speak). However Giordani's refusal to adopt new ways of seeing situates Giordani in a place of metaphorical blindness as compared to Arno's literal blindness. Giordani's privileged position is compromised by his assumptions of a logical relationship between sight and knowledge demonstrated in his mistaken belief that a cut on Anna's hand, and her 'incestuous' relationship with her father, must mean that Anna is the perpetrator of both the acts of violence and of Lori's kidnapping. If Arno shows us that we need to find new ways of seeing and knowing the shifting amorphous nature of reality, Giordani is the typical Argento male protagonist who in attempting to condense the dispersive nature of reality within a predetermined sexist and homophobic framework brings our attention to the limitations of that framework. For Giordani as for the police if Anna is not the culprit, then surely it must be Braun, the German homosexual! Of course it is neither, but Casoni. And neither are the reasons for his actions psychological but rather a result of a genetic deficiency: a chromosomal abnormality. But even this scientific explanation is uncertain as the narrative raises a series of questions over accountability, predisposition and traditional morality.

Does Casoni kill because he has the defective gene or indeed is it the knowledge of this deficiency that in seeking to repress is causal of the violence. This of course is the central enigma of the Frankenstein myth - is Frankenstein's creature inherently evil or is his evil a result of his ostracisation from society and his creator's denial of his existence. It is typical of the meta-textuality of Argento's *giallo* that they slip between generic boundaries. *The Cat O'Nine Tails* raises similar questions about scientific research and genetic advances posed by films such as *Gattaca* and the recent Phillip K. Dick adaptation *Minority Report*.

### **Conclusion**

Both specular tranquillity and the assurance of one's own identity collapse simultaneously with the revealing of the mechanism, that is, of the inscription of the film work. (Baudry, 1992: 312)

In Argento's *The Cat O'Nine Tails* the liberation the speech-act from the speaker and the image from the viewer acts to foreground the very processes at work in the mechanics of cinematic production and reproduction. This works to threaten the assurance of an integrated and integral identity so central to the organising perspective of the transcendental subject. The separation of the cinematic-image into diverging archaeological strata - the conscious: the fragmentary speech act which connects disparate times and spaces and inserts time into the equation of cinematic movement; the discordant use of cinematic music as independent from reliance on the visual; and the continued disruption of the visual composition of the frame through the conflicting dynamics of Arno's sights/insights and Casoni's omniscient and omnipresent eye/iris; and the unconscious - the desynchronisation of voice and words through the use of dubbing; and the scriptable use of subtitling as intertitle; seems to demonstrate once

again the inappropriateness of reliance of American models or interpretative methods derived from these models.

Instead we have a more poetical and philosophical approach to questions of the cinematic-image, in which sound, movement, texture, tone and light are not connected to each other, and refuse formation into a recognisable and order whole. It is an experience of cinema as possibility beyond gender, beyond binaries and into “singularities”<sup>12</sup> – a philosophical rather than a psychological cinematics.

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<sup>12</sup> A cinema of singularities would present colours, movements, sounds, textures, tones and lights that are not connected and organised into recognised and ordered wholes. (Colebrook, 2002: 33/34)



## **Introduction**

We have already begun to map out how Argento's *giallo* perform a challenge to dominant understandings of cinematic spectatorship and relationship between vision and violence: both of which are "traditionally" gendered masculine in theoretical/psychoanalytical discussions of horror film. The figures of Sam Dalmas in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* and Giordani in *The Cat O'Nine Tails*, clearly highlight the limitations of these gendered models, whilst that of Arno in *The Cat O'Nine Tails* who operates on insight rather than sight represents an attempt to think outside of those foundational models. Argento's next *giallo* *Four Flies on Grey Velvet* (1972) is closer in content to *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* in that it offers no alternative to its protagonist's fractured and fragmented visions.

In this chapter, I discuss how *Four Flies on Grey Velvet* utilises the "powers of the false"<sup>1</sup> to construct new models of becoming outside the dialectics of essence and appearance and gendered binaries. In particular, I explore the manner in which the distinctions between present and past and dreams and "reality" are effaced in the operation of the "dream-image" and the "memory-image" within the philosophical and poetical narrative that distinguishes Argento's third *giallo*. I draw on Alan Wright's recent discussion of childhood memory in "A Wrinkle in Time: The Child, Memory, and the Mirror" in order to demonstrate how the figure of the "child" in *Four Flies of Grey Velvet* provides a "line of flight" away from gendered identities and normative constructions of identity.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Cinema 2: The Time Image* - Chapter 6: The Powers of the False (Deleuze, 2000 p. 126-155)

**Four Flies On Grey Velvet: murder and/as performance**

*Four Flies on Grey Velvet* (Italy/France: 1972) completes Argento's 'animal trilogy' which began in 1970 with his directorial debut *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* and was followed up in 1971 with *The Cat O'Nine Tails*. *Four Flies on Grey Velvet* has, perhaps with the exception of *Tenebrae*, Argento's least likeable and sympathetic protagonist in Roberto Tobais played by Michael Brandon. In his review of the film, Kim Newman states that: 'It is, because of its strangely neutral protagonist, one of Argento's chilliest films and perhaps the hardest to get a grip on.' (2000: 105). It is not surprising therefore that it is also one of Argento's least commercially successful *giallo*.

It is Tobais who is the agent of the originary narrative disruption, when he violently attacks and seemingly kills an unknown man who has been following him for some weeks one night in a deserted theatre. This event is witnessed by a masked figure on the balcony and captured within a series of incriminating photographs which are used to blackmail Tobais. A theatre provides the setting for Tobais's act of violence, and we discover later that this scene was itself staged. Unlike the typical Argento [male] protagonist, who is not the primary object of aggression but only attracts the murderer's attention by being in the wrong place at the wrong time, Tobais finds himself inside a literal nightmare which not even the walls of his home can keep out. Photographs of the staged scene turn up in his record collection, the 'dead' man's identity card is sent to him in the post; he is constantly followed and is repeatedly woken at night by a masked intruder whispering vague threats to him.

## Chapter Five: **The Powers of The False**

*Quattro mosche di velluto grigio* (*Four Flies on Grey Velvet*:1972)

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Tobais hires a private detective, Arrosio (Jean-Pierre Marielle) to try and discover who is behind his harassment but Arrosio is murdered when he comes close to revealing the identity of Tobais's masked intruder. Further acts of violence occur in quick succession as both Tobais's maid and his wife's cousin, Dalia (Francine Racette), with whom he has a brief affair, are brutally murdered. An image of 'four flies on grey velvet' is captured on the cinematic screen of Dalia's iris and Tobais discovers almost too late that this is an image of the locket that his wife, Nina (Mimsey Farmer) wears around her neck. The film ends with the shocking scenes of Nina's decapitation as her car plunges off the road.

### **I saw you**



**Figure 18:** The deconstruction of faciality in *Four Flies on Grey Velvet*

*Four Flies on Grey Velvet* provides us with Argento's most detailed analysis of the links between vision, violence and visibility. In a film about sight and knowledge, voyeurism has become epidemic - everybody is watching somebody, and everybody is simultaneously being watched. Roberto captured in the gaze of the unknown assailant in the theatre returns the gaze - he employs a private 'eye' to watch the watcher;

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Roberto's maid over 'sees' Nina place the photographs in Roberto's record deck, and in the terrifying sequence of her death Dalia becomes the embodiment of voyeurism - a disembodied eye in the dark on which the image of the murderer is fixed [Fig 18]. The violence inherent within the mechanism of voyeurism is repeatedly explored as seeing too much is the primary motivation for murder.

In *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, Laura Mulvey distinguishes between 3 looks associated with visual pleasure: the look of the camera, the look of the audience and the pro-filmic look of the characters at each other. The illusion of cinematic realism and the conventions of filmic pleasure necessitates the denial and/or subordination of the first two to the third: 'Without these two absences (the material existence of the recording process, the critical reading of the spectator), fictional drama cannot achieve reality, obviousness and truth' (Mulvey, 1992: 25).

In addition to these three "looks", there are - as Creed points out - two further looks: 'the possibility of the viewer being overlooked while engaged in the act of looking at something he or she is not supposed to look at [and] the act of 'looking away'' (Creed, 1992: 29).

As a commentary on spectatorship and the violence implicit within vision, *Four Flies on Grey Velvet* denies the conventions of cinematic realism by refusing to privilege the look of the characters in the diegesis over the look of both the audience and the camera. In *Four Flies on Grey Velvet* it is Creed's fourth look, conventionally associated with the pleasures of pornography, around which the diegesis unfolds - the repeated mechanism by which characters in the diegesis are caught in the act of

## Chapter Five: **The Powers of The False**

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looking problematises the boundaries between the inside and the outside of the cinematic text. Just as the characters are overlooked whilst looking in the diegesis, there remains the disturbing possibility that the extra-diegetic spectator is also being overlooked in the act of looking.

In “The Tutor Code of Classical Cinema”, Daniel Dayan (1992, 22-31) argues that the use of the shot-reverse-shot which characterises continuity editing serves to resolve the continual answer to the question “Who is watching this” imposed by the shot by using the reverse-shot to embody the gaze within a determinate visual field. The use of the shot-reverse-shot is integral in allowing the spectator to adopt a position of potency with regards to the image. Just like the use of the disembodied eye of Casoni in *The Cat O’Nine Tails* which looks directly out of the screen and towards the audience, the foregrounding of the possibility of being overlooked in the process of looking in *Four Flies on Grey* draws the spectator within the cinematic frame:

We are no longer anonymous onlookers, sitting in the dark auditorium, looking in on the action of the film unobserved. The film is looking back at us - we are the object of its gaze. It scrutinises us every bit as much as we scrutinise it. (Gallant, 2000: 12).

In this manner, *Four Flies on Grey Velvet* operates as a metafilm, deconstructing the illusion of visual pleasure by foregrounding the cinematic mechanism and the camera’s gaze.

**Within the frame**



**Figure 19:** Murder as performance in *Four Flies on Grey Velvet*

Like all Argento's male protagonists, Tobais fails both literally and metaphorically to recognise the frame in front of the real, which separates the image from being a simple reflection of the real [Fig 19]. According to Landy the 'interplay between reality and appearance' (Landy, 2000: 94) in modern Italian

cinema reconfigures the relationship between the true and the false: 'realism becomes the truth of falsity, the impossibility of simple explanation, actions and solutions, implicating the spectator in different reflections on history.' (Landy, 2000: 97). In *Four Flies on Grey Velvet*, the questioning over the "truthfulness" of the photographic image enables us to grasp the temporal dimension of the cinematic-image - of history as a flow of events rather than a fixed point of origin from which meaning can be constructed.

In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes argues that cinema and photograph belong to two different phenomenological systems. '[I]n the photograph, something *has posed* in front of the tiny hole and has remained there forever (that is my feeling)' but in cinema, something *has passed* in front of this same tiny hole: the pose is swept away and denied by the continuous series of images.' (Barthes, 1993: 78). Unlike the photograph which captures the reference within its closed frame, the cinematic image creates meaning through the relation between fixed frames imposed within

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movement. The photograph is the ultimate resurrection of the past and the real: ‘The Photograph does not necessarily say *what is no longer*, but only and for certain *what has been*.’ Neither is it a copy of the real, but rather ‘an emanation of *past reality*’ (Barthes, 1993: 88).

The use of the photographic-image as memory-image in *Four Flies on Grey Velvet* works to problematise this relationship between the image and reality: the “truthfulness” of the past event as indelibly inscribed on the photographic still. Not only does the film foreground the possibility of manipulation of reality through the staged scene of Tobais’s transgression, but the photographic images from the pages of Nina’s perverted family album are rendered unreadable, the images in them made unrecognisable through the passage of time. By creating an allegorical connection between photography and cinema, Argento also denaturalises the apparent realism of the cinematic-image. In “The Art of Allusion: Painting, murder and the ‘plan tableau’, Chris Gallant, drawing on the work of Pascal Bonizer in *Decadrages*, draws a distinction between two opposing approaches to the cinematic image: ‘between those who believe in reality and those who believe in the image’ or the camera as a ‘purely ideological apparatus’ and that which ‘mechanically reproduces natural vision.’ (Gallant, 2000: 66/67) Gallant suggests that the painterly aesthetics of Argento’s *giallo* are closer to Pasolini’s poetical approach to reality: ‘Argento too has come close to voicing this distinction, having once claimed to be a follower of Pasolini’s poetic approach to filmmaking, as opposed to the simple rendering of an objective vision of reality.’ (Gallant, 2000: 67).

## Chapter Five: The Powers of The False

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In *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, Deleuze argues that Pasolini's "poetics" introduce the powers of the false as against the ideal of the true which would confirm the image's veracity: 'In the cinema of poetry, the distinction between what the character saw subjectively and what the camera saw objectively vanished, not in favour of one or the other, but because the camera assumed a subjective presence, acquired internal vision, which had entered into a relation of simulation ('mimesis') with the character's way of seeing.' (Deleuze, 2000: 148). As in Bava's *The Evil Eye*, there is no outside to the traumatised and tortured vision of the central protagonist in *Four Flies on Grey Velvet*. There is no longer an objective space outside the frame from which to distinguish the true and the false, but rather only a subjective and internal vision which is determined by Tobais's neurotic viewpoint. Talking about Antonioni's *Deserto Rosso*, Pasolini states:

In *Deserto Rosso* Antonioni no longer hands his vision of the world [...] on a vaguely sociological content [...] rather he looks at the world through the eyes of a sick woman ... By means of this stylistic mechanism Antonioni freed himself: he can finally see the world through his eyes, because he has identified his own delirious vision of aestheticism with the vision of a neurotic. (Pasolini cited in Sitney, 1995: 210).

In *Four Flies on Grey Velvet*, the 'framing' of Tobais, both literally and metaphorically, not only collapses the distance from subject to object, but also calls into question models of the true, including psychoanalysis, which construct a transcendental perspective through which the world can be judged. In *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine*, Rodowick aligns the working of traditional organic representation [the space of the movement-image] with Platonic Idealism: 'Judgement demands one who wants the truth, both is protagonist and spectator, and thus one who wants to judge the world from a transcendent perspective.' (Rodowick, 1997: 134).



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The Platonic ideal situates the world of truth and reality in opposition to the world of deception and illusion that the truth-seeker must navigate in order to “correct” life by making it conform to an atemporal, systematic, and transcendent image of thought, and in doing so, to annihilate life in an ideal image.’ (Rodowick, 1997: 135).

In *Four Flies on Grey Velvet*, Tobais’s position inside the ‘frame’, both literally and metaphorically, means that he is unable to distinguish between the world of illusion and the world of truth. For Tobais the image is reality, and reality the image. The image of the detective as truth-seeker able to distance himself from the central enigma in order to restore order to chaos is problematised by the figure of Tobais whose sense of reality gradually disintegrates as the narrative unfolds. Tobais finds himself in a world whose elusiveness cannot be reduced to a-priori structures, a world in which reality is no more ‘real’ than appearances and nightmares bleed into the waking day

More so than any other of Argento’s male protagonists up to this point, Tobais signals the type of character that Deleuze identifies as central to modern cinema - cinema of the *time-image* - in that he is rendered unable to act and react to the pure optical and sound situations in which he finds himself. This is also a clear transgression of gender representations, as Tobais is placed in the position of the terrorised female which has come to be associated with both the thriller and the horror film. And whilst Deleuze does not discuss in detail the implications of the recoding of gender positions in his discussion of the time-image, there is an implicit feminisation of the concept of character that is inseparable from the politics of becoming that the time-image foregrounds: molecular reconfigurations cannot begin with man - as man is the image of molar identity - but can only take place through the “becoming-woman” of the

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subject. Tobais's "becoming-woman" is also inseparable from his feelings of persecution, paranoia and increasing loss of identity. In these terms it is not coincidental that a theatre provides the setting for Tobais's ordinary transgression, or that he is watched by a masked figure high up in the stalls. When photographs of his supposed crime turn up in his house, Tobais becomes more and more paranoid as he desperately seeks to uncover the identity of his persecutor. As those close to him are brutally murdered, Tobais's sense of reality becomes increasingly threatened and his sense of persecution and guilt is displaced into a number of disturbing nightmares:

The progress of these dreams charts the process by which Roberto's sense of reality dissolves into a nightmare of death and retribution, or perhaps simply that by which all his dreams run together into one continuing dream whose landscapes - ranging from the Middle Eastern courtyard to bizarre Roman back alleys - are really one landscape full of hidden pitfalls and vicious surprises. (McDonagh, 1994: 93)

Roberto's dreams provide us perhaps with the clearest example of the pure optical and sound situations that haunt Argento's protagonists. The setting is a brilliant white Middle Eastern Courtyard in which the execution of a condemned man takes place. There are three dream sequences: the first offering a detailed mise-en-scène of the setting; the second is a fragmentary return of the first but a repetition with and through difference and the third completes the sequence with the baroque visual image of decapitation. In these dream sequences, landscape is privileged over character and constant changes in perspective, type of shot and angle of shot, insert the fractured montage that is already a distinguishable feature of Argento's work. Just as in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* and *The Cat O'Nine Tails*, there is also an intensification of the deterritorialisation of the politics of faciality. In addition to this, there is also the pervasive contamination between the real and the imaginary as

sounds from outside the frame of the dream become commingled with sounds inside the dream. Is the loud bang, which wakes Tobais up from the first dream, the sound of the knife coming down or the sound of the intruder in the house? In the second dream, we seem to hear sounds from outside the dream within its imaginary space - glass breaking and a cat crying. In the last inscription of Tobais's nightmare, the real and the imaginary become even more confused. Not only is there no transitional shot of Tobais asleep before we enter into the imaginary landscape of his mind, but the sound of the knife coming down on the neck of the condemned man is contemporaneous with the sound of a telephone ringing outside the dream space.

Rather than reading this as an example of an explicit dream, it is more useful to turn to Michel Deviller's notion of the 'implied dream' that Deleuze engages with in *Cinema 2: The Time Image*. In the explicit dream, sensory motor connections maintain a linkage between the imaginary and the real. In the implied dream these connections are broken: 'the optical and sound image is quite cut off from its motor extension' and further 'it no longer compensates for this loss by entering into relations with explicit recollection-images or dream-images' (Deleuze, 2000: 59). The dream-image provides a particularly appropriate visualisation of the mechanics of the optical drama and its consequence feminisation of character as it mimics the motor-helplessness that the unlinking of the sensory-motor schema implies: 'But it is no longer the character who reacts to optical-sound situation, it is the movement of the world which supplements the flattening movement of character.' (Deleuze, 2000: 59).

### **Becomings and metamorphoses**

The conjuror, the forger, the traitor, are all figures aligned with the politics of becoming, metamorphoses and transformations are evoked by Deleuze talking about the powers of the false. (Deleuze, 2000: 145). In *Four Flies on Grey Velvet*, the powers of the false are associated with Nina, the female-as-killer, who stages the scene of Tobais's transgression. Nina is both conjuror and forger, who manipulates reality and forges identities whilst hiding hers behind the blank expressionless mask that persecutes Tobais. As in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, it is the body of the woman provides a 'block of becoming', which resists interpretation into fixed taxonomies of meaning and disturbs the norms of gendered identity and sexual desire:

The norms that repeatedly end up getting thrown into question are those of sanity, of gendered identity, and of sexual desire. Often the truth that has proven so fascinating, yet so difficult to achieve, comes with a dramatic revelation of a sexually traumatic event in the killer's past, or of the killer's present gendered identity, or of his or her previously undetected lack of rationality. As visual and auditory perceptions and memories are thrown into doubt, so are assumptions about gender, about sexuality, and about sanity - assumptions about what constitutes a norm, what constitutes the identities of those around us. (Knee, 1996: 224).

Just as in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, a sexually traumatic event in the past is posited as the point of gender transgression and transformation and which through its repetition in the present calls into question the ideology of fixed and identifiable gendered identities. And once again, male violence is situated as the causational factor in female psychosis - in this case the father's anger over the gender identity of his child. This is not the typical oedipal scenario in which the girl-child has to negotiate a circular path from desire for her father to desire for his substitute, rather

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Nina's attitude towards her father, and his substitute - Roberto Tobais - is one forged from anger and refusal to obey the father's symbolic injunctions.

These images from the past function to inscribe Nina's refusal to adopt the masculine personae and consequently make it difficult to read the graphic scenes of murder focalised through the perspective of the concealed killer (Nina) as confirmations of the inherent masculinisation of the spectatorial position. Again, we reach a place of impasse with traditional models of gender identity not reducible the interplay between norm and the marginal. Instead, gender is a series of images, of impressions, of becomings, beyond the masculine and feminine binarism of traditional psychoanalytical thought on which these models are constructed. [Fig 20]



**Figure 20:** gender transgression in *Four Flies on Grey Velvet*

It is perhaps the figure of the child evoked through the eruption of childhood memory-images in *Four Flies on Grey Velvet* that allows us to reconstruct gender outside of Oedipal limits/limitations and the domestication of memory as symptomatic expressions of the Oedipal subject. Nina's memories are inscriptions of flight and speed, interspersed with stasis, a disturbance and disorientation of visual perspective, expressing a different and differential conceptualisation of the spatial-temporal medium of the cinematic-image. The powers of the false whilst disturbing the interplay between essence and appearance also of necessity call into question the dialectical idea of time as succession and progression.

Just as the sight of visible sexual difference is eluded by the distortion and particularisation of the cinematic-image in these re/presentations of the past, the contemporaneous operation of past and present produces a crisis in the spatial-temporal workings of the cinematic-image. In “A Wrinkle in Time: The Child, Memory, and The Mirror”<sup>2</sup>, Alan Wright (1996) utilises a Deleuzian methodology through which to discuss the reconfiguration of temporality in Tarkovsky’s *The Mirror* (1974). In the following discussion of the memory-image, I make reference to Wright’s analysis as a possible means through which to elucidate the manner in which memory is used to problematise the relationship between past and present, virtual and actual and the real and the imaginary in *Four Flies on Grey Velvet*.

### **The flashback and the memory-image**

The flashback is the traditional mechanism for allowing the representation of events outside of the immediate diegetic narrative. Whilst offering an event out of sequence, the flashback does not threaten the chronological ordering of the narrative:

The flashback operates as an important technique of film narrative as well as a principle vehicle for the cinematic presentation of memory. It often provides key information as to plot development or character motivation, readable from a structural framework that supports a view of the chronological unfolding of narrative events. (Wright, 1996: 48).

The conventional flashback works as an extrinsic device, anchoring and regulating meaning. It is essential to the functioning of the flashback that its appearance is signalled before hand: Deleuze argues that often the dissolve-link signals ‘watch-out!

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<sup>2</sup> *Wide Angle* - Volume 18, Number 1, January 1996, pp. 47-68

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recollection' (Deleuze, 2000: 48). This allows the event in the past to be "framed" from an established position in the present which constitutes a sensory-motor link between separate temporal dimensions and 'confirms the progression of a linear narrative.' (Deleuze, 2000: 48).

We have already seen how Argento's *giallo* disturb the chronological unfolding of narrative events through the means of ellipses, editing discontinuities, and disturbances in temporal-spatial co-ordinates. In *Four Flies on Grey Velvet* memory-images constitute a fragmentation in linearity calling into question traditional conceptualisations of time as progression, and the ideology of the unified subject, mapped within space but outside of time: like Descartes' Cartesian cogito. In a similar manner to the dream image, the memory-image articulates a liberation of time from the constraints of movement in which:

[the] character finds himself prey to visual and sound sensations (or tactile ones, coetaneous or coenaesthetic) which have lost their motor extension. This may be a limit-situation, the imminent arrival or consequence of an accident, the nearness of death but also the most ordinary states of sleep, dream, or disturbance of attention. And in the second place, these actual sensations and perceptions are as cut off from memory-based recognition as they are from motor recognition: no specific group of recollections comes to correspond to them, and to fit into the optical and sound situation. But, what is very different, it is a whole temporal 'panorama', an unstable set of floating memories, images of a past in general which move past at dizzying speed, as if time were achieving a profound freedom. (Deleuze, 2000: 55)

Like the dream-image, the memory-image is inscribed as a pure optical and sound situation 'no longer subject to the rules of response or an action.' (Deleuze, 2000: 3).

Even though the memory-image articulates a singular rather than multiple forking in time, its audio-visual dimensions resist assimilation into a totality: 'its repetitions are

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not accumulations, its manifestations refuse to be aligned, or to reconstitute a destiny, but constantly split up any state of equilibrium and each time impose a new 'meander', a new break in causality, which itself forks from the previous one, in a collection of non-linear relations.' (Deleuze, 2000: 49).

The first slippage from present to past is triggered by a telephone conversation between Tobais's maid and an/other concealed speaker in which she threatens to reveal the identity of the person who placed the photographic images of Tobais's transgression in their home. Rather than being constrained by the visual image of the speaker, the camera takes flight and instead traces the voice as it is carried through the city through the telephone lines. On a simplistic level, the telephone allows the connection of disparate geographical and temporal spaces. The telephone as the main form of modern communication, allows the flow of information across distinct geographical and temporal zones.

Telephones are often used in Argento's *gialli* to signal the estrangement between characters, in this sequence the telephone provides a conduit from the present through to the past which disturbs the ideology of time as succession and progression. We can productively consider this linking of past and present through Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome. Instead of the tree-like logic of the representational schema of Oedipal thought, the relation between past and present is expressed rhizomatically as the present disappears down the end of a telephone and telephone lines lead us outside the house, up and down buildings, across streets before eventually ending up inside a deserted house and the virtual space of the past. This machinic assemblage of voice and technology seems to articulate Deleuze and



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Guattari's principles of connection and heterogeneity in which 'any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be.' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 8). The telephone line opens lines of communication between past and present outside of the order of time as succession and progression: the primary characteristics of the image are no longer those of spatiality but of topology and time. Again instead of the frame of the flashback, we have a sense of temporality as becoming, outside the dialectical model of being: based upon an unproblematic relation of continuity between past and present.

This use of the child as a mechanism through which to problematise the relation between cinematic space and time formed a central element of neorealist discourse. The ending of *Rome, Open City* in which children line up against a fence passively watch the death of Don Pietro and the voyage journey between father and son in De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* both situate the child as unwitting witness to the acts of unremitting brutality in the first instance and banality in the second. In *Passion and Defiance: Film in Italy from 1942 to the Present*, Mira Liehm argues that when he made *Rome, Open City*: 'Rossellini already saw film as an instrument of modern vision, a way of seeing things "with one's own eyes."' (Liehm, 1984: 65). This way of seeing things anew as focalised through the eyes of the child however was not simply a case of the realistic representation of the everyday but a more poetical approach to the question of post World War Two reality as seen in the frequent allusions to the cinematic apparatus itself in De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves*. As Bonadella points out: 'the scene preceding the theft of Ricci's bicycle, as artistically contrived a sequence as one can imagine, shows Ricci posting a Rita Hayworth film poster, the directors' pointed

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reference to the careful viewer that he is watching a film, nor reality.’ (Bonadella, 1989: 57).

Deleuze sees the figure of the child in neorealism as a pivotal mark of the changing materiality of the cinematic mechanism: ‘the role of the child in neo-realism has been pointed out, notably in De Sica (and later in France with Truffaut); this is because, in the adult world, the child is affected by a certain motor helplessness’ (Deleuze: 2000: 3). The memorialisation of childhood trauma in *Four Flies on Grey Velvet* seems to enact the motor-helplessness of the child and the breakdown of the sensory-motor schema as the past breaks up into a number of fragmentary returns, not reducible to a singularity or origin.

### **Traumatic Becomings**

The evocation of childhood memory is subject to a number of displacements. The faded black and white photographs from a family album conceal rather than reveal identity: the identity the child in the photographs is not fixed through the immobilisation of cinematic time. The opposition of the gendered natures of the photographs seems to juxtapose male aggression and feminine victimhood, although the gender of the child in the photograph is not clearly visible to the spectator’s eye. A cut articulates a break with the sense of the past as stasis, and the past becomes audio-visual, a pure optical and sound image, enacting both spatial and temporal dislocation. This transition is signalled first by a male voice who seems to be berating a child for not being ‘manly’ enough, before a cut takes us into the rarefied spaces of the past - sterile white walls lead to a padded room and a huddled figure beneath the

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covers of a bed in the corner of the room. The camera seemingly liberated from a determine visual field, spins and turns around the white walls of the room. Both the still photograph and the audio-visual image as memory-images displace the subject from the centre of the frame. In the scene of Daria's murder, the past is no longer contained within the visual, instead it becomes pure voice; collapsing the distance and distinction between separate temporal moments. Deleuze argues in relation to memory and the time-image: 'In its very essence, memory is voice, which speaks, talks to itself, and re-encounters what happened' (Deleuze, 2000: 51).

In "A Wrinkle in Time: The Child, Memory and *The Mirror*", Alan Wright posits an alternative to the understanding of childhood memory as Oedipal theatre. Wright re-reads Freud's description of the Fort/Da game outside of the binaries of presence and absence and suggests instead that 'The joyous shrieks - Gone! Here! - are a response to pushing appearances to their limits. Ernst knows how to make a plaything of reality.' Drawing on the work of both Virilio and Benjamin, Wright contends that non-gender specific childhood games such as "1-2-3, Red Light" (a form of hide-and-seek) and the merry-go-round offer a set of pleasures which are not structured through the interplay of presence and absence but rather highlight 'the child's attraction to the sensations of physical dislocation and sensory distortion.' (Wright, 1996: 54)

This accords with Paul Virilio's thesis, which Wright cites, in *The Aesthetics of Disappearance*, that 'child-society frequently utilises turnings, spinning around, disequilibrium.' (Virilio cited in Wright, 1996: 54). The repetitions of the past in *Four Flies on Grey Velvet* inscribe this sense of both physical and sensory

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dislocation, and in framing Tobais through the use of the photographic image, Nina, like Ernst, makes a plaything of reality.

Wright's analysis that childhood memory provides 'another perspective on the cinematic apparatus as a prosthetic, technical device for facilitating access to an intermediated experience of time' (Wright, 1996: 50) is useful in thinking outside the binaries of gender. However it ends up by reinserting gender across the binary as it is a story of childhood once again which has as its primary protagonist the figure of the boy: as also does Freud's discussion of the Fort/Da game itself. Not unproblematically Wright seems to see cinema's encounter with memory as primarily as male concern. Indeed he goes on to suggest that 'when the girl appears specifically as representative of the return to childhood, the narrative format changes from autobiographical or dramatic mode to the entertaining spectacle of make-believe and fantasy.' Wright talks about the figure of Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) and Alice in *Alice In Wonderland* as prime examples of this. He puts forward the argument that while 'their stories involve the same emphasis on "turnings" and transformations [...] such deformations impel the girls into an imaginary world beyond temporal restraints' (Wright, 1996: 66)

For Wright the figure of the girl provides a block, which disrupts his attempts to reconstruct the field of childhood memory outside of oedipal limits. His insertion of the girl within the imaginary, or a liminal zone, seems to function to reassert the meta-narrative of Oedipus.

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Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of the figure of the girl as a line of flight in *A Thousand Plateaus* provides us with an alternative means through which to negotiate the temporal-spatial disturbances of the narrative without reconstructing gendered models.

The girl is certainly not defined by virginity; she is defined by a relation of movement and rest, speed and slowness, by a combination of atoms, an emission of particles: haecceity. She never ceases to roam upon a body within organs. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 277).

As we have seen the memorialisation of the past in *Four Flies on Grey Velvet* is defined by the relation between speed and slowness that Deleuze and Guattari associate with the figure of the girl. At the same time, the indiscernability of the gender of the child in both the photographic memory-image and the audio-visual memory image evokes this sense of the body as a flux of atomic connections and disconnections, or what Deleuze and Guattari call haecceity.

### **Conclusion: Lines of Flight**

Perhaps of all Argento's *gialli* *Four Flies on Grey Velvet* is the most explicit in its gender transgression. Whereas the masculinity of Dalmas in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* and Giordani in *The Cat O'Nine Tails* is called into question through their inability to interpret the narrative enigma, to embody the masculine characteristics of agency, action and action with which the male detective has become associated.

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Tobais, however, occupies the place usually reserved for woman in the horror film. The object of the murderer's ultimate aggression, he is positioned within both the gothic ideal of *damsel-in-distress* and the *final girl* of the slasher film. For much of the narrative, Tobais is literally the transfixed, terrorised and trapped femininity that has become the defining feature of much of modern horror. In opposition to this is the figure of Nina who is positioned in the role usually reserved for men in the horror film. Yet as I have argued it is not enough to see *Four Flies on Grey Velvet* as a mere subversion of the traditional form of horror, or indeed the detective film, but we need to see it as articulating a more profound reconfiguration of the limits of truth and the possibilities inherent within the powers of the false as signalled by the figure of the child - neither before or after, masculine or feminine, but in-between.

In my discussion of Argento's Diva trilogy, I explore in greater detail the bodily resistances of the girl-child to oedipalisation and the emergence of what could be seen as a feminist politics of becoming in Argento's later work.

## **Introduction**

I would suggest, now, that the cryptic forms of modern narrative and modern art always - whether consciously or not - partake of that historical impossibility of writing a historical narration of the Holocaust, by bearing testimony, through their very cryptic form, to the *radical historical crisis in witnessing* the Holocaust has opened up. (Felman, 1993: 201)

In the last chapter, I argued that the figure of the child and the recollection of childhood trauma in *Four Flies on Grey Velvet* functioned as a line of flight from normative constructions of gender in horror film. In this chapter, I bring together Deleuze's discussion of the cinematic-image with Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's writings on the Holocaust in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* in order to consider how the tension between textualization and contextualization in Argento's *Deep Red (Profondo Rosso: 1976)* might yield new insights into the traumatic eruption of memory in Argento's *giallo* outside of traditional psychoanalytical gendered models.

Continuing from my argument in *Chapter Three* that Argento's first *giallo* *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* can be considered a critique of colonialism, I map the ways in which the inability of the 'witness' as colonial other to bear witness embodies an implicit and explicit reference to the Holocaust as the unsymbolizable real which brings about the crisis in truth that we have already explored in connection to Argento's earlier *giallo*. Whilst this project is primarily concerned with Argento's *psychological giallo*, I back up my argument by references to Argento's supernatural horror films - in particular the multiple allusions to fascism contained in the iconography of his 1977 film *Suspiria* and the allegorical treatment of the Holocaust

in the opening sequences of *The Church* (1988) - produced by Argento and directed by Michele Soavi.

This chapter argues therefore that when taken together with Argento's other films, the allusion to the holocaust in *Deep Red* is not just one of the multiple allusions that make up the dense tapestry of Argento's fourth *giallo* - as Landy (2000) suggests - but is in fact the moment of disruption of totalizing theories of truth. This also makes sense, I contend if we locate *Deep Red* contextually within a more generalised eruption of figures of monstrosity and perversity in Italian film in the 1970s including Ruggero Deodato's stomach churning cannibals in *The Last Cannibal World* (1976) and Lucio Fulci's savage zombies in *Zombie Flesh Eaters* (1979). Once again, political commentary is communicated at the level of the iconographic which displaces, although does not replace, simplistic questions of gender and genre.

### ***Deep Red: memory and murder***

*Profondo Rosso* makes claim to our attention since it also offers an essay into cinema spectatorship, treading familiar ground precisely because of its exploration of the as-yet-unfathomed nature of the links between knowledge and cinema, cinema and violence, and the role of gendered knowledge in this equation. In the process of interrogating vision, the film also, by highlighting the connections between murders past and present, addresses the role of memory and (as in the conflation of a painting and a reflection) points both to its persistence and to the violence inherent in the memorialising of actions.' (Landy, 2000: 359)

In *Deep Red*, the central protagonist Marc Daley (David Hemmings), a classical jazz pianist, is a witness to a brutal murder of a famed Jewish psychic, Helga Ulman (Macha Méril), who hears murderous thoughts of an unseen person during a



psychopathology conference. Too late to save Helga, Marc runs into her apartment and catches glimpse of what he thinks is a strange portrait of three woman on the wall to the left of the hallway. This strange portrait turns out to be a mirror in which the face of the murderer is reflected. Like Sam Dalmas in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, Marc realises that he has seen something important, but is unable to recall what it is.

As in all Argento's early *giallo*, the function of gendered knowledge is to render the male protagonist unable to 'read' the signifiers of aggression, which as in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* and *Four Flies on Grey Velvet* are associated with femininity rather than masculinity. In *Deep Red*, the killer turns out to be Marta (Clara Calamai), a one time actress, and mother of Marc's best friend, Carlo (Gabriele Lavia). And the original trauma is the murder of Marta's husband and Carlo's father which is witnessed by Carlo. The finale of the film is a grand guignol set-piece with Marta beheaded as her necklace becomes caught up in a moving lift.

### **Gender transgression**

Once again gender transgression is foregrounded. Not only are the traditional signifiers of masculinity with activity, agency and activity subverted by what can only be called its feminised and effeminate men but *Deep Red* offers multiple figurations of femininity irreconcilable with traditional representations of "woman". In opposition to Marta, the murderous mother, Argento offers another even more disruptive figuration of modern femininity: Gianna Brezzi (played by Dario Nicolodi,

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*Profondo Rosso (Deep Red: 1976)*

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Argento's partner at the time): an assertive and brusque newspaper reporter whose mismatched relationship with Marc is the subject of much *Commedia dell'Arte* humour. Early on in their relationship Marc mistakenly shares his views with Gianna: 'Men and Women are different. Woman are delicate, fragile' to which she exclaims 'What, delicate? Fragile?' before bursting into laughter. Gianna is certainly no *damsel-in-distress*, and in fact rescues Marc later on in the film when his curiosity leads to him becoming trapped in the old gothic mansion on whose walls the secret of the past trauma is inscribed. And whilst Marc's involvement in the investigation is a result of chance - the Hitchcockian wrong man in the wrong place at the wrong time - Gianna actively involves herself in the investigation, more often than not taking the lead in both the investigation and the ensuing personal relationship with Marc. This is not the passive femininity that has been associated with the traditional representation of woman in horror: Gianna is certainly not a '*woman-in-peril*' - a trope of the horror film - and neither is she the sexually repressed '*final girl*'.

As I suggested in *Chapter Three* in my discussion of *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, conventional feminist interpretations of gender and genre do not work when faced with the more sexually liberated and assertive woman who figure strongly in Italian film generally, and Argento's *giallo* specifically. And whilst childhood trauma might go some way in explaining Carlo's uncertain gender, it offers no explanation at all for Marta's psychosis. Unlike *Four Flies on Grey Velvet*, where the violence of the father is situated as causative of Nina's gender instability, in *Deep Red* all we have are the external signs of Marta's psychosis which are irreducible to an explanation within traditional psychoanalytical terms. Just as Gianna's assertive

femininity and sexuality work outside pre-existing gendered models – and in particular Clover’s ‘final-girl’ - Marta’s monstrosity cannot be assimilated in the categorisations of archaic mother, monstrous womb, witch, vampire or possessed woman that Barbara Creed constructs in her taxonomy of the five faces of the *monstrous-feminine* (Creed: 1992, 7). Indeed there are implicit parallels between the aggressive sexuality and femininity of both Gianna and Marta which subverts the traditional binaries of virgin/whore that we see in so many American horror films – for example, Joe Dante’s *The Howling* (1981) with its blond, repressed central female protagonist [good] and her opposite, the sultry, dark-haired and sexually voracious woman with her bestial appetites [bad]. This problematisation and subversion of the traditions of representation of female identity in the horror film culminates in the frightening femininity of his Diva trilogy: *Opera (Terror at the Opera: 1987)*, *Trauma (Dario Argento’s Trauma: 1992)* and *The Stendhal Syndrome (La sindrome di Stendhal: 1996)*.

As in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* and *Four Flies on Grey Velvet* the extended murder sequences are disturbing not only because of their graphic dismemberment of the human body [both male and female], but also because they suggest the disturbing subtext of woman on woman violence: a sado-masochistic sexuality. In the mise-en-scène of Helga’s murder, the glimpses of the murderer are limited to shots of fetishistic clothing: black gloved hands and leather high-heeled boots. As Julian Grainger points out in his review of *Deep Red*: by 1975 the use of sadomasochistic clothing was a *giallo* cliché: ‘the ritualistic adornment of leather, with its connotations of fetishism and sex, suggesting that the killer isn’t just a psychopathic murderer but

kinky with it.’ (Grainger, 2000: 123)<sup>1</sup>. Once again, this clearly situates the figuration of the feminine in Argento’s *giallo* clearly outside the dominant American models of Clover (1992) and Creed (1992). The meta-narrative of heterosexuality associated with the Puritanism of American horror is subverted by the fluid, homosexual desires that underpin the narrative trajectory of *Deep Red*. One could go as far as to suggest that gender in Argento’s *giallo* is no more than a “play of appearances” (Butler, 1990: 47) which through the interplay between concealment and revelation suggests that ‘the original identity after which gender fashions itself as an imitation without an origin.’ (Butler, 1990: 138). In fact, gender is no more than a fashion statement, a play on surface style, a set of fetishistic clothing items which, like the blank mask of Bava’s murderer in *Blood and Black Lace*, tell us nothing about the gender, sexuality or identity of the person who adorns these signifiers of violence and violation: the point is that it could be anybody or indeed everyone - a much more unsettling thought that the individualisation and pathologisation of the monstrous in the original cycle of the American “slasher/stalker” genre.

It is not just female identity, which is a site of reconfiguration outside of the dialectical play of activity and passivity in *Deep Red*. In opposition to the dominant and aggressive woman are the deeply ambivalent gender identities of Marc Daly and his friend, Carlo. Unlike the American horror film that “ends” by the reassertion of normative heterosexuality through the elimination of the “monstrous other” and any

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<sup>1</sup> But these signifiers of sexual difference also function as the main site of the protagonist’s misreading. Like Giordano in *The Cat O’Nine Tails*, Marc mistakes sexual “perversity” for criminal “deviancy” and when faced with the obvious signifiers of Carlo’s unstable gender comes to the conclusion that therefore Carlo “must be” the murderer. This suggests that sexuality is anything but simplistic in Argento’s *giallo*.

possible “queerness” signified by this other; there is no such comforting catharsis for the audience in *Deep Red*'s exploration of the close friendship between Marc and Carlo. Male homosexuality, like female homosexuality provides a counter-paradigm to the dominant heterosexuality of the American model and the interpretative paradigms built upon those models.

In Maitland McDonagh's reading of *Deep Red*, she suggests that both Marc's masculinity and heterosexuality are questioned throughout the film: 'The police inspector sent to the scene of Helga's murder suggests slyly that being a musician is no sort of profession for a real man, while Gianna taunts Marc into armwrestling with her, then gleefully beats him - more or less fairly - every round and giggles at his dismay; when she assures him that he is a “big..strong..man” there's no doubt that she means something else.' (McDonagh, 1994: 103/104). It is perhaps though Marc's relationship with the sexually ambiguous Carlo that is inscribed as the main threat to Marc's masculinity and identity.

Whilst it might seem that Marc and Carlo are “doubles”, their complicated relationship places them outside of being mirror images. In psychoanalytic terminology, the double can be seen as articulating a split identity: between the restrictive apparatus of the superego and the unrestricted desires of the id; a definition which owes much to Otta Rank's discussion of the *doppelgänger* in 1914. In *The Horror Genre: From Beelzebub to Blair Witch* (2000), Paul Welles points out that the use of the double in horror film articulates either an evil “outside” of the self or a splitting of the self: ‘humankind confronts its nemesis either through the

opposition of an individual and a monster or by exposure of the two competing sides of an individual - normally one rational and civilised, the other uncontrolled and irrational, often more primal and atavistic.' (Welles, 2000: 8)<sup>2</sup>. But as McDonagh points out it is not possible to see Marc and Carlo in terms of the operation of simple oppositions:

each character is contextually real, and they don't bear a conventional doubling relationship to one another - they aren't siblings, lovers, namesakes or dead ringers for one another. But they're linked by circumstance and detail in a number of ways, and the linkage is so obsessive and pervasive that its demands structural resolution (McDonagh, 1994: 102/103).

Outside of the fact that both men are pianists, the similarities between the two men are both thematic and iconographical. A scene, cut from the American version of the film, makes these similarities explicit. It opens with a close-up of two pairs of hands at a piano which play a duet in which as McDonagh argues 'their respective parts are precise echoes of each other.' (McDonagh, 1994: 103) In their relationships, both Marc and Carlo are constantly viewed in a submissive position to their partners - as we have already seen Gianna literally 'wears the pants' in her relationship with Marc, and the scenes in which Carlo is seen together with Massimo situate Carlo in a feminine position, both through his adoption of female dress and his overt passivity. And more significantly, after Marc witnesses the murder of Helga, Marc becomes deeply embedded within the perverted familial saga began by Marta's murder of her husband.

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<sup>2</sup> In *The Gothic*, Fred Botting argues that the figure of double as a psychological "monster" is a development of Romanticism: 'An uncanny figure of horror, the double presents a limit that cannot be overcome, the representation of an internal and irreparable division in the individual psyche' (Botting, 1996: 93)

The difference between you and me is political. We both play rather well. But I am the proletariat of the pianoforte while you are the bourgeoisie. You play for the sake of art and enjoy it. I do it for a living, it's not the same thing.  
(Carlo to Marc in *Deep Red*)

Carlo argues that the differences between the two men are political. Whilst both men are pianists, Marc occupies an official position as a music teacher working at the Conservatory, unlike Carlo who is forced to earn a living working in bars and pubs. This foregrounding of cultural and political differences can be seen as a continuation of the critique of colonialism and imperialism that I discussed in relation to Argento's first *giallo*, *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*. Julian Grainger suggests in his review of *Deep Red*, that this overt politicisation of cultural and national identity is somewhat undermined by the faded opulence of Marta's apartment. According to Grainger, Carlo's romanticised vision of himself as working class proletariat, is at odds with the visible signifiers of wealth that surround Marta: 'Carlo seems to suffer more from wealthy indolence than grinding poverty.' (Grainger, 2000: 123). Whilst I would agree with Grainger that issues of class are somewhat problematic in *Deep Red*, the critique of capitalism still remains a dominant theme of Argento's *giallo* as we saw in my discussion of *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*.

### **The primal scene/seen**

*Deep Red* begins with the traumatic event in the past, which unfolds during the main title sequence. And although at first the film seems to be operating within the traditional two part temporal structure that we associate with the American

“slasher/stalker” genre, the manner in which the past is presented and embedded within the present is significantly and structurally different.

Unlike the traditional visual presentation of the event from the past associated with the American slasher-film, which is separated from the main flow of the narrative by the use of intra-diegetic titling, there are no visual or scriptable signifiers to situate the event either temporally or spatially. The event is not presented to us directly, but indirectly - all we see are the reflections of a violent struggle on the wall of a room. Whilst a gaudily decorated Christmas tree signals that the event takes place in and around Christmas time, there is no direct temporal positioning of the event. If we think about the past in the American *slasher* film: it is always positioned both temporally and spatiality. In *Halloween*, inter-diegetic title frame the traumatic event as taking place in “Haddonfield, Illinois, Halloween Night in 1963”. Similarly in *Friday 13th*, lettering imposed over location is used to signify both time and place: “Camp Crystal Lake, 1958”. In both films, the movement from past to present is again signalled through the use of interdiegetic titles, in *Halloween* we move from 1963 to 1978 and in *Friday 13th*, from 1958 to “Friday 13th: The Present”.

In *Deep Red*, the space is an any-space-whatever, and the only temporal signifier we have is the Christmas tree. A children’s nursery rhyme provides the musical accompaniment to this murderous shadow play which ends with a knife thrown down onto the ground - blood on its tip - and a pair of stocking legs and black patent shoes standing over the knife. For McDonagh the manner in which the ‘past’ is remembered within the credit sequence ‘establishes a distinctly uneasy, off-balance



tone, and it does so by manipulating many of the same elements that inflect the film as a whole.’ (McDonagh, 1994: 7).

Unlike the located spaces of *Halloween* and *Friday 13th*, the evocation of memory in *Deep Red* articulates a much more fluid, time-orientated and free floating space of indeterminate recollection. And unlike *Halloween* and *Friday 13th* in which we see the actual past and the realm of perception, in *Deep Red*, we are in the space of the virtual past and that of recollection:

The virtual image (pure recollection) is not a psychological state or a consciousness: it exists outside of consciousness, in time, and we should have no more difficulty in admitting the virtual existence of pure recollection in time than we do the actual existence of non-perceived objects in space. (Deleuze, 2000: 80).

For Ray Guins in “Tortured Looks: Dario Argento and Visual Displeasure”, the opening sequences of *Deep Red* articulate a symbolic exchange of power between father and son, in which the knife as phallic signifier is passed from dying father to traumatised son. He goes on to suggest that: ‘Carlo’s primal trauma could be considered the murderous act which carries a more literal and lethal version of parental sexual signification.’ (Guins, 1996: 143). But not only does Carlo refuse to take the knife - and the phallic power that it embodies - and to replace his father in the oedipal triangle, his feminisation or “becoming other” is transcribed in terms of masochism rather than sadism.



**Figure 21:** The death of the "Jew" in *Deep Red*

Having posited the past as virtual in the opening sequences, *Deep Red* then actualises the traces of the past in the present when Helga is brutally murdered as Marc watches helplessly outside the apartment block. Like the originary set-piece in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, the murder of Helga is appalling in its brutality, both in the violence done to the body and the violence to the spectator's perceptual and conceptual framework. Helga dies neither quickly nor quietly and the sheer visual excess of the scene/seen is one that is both disturbing and disorientating. The crystalline nature of this "primal scene" is one in which the incommensurability between different viewpoints - the victim's (Helga's), the killer's (Marta's) and the witness (Marc) - creates a fragmentation and problematisation of visual perspective which renders the extra-diegetic spectator unable to reconcile the fragments into a coherent whole.

The set-piece of Helga's murder is divided into two sequences. The first sequence begins conventionally with the act of violence focalised through the point of view shot of the murderer as a cleaver is brought down again and again on the body of Helga [Fig 21]. The film then cuts to the square outside where Carlo telling Marc that he is unable to remember when he is drunk. This is significant thematically, as a later sequence after the murder has Carlo and Marc discussing what Marc remembers. Carlo leaves and as Marc walks towards the apartment block a piercing scream breaks

through the silence. The second sequence of Helga's murder then takes place, and as Marc looks upwards, an angled shot shows us Helga with her hands held out against the glass window of her apartment. The use of flash-cutting allows Argento to switch the camera's position, angle, point of view and focus continually within what is a remarkably short sequence lasting little over 7 seconds. The sequence is an incoherent montage of shots with rapid switches between Helga's point-of-view as she looks out of the window and down towards Marc, and Marc's point-of-view as he looks up towards the window where Helga is standing. The camera moves in towards an extreme close-up of Helga's neck as it shatters through the glass in the window. As in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, the camera switches from inside to outside, in which Helga's entreaties for help are mirrored by the helplessness of Marc who is literally transfixed to the spot.

The violence embedded within the virtual past in the credit sequences is transformed into the actual through its repetition in the present. Helga's murder recalls into the present becoming past, the virtual past with which the film began. Totoro's commentary on the actual and the virtual image in her incisive analysis of "Deleuze's Bergsonian Film Project" is applicable to the memorialisation of the past in *Deep Red*: 'The virtual image as "pure recollection" exists outside of consciousness, in time. It is always somewhere in the temporal past, but alive, and ready to be "recalled" by an actual image. The actual image is objective, in the present and perceived' whilst the 'virtual image is subjective, in the past, and consciousness in time.'<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Totaro, Donato (1999). "Deleuze's Bergsonian Film Project: Part 2: *Cinema 2: The Time Image. Offscreen*. 31 March 1999. [Online]. Available at: [http://www.horschamp.qc.ca/9903/offscreen\\_essays/deleuze2.html](http://www.horschamp.qc.ca/9903/offscreen_essays/deleuze2.html)

As a picturation of violence, this sequence works through a depth of field at which moment ‘depth becomes depth of field, whilst the dimensions of the foreground take on an abnormal size, and those of the background are reduced, in a violent perspective which does even more to unite the near and faraway.’ (Deleuze, 2000: 107). The use of diagonals in this scene which links the horizontal with the vertical frees depth from all other dimensions and is one in which the image is free from sole determination through logical space, instead the determining characteristic becomes one of temporality. This is the point that Deleuze is making when he states that: ‘The new depth [...] directly forms a region of time, a region of past which is defined by *optical* aspects or elements borrowed from interacting planes.’ (Deleuze, 2000: 108). Instead of perception being organised through the image, a characteristic of the image, the extra-diegetic viewer is asked, in the same way as Marc is, to organise perception him/herself. But the perceptual process, just as the linkage between action and reaction, is made impossible by the fractured montage through which the sequence is shot.

### **The Witness and The Jew**

We have already seen how Argento’s *giallo* articulate an incommensurability between seeing and knowledge, in which the central protagonist [the outsider] is witness to an attack of unremitting brutality but fails to recognise the significance of what he sees. And we have also seen how these failures of recognition are often ascribed to the failures of gendered knowledge which works upon the “normative” assumptions that

men are violent and woman victims of that violence. Gendered knowledge is disrupted by the inscription of the killer either as female - Monica in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* and Nina in *Four Flies on Grey Velvet*, or improperly gendered as in Casoni in *The Cat O'Nine Tails*.

Once again we have the *female-as-killer* in *Deep Red*, and the male protagonist who is unable to see past the gendered equation, which equates masculinity with violence. However the subsequent revelation that Helga is Jewish suggests that “gender” is not the main issue in *Deep Red*. As Landy argues: ‘In the case of Helga’s death and the discovery of her Jewishness, the spectator is invited to make comparisons between these murders and the destruction of the Jews in the Holocaust.’ (Landy, 2000: 358) In the light of Landy’s statement, and in opposition to traditional psychoanalytical readings of Argento’s *giallo*, I want to suggest that it is this displacement of the Holocaust onto the “primal scene” that resists symbolisation and interpretation: that renders the detective “unable” to detect. And if Argento’s *giallo* are demonstrations of what Deleuze calls the cinema of the *time-image* it is precisely because of this historical sense of rupture with rational systems of thought, deriving from the Enlightenment, which Argento’s films explore in their destruction of temporal-spatial continuity.

This also helps us to make sense of Deleuze’s statement that it is not the ‘recollection-image or attentive recognition’ that is the equivalent of the optical-sound image but ‘it is rather the disturbances of memory and the failures of recognition.’ (Deleuze, 2000: 56). If *Deep Red* articulates the disturbances of memory and failures of recognition

then it is precisely because the film articulates “the crises in witnessing” that the Holocaust as traumatic event opens up. In *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in History, Literature and Psychoanalysis*, Felman and Laub state that not only is the Holocaust an event which is *not over*, but that it signifies: ‘a history whose repercussions are not simply omnipresent (whether consciously or not), but whose traumatic consequences are still *actively evolving*.’ (Felman and Laub, 1992: xiv)<sup>4</sup> According to Felman, art and literature, which explore the traumatic consequences of the Holocaust, use testimony as ‘a crucial mode of our relation to the events of our time - our relation to the traumas of contemporary history: the Second World War, the Holocaust, the nuclear bomb, and other war atrocities.’ (Felman and Laub, 1992: 5)

Felman points out that whilst testimony encompasses the process of memory and remembering, it does so in relation to an event which cannot be understood or assimilated within conventional frames of reference:

As a relation to events, testimony seems to be composed of bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by occurrences that have not settled into understanding or remembrance, acts that cannot be constructed as knowledge nor assimilated into full cognition, events in excess of our frames of reference. (Felman, 1992: 5)

We can apply Felman’s statement to the workings of memory in *Deep Red*. Argento constantly calls our attention to the workings of memory throughout *Deep Red*. In his review of *Deep Red*, Julian Grainger points out that Argento is playing an elaborate game with the audience by overloading the film with visual clues which obscure the

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<sup>4</sup> In *Spectacular Suffering* (1999), Vivian M. Patraka uses the term “Holocaust performative” to express those artistic and theatrical attempts to come to terms with the horrific events of the Holocaust.

very thing which they are meant to reveal. In the opening sequences, we follow the murderer into a [male] washroom and gradually the camera pans into a mirror above the sink in which the murderer is washing their hands: but the mirror reveals nothing, as it is so distorted by age and grime. In a later sequence, immediately after Helga's murder, Marc runs down the hallways, catching a glimpse of the murderer face in a mirror – which he mistakes for a painting - as he does so. As Grainger points out that although Marta's face is just visible in the mirror - it can only be viewed by stilling the film: 'The whole of the mirror is visible but for a single frame and to make matters worse, the camera is moving, this dolly shot making it very difficult to focus on the relevant part of the screen in time to take in the vital details.' (Grainger, 2000: 123). But can these deliberate actions on the part of Argento be seen as merely a 'great joke' played by Argento on the audience, or are they deliberate signals which point to something more traumatic and intolerable? Can we not see them instead as signifiers which 'confront thought as higher 'problem', or which enter into relation with the indeterminable, the unreferable.' (Deleuze, 2000: 167) in which the indeterminable and the unreferable is the shadow of the Holocaust which is still not - and will never be - over.

I have already suggested that it is significant that both during and after Helga's death, conversations take place between Marc and Carlo on the subject of forgetting and remembering. Like a "Greek chorus" these conversations draw our attention to the centrality of memory as dominant thematic in *Deep Red*. In addition to this, both Carlo and Gianna constantly call attention to Marc's status as witness. At one point, Gianna says to Marc "You saw everything. You're the super witness." And even

Chapter Six: **The Crisis in the Truth**  
*Profondo Rosso (Deep Red: 1976)*

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when Carlo tells him that the painting that he thinks he saw was important, Marc continues to fail to recognise that the painting was in fact a mirror in which Marta's face was reflected. Marc tells Carlo that he is telling the truth about not being able to remember, Carlo retorts: 'No, Marc, you think you're telling the truth but it's just your version of the truth.' Returning to the apartment, Marc sees the mirror and still fails to understand.



**Figure 22:** Uncovering the "truth"? in *Deep Red*

Just as when Marc uncovers the painting on the wall of the old Gothic house where the murder happens, he uncovers what he thinks happened - the young boy with the knife - but leaves the figure of the real murderer still concealed [Fig 22]. In foregrounding the fact that the process of forgetting is an integral part of that of remembering, *Deep Red* re-enacts the story of the Holocaust as an event beyond the conceptual frameworks which we inhabit: an event which can only be partially reconstructed and partly recognised.

For Felman this inability to construct a coherent narrative out of the Holocaust is a result of the incommensurability between the story of the victim; that of the



bystanders and finally that of the perpetrators. Whilst both the victim and the bystander see without knowing, the actions of the perpetrator function to conceal the sight by disposing of all the witnesses. Just as we have already seen in Argento's previous *giallo*, the narrative in *Deep Red* flows out of this disjunction between sight and knowledge. In her discussion of Lanzmann's *Shoah*, Felman argues that the differences between the three protagonists at the central of the film are inscribed not through what they see, but 'what and how they do not see, by what and how they fail to witness.' (Felman, 1992: 207). Whilst it is obvious that *Shoah* is a very different cinematic experience to Argento's *Deep Red*, her discussion of the differences between the "protagonists" provides a powerful mechanism through which to interrogate the link between personal and historical memorialisation in Argento's film.

In *Deep Red*, Helga's failure to 'see' leads directly to her death. During parapsychology conference with which the film begins, Helga tells her audience 'I pick up on facts that are happening, or that have happened, but not things that might happen.' The conference is disrupted when suddenly Helga cries out, asking the audience to excuse her, saying that she felt something strange 'like a knife entering my flesh.' Moments later, she directly addresses the murderer [whose identity is concealed] and exclaims 'You've already killed, I sense you'll kill again.' It is not without irony that whilst Helga disclaims an ability to see the future, she does in fact foresee her own death - as later than night, she is brutally knifed to death. Julian Grainger points out that: 'Like most of the characters in *Deep Red*, she can see something, but, crucially, she can't see enough.' (Landy, 2000: 117). Or, using Felman's words - Helga is blind to the significance of what she sees:

The Jews see, but they do not understand the purpose and the destination of what they see; overwhelmed by loss and by deception, they are blind to the significance of what they witness. (Felman, 1992: 208).

In the same way as we can use Felman's description of the "victim" as a point of identification for the role that Helga is positioned in in *Deep Red*, we can also Felman's description of the bystander, who like the victim is unable to see both their positioning within the event and their complicity in not understanding what it is that they are seeing, in relation to Marc:

The Poles, unlike the Jews, do see but, as bystanders, they do not quite look, they avoid looking directly, and thus they overlook at once their responsibility and their complicity as witnesses. (Felman, 1992: 208).

Throughout the film, Marc remains largely untouched by the events that occur around him. And there is something highly problematic in the fact that for Marc, the mystery of Helga's murderer is an intellectual challenge and the murders merely clues on the way to solving the mystery. And although Carlo tells Marc on a number of occasions to leave, he persists in his investigation. Just before Carlo is killed, Carlo says to Marc: 'Why didn't you listen....don't you realise it's all your fault, you wouldn't let up.' Addressing the audience directly through Carlo, Argento draws our attention to Marc's responsibility and complicity: ignorance is not excusable and neither is choosing not to look.

Just as Marc takes in on himself to uncover the past, Marta desperately tries to erase all trace of it by murdering all those associated with it. It seems to be that this can be

seen as analogous to the way in which part of the Nazi project was to ensure that the Holocaust would remain a secret by creating an event without a witness. This is Felman's argument: 'The Nazis, on the other hand, see to it that both the Jews and the extermination will remain unseen, invisible [...]' (Felman, 1992: 208).

In these terms, the use of dolls to prefigure the murders, are not fetish objects as Guins (1996) contends, but much more disturbing reminders (remainders) of the attempt by the Nazi's to conceal the horrors of the Holocaust. One of the witnesses in Lanzmann's *Shoah* states:

The Germans even forbade us to use the words "corpse" or "victim". The dead were blocks of wood, shit. The Germans made us refer to the bodies as figurine, that is, as puppets, as dolls, or as *Schematise*, which means "rags". [Cited in Felman and Laub, 1992: 216)

In these terms, the "childhood" objects laid out on a table that the camera spends time detailing before Helga's murder, takes on more sinister connotations: a doll's cradle which has been knocked over; a child's painting; a wool doll with needles in it; an Indian statue; marbles and knotted wool; a naked doll and a small red statute of the devil. In Argento's *giallo*, personal and historical memorialisation become inseparable. And once again, it is at the level the iconographic that political commentary is made.

### **The wider context**

*Deep Red* is not the only Argento film to directly or indirectly explore historical and political issues. We have already seen how the position of Sam Dalmas in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* can be considered analogous to that of the colonial other - a reference to the wartime occupation of Italy by the Americans. In *The Cat O'Nine Tails*, we have the Terzi Institute run mainly by Germans and English whose research into genetics can be conceived as an allusion to the Nazi's unholy genetic experimentation on the Jewish people. And in *Four Flies on Grey Velvet*, the father's comments from the past that his child is "not manly enough" brings to mind the centrality of manliness to the discourse of fascism.



**Figure 23:** Recalling the iconography of fascism: the "square" in *Suspria*

In Argento's 1977 gothic fairytale *Suspria*, the iconography of fascism provides the visual landscape for a dreamlike nightmare in which a young girl, Suzy Brandon (Jessica Harper), becomes trapped. Set in Frielburg Germany, and in a famed Dance Academy, *Suspria* has been likened to a perverse rendition of Disney's *Snow White*.

In “The “mother” of all horror movies” (Kinoeye, Vol 2, Issue 11, 10 June 2002), Linda Schulte-Sasse argues that “Like the standard fairytale, *Suspiria* is a story of travel and movement between two kinds of spaces, one realistic and high-tech modern, the other gothic - all located within a vague and dislocated ‘Germany’.” Spaces which: ‘have the distinction of being at once imaginary and historically overdetermined.’<sup>5</sup> The Academy itself, whilst a real historical building, its baroque architecture bathed in red light, takes on a dreamlike unreality, in which seemingly ordinary rooms suddenly transform into nightmarish death traps composed of coils of wire and maggots. The touristic and the horrific collapse in the public square [Fig 23] with its white Corinthian column as day becomes night, and man’s “best friend” becomes the enemy as a guide dog tears out the neck of his blind master.

Schulte-Sasse suggests that ‘The misplacement of the square with its neo-classical architecture in the quaint, medieval crampedness of Freilburg is significant because it recalls a very different moment in Germany history, National Socialism, which got its start in Hitler’s infamous 1923 beer hall putsch.’<sup>6</sup> Schulte-Sasse compares the “fictional” square with Arthur Kampf’s painting *January 30, 1933*, which shows a neo-nazi demonstration in front of a square whose architecture is uncannily similar to the fictional one in *Suspiria*. [Fig 23 and Fig 24]

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<sup>5</sup> Schulte-Sasse, Linda (2002). The “mother” of all horror movies. Dario Argento’s *Suspiria* (1977) *Kinoeye: new perspectives on European Film*. Vol 2. Issue 11. 10 June 2002. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.kinoeye.org/02/11/schultesasse11.php>

<sup>6</sup> Schulte-Sasse, Linda (2002). The “mother” of all horror movies. Dario Argento’s *Suspiria* (1977) *Kinoeye: new perspectives on European Film*. Vol 2. Issue 11. 10 June 2002. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.kinoeye.org/02/11/schultesasse11.php>



**Figure 24** Arthur Kampf's painting *30 January, 1933*

Schulte-Sasse also points out that the neo-classical architecture calls to mind “Albrecht Speer’s never-completed vision of “Germania” which “stood for rebirth out of destruction or purgation.” The fact that the dog that turns on his master is a German Shepherd also seem significant as is the character of the butch Miss Tanner - who Schulte-Sasse suggests is ‘an allusion to the sadistic, Lina Wertnuellereseque, Nazi female guard.’<sup>7</sup> In *Suspiria* witchcraft and fascism are two sides of the same coin: both malevolent forces that seek to control the course of events and the progress of history.

Schulte-Sasse asks: ‘What was National Socialism if not a historical version of what the witches achieve on a seemingly apolitical level: a systematic reign of surveillance and paranoia, a disciplining of the body and social behaviour [...], a process of

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<sup>7</sup> Schulte-Sasse, Linda (2002). The “mother” of all horror movies. Dario Argento’s *Suspiria* (1977) *Kinoeye: new perspectives on European Film*. Vol 2. Issue 11. 10 June 2002. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.kinoeye.org/02/11/schultesasse11.php>

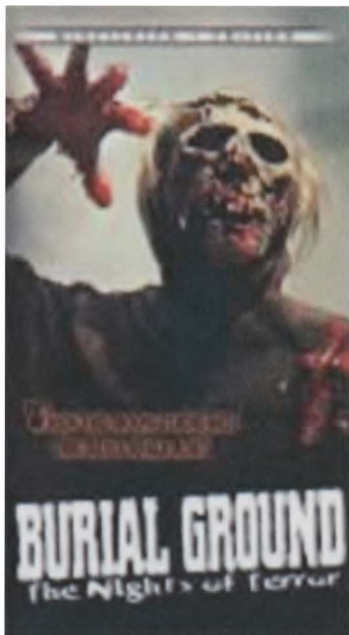
selecting who belongs to the “we” and the elimination of who does not.”<sup>8</sup> This is also what is alluded to *The Cat O’Nine Tails*: it is not incidental that the research done by the Terzi Institute has connotations of genetic engineering and eugenics or that at the Head of the Institute is a German.

Whilst we would need to have some knowledge of fascist iconography in order to pick-up on the historical referencing in *Suspiria*, in the Argento produced, Soavi directed *The Church*, the allusion to the Holocaust is both more immediate and apparent. Even if what we know about the Holocaust has been derived from images of old-newsreels or reconstructions, the death-pits used by The Tectonic Knights to conceal the bodies of the victims whose village they ransack and pillage cannot conceal their historical connotations or the affective shock which reverberates through our sensory systems when we watch the graphic scenes of death. Not only has it been documented that it was Argento who insisted that the Church be located in Germany, but there are multiple references made characters to the links between the Knights and the Nazis to the point at which one character argues that these “fictional” Knights were the template for the SS Soldiers.

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<sup>8</sup> Schulte-Sasse, Linda (2002). The “mother” of all horror movies. Dario Argento’s *Suspiria* (1977) *Kinoeye: new perspectives on European Film*. Vol 2. Issue 11. 10 June 2002. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.kinoeye.org/02/11/schultesasse11.php>

### Italian Horror as Testimony



**Figure 25:** The earth erupting in Bionchi's *Burial Ground*

The wider picture of Italian Horror Film in the 1970s also suggests that the references to both fascism and the Holocaust in Argento's early giallo are deliberate acts of memorialisation. In 1976, the same year as *Deep Red* was released, Ruggero Deodato's cannibals were unleashed on the unsuspecting cinema goer in *The Last Cannibal World*. With its subtext of the inherent evil of white imperialism, Deodrata's first cannibal film led the way for subsequent violent and vile eruptions of flesh-eating zombies, demons and other abject monstrosities. In Andrea Bionchi's *Burial Ground* (1980) and Fulci's *Gates of Hell* (1980) and *House by the Cemetery* (1980) the earth metaphorically vomits up its abject and unspeakable other, threatening the boundaries of the self with dismemberment and/or annihilation.

Decaying bodies, walking corpses, flesh-eating zombies and cannibals can be seen as symptomatic expressions of a historical past that will not and cannot be forgotten. And even the figure of the child becomes both monstrous and demonic. Whilst neorealism saw the child as signifying the possibility of renewal, in Italian horror in the 1970s there is just a sense of pervasive guilt which lingers from generation to generation. Even in Argento's *Deep Red*, whilst the sexually traumatised Carlo is in many ways the "victim" of the narrative, the fact that the figure of caretaker's child is



inscribed as “evil” suggests a break with the romanticised imagination of neorealist discourse.

In *The Body in the Mirror: Shapes of History in Italian Cinema*, Angela Dalle Vacche argues that: ‘In films made during and after May 1968, unity turned to disunity among regions and classes, and continuity to discontinuity with one generation questioning the legacy of the previous one.’ (Vacche, 1992: 15). And if some of the most influential post War filmmakers, such as Rossellini and Visconti, learnt their profession under fascism, it is not surprisingly that this break with the past would take the form of disengagement with not just fascist film but also neorealist. And if it is, as Angela Dalle Vacche, contends a rebellion against the father as representative of the past, a “familial” revolt, then we can understand perhaps that the multiple eruptions of the past in the 1970s in Italian horror film can be “read” as an attempt on behalf of second generational filmmakers to come to terms with the continuing effects of the historical past. The monstrous figure of Dr Freudstein in Fulci’s *The House by The Cemetery*, a grotesque father-figure who uses bodily parts of subsequent generations to give himself life, is perhaps the most articulate and baroque symbolisation of the father/son conflict.

## **Conclusion**

[H]itler as filmmaker [...]. And it is true that up to the end Nazism thinks of itself in competition to Hollywood. The revolutionary courtship of the movement-image and an art of the masses become subject was broken off, giving way to the masses subjected as psychological automaton, and to their leader as a great spiritual automaton. (Deleuze, 2000: 264)

For Deleuze, it is the use of the cinema of the movement-image in the service of Nazi and Fascist ideology which necessitates the formation of a new cinematic-image after the end of World War 2. Like Hitler, although less successfully Mussolini attempted to bring the visual image under the service of state ideology. Cinematically, fascism is often associated with large spectacular historical epics which sought to address the formation of a people by rewriting the past. Whilst neorealism represents a break with fascist spectacle, it retains the belief in history as both progression and succession. Hence the significance of the child in neorealism who learning from the mistakes of the previous generation symbolised a new and better tomorrow. And whilst films such as *Rome, Open City* did directly address wartime Italy, they did so by reconstructing Italy during the occupation through rose tinted spectacles. Subsequent events both in Italy and outside of Italy would function to shatter this romantic illusion.

Post 1968, Italian horror becomes the site of the multiple eruptions of the past with its decaying and abject bodies of the monstrous other. In the light of this evidence, we can suggest that the multiple thematic and iconographical illusions in Argento's films to the Second World War: the neo-classical architecture of *Suspiria*; the death-pit of *the Church*; references to genetic engineering in *The Cat O'Nine Tails* and the foregrounding of the process of memory in *Deep Red* bring us face to face with the intolerable and the unthinkable historical past, that is the Holocaust.

And whilst I agree with Mendik (1996) that Argento's *giallo* foreground an instability in identity, I would suggest that the sense of pervasive historical memorialisation in

**Chapter Six: The Crisis in the Truth**  
*Profondo Rosso (Deep Red: 1976)*

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Argento's *Deep Red* points to a trauma outside of gendered models which forces us to think "the inpower of thought', the figure of nothingness, the inexistence of a whole which could be thought.' (Deleuze, 2000: 264). In these terms, Argento's films are more than simple horror films, but can be seen as profound and philosophical mediations, not just on the nature of the thought, but on the very possibility of thought after the "unthinkable" as signified by the death pits of Nazi Germany.

### **Introduction: Endings**

Becoming-other is a serial process, and modern political cinema critiques identity because becoming-other is expressed as a collective will. The direct time-image can serve an explicit political function. (Rodowick, 1997: 152)

In the last chapter, I argued that the act of memorialisation in Argento's *giallo*, as demonstrated by *Deep Red*, can be seen in terms of an affective testimony to the consequences of the Second World War. Immediately after *Deep Red*, Argento began work on what was intended to be a trilogy of supernatural films based around the figures of the "Three Mothers" and inspired by the fevered and drugged imagination of Thomas DeQuincey in his follow-up to *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, *Levana and Our Ladies of Sorrow*. The result of this was *Suspiria* (1977) (*Mater Suspiriorum: Our Lady of Sighs*) and *Inferno* (1980) (*Mater Lachrymarum: Our Lady of Tears*)- but the tale of *Mater Tenebrarum - Our Lady of Darkness* has yet to be completed. Instead, Argento's next film *Tenebrae* saw a return to the *giallo* format of his earlier films. Some critics, as McDonagh points out, 'went as far as to call *Tenebrae* a return to the thrillers of the sixties.' (McDonagh, 1994: 166).

This chapter develops my thesis, as introduced first in the recently published review of *La sindrome di Stendhal*<sup>1</sup>, that *Tenebrae* (1982) operates as a turning point between 'his' story - the focalisation of the narrative through male protagonists - and 'her' story as articulated in his subsequent 'Diva' trilogy: *Opera (Terror at the Opera: 1987)*, *Trauma (Dario Argento's Trauma: 1992)* and *The Stendhal Syndrome (La*

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<sup>1</sup> Balmain, Colette (2002). Female subjectivity and the politics of "becoming other". *Kinoeye: new perspectives on European film*. Vol 2, Issue 12, 24 June 2002. [Online]. Available at: <http://Kinoeye.org/02/12/balmain12.php>

*sindrome di Stendhal*: 1996). I demonstrate how *Tenebrae* narratively and iconographically signals this end of his/story (history) through the death of the central protagonist - and through the visually uncanny space of a Rome devoid of historical signifiers, set in an indeterminate future, in which the narrative takes place.

In signalling the end of his/story, I argue that *Tenebrae* opens up a space through which to reconfigure desire outside of the limits/limitations of oedipal thought. From the landscape of perversion through to the impulse-image and the insistence on the creative potentiality of art, I contend that the eroticised surfaces of *Tenebrae*'s narrative becomings express a will to art and to desire which is both radical and revolutionary. In order to do this, I make reference to Deleuze's (in collaboration with Guattari) original critique of psychoanalysis as an instrument of capitalist repression in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* in which the transgendered body of Dr Schreber, luxuriating in its womanly desires, allows the production of 'a radical politics of desire freed from all beliefs' (Foucault in Deleuze and Guattari, 1984 xxi).

By drawing an analogy between the attraction and repulsions of the desiring-machine of the body-without-organs and Deleuze's concept of the *impulse-image* in *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, I place the *impulse-image*, and its violent becomings, in opposition to the dominant psychoanalytical readings of *Tenebrae*: as in Xavier Mendik's oedipalisation of Peter Neal in "Detection and Transgression: The Investigative Drive of the *Giallo*" (1996) and "Transgressive drives and traumatic flashbacks" (2002) and the recent review of *Tenebrae* by Barber and Thrower (2000).

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### **Tenebrae: the story**

*Tenebrae*, then, is a palimpsest, juxtaposing explicit and implicit dimensions: by layering a dazzling array of texts it demands an engagement of subjective interpretation, the contrast of alternative readings, different possibilities [..] (Barber and Thrower, 2000: 173)

*Tenebrae* is the most textually difficult and dark of Argento's *giallo*. *Tenebrae* is first and foremostly a film about writing, reading and the act [art] of interpretation. The first images are a close-up of a pair of gloved hands holding a book as a fire burns in the background. Simultaneously as a finger traces the words on the page, we hear a voice reading the lines aloud. As the film's title "*Tenebrae*" comes up on the screen, the book is thrown into the fire. Through the flickering flames we can see that the book is also called "*Tenebrae*". This sequence of audio-visual images immediately places the narrative under "the sign of the false" by foregrounding the textuality of the act of storytelling. This is cinema as performance, which constructs the world inside the frame rather than reflects a world outside of the frame. The deconstruction of the visual image into an archaeology of the scriptable, the visual and the acoustic transforms the relationship between the spectator and the screen. In his discussion of Deleuze's cinematic-image, Rodowick comments: 'The spectator is no longer included in an expanding totality constructed by the narration, and thus must provide the relation himself or herself.' (Rodowick, 1997: 130). Instead *Tenebrae*, actively engages the spectator as Barber and Thrower put it 'to read - and create the text'. Immediately *Tenebrae* disturbs the boundaries between 'reality' and 'fiction', foregrounding the work of art as fabulation, rather than reflection, an act of disruption which is the driving force behind the meta-fictional world of *Tenebrae*: a world in

which the detective is both hunter and prey; creator and destroyer; and fiction the very model of reality. As Barber and Thrower claim: 'Is this fact within fiction? Vice versa? Or fiction within fiction? The diegetic conventions of cinema are immediately dislocated in this play with our attention. Who is the reader or the writer? Even the time frame is uncertain - there is no equilibrium to disrupt.' (Barber and Thrower, 2000: 173).

In *Tenebrae*, there is no outside to the film, just as a series of insides in which a book provides the modus operational for a deranged fan [who mistakes fiction for reality]; the mise-en-scène of murder is an act of artistic creation and the investigation into the crimes takes on a meta-fictional status through constant intertextual references the 'outside' world of detective writing [reality mistaken for fiction]. And whilst the first part of *Tenebrae* in which Peter Neal teams up with his secretary, Anne (Daria Nicoladi) to investigate the brutal murders, taken from the pages of his books, is typical of Argento's male lead *giallo*, the second half in which the murders continue after Berti's murder, is not so typical. As is the final revelation that Peter Neal has assumed Berti's role, after killing him, in order to take revenge on his ex-partner, Veronica Laria (Jane McKerrow), and his agent, Bullmer (John Saxon), who have been having an affair. In *Tenebrae*, murder is contagious, and guilt all-pervasive. The boundaries between subjective and objective, subject and other, detective and criminal are effaced, in Peter Neal's "becoming-other". And even Anne, Neal's secretary and lover, is not excluded from the violence of the narrative becomings, as she unwittingly causes Neal's death by opening the door to his apartment - an act which results in Neal being impaled on the steel spikes of a sculpted cornucopias. In *Tenebrae*, Berti, Neal and Anne are all implicated in becoming-other as serial process

and desire takes on a revolutionary and creative (destructive) force beyond the history of oedipal thought.

### **The Landscape of Perversion**

It was never meant to be a story about something that is happening now. It isn't exactly my *Blade Runner* of course, but nevertheless a step in the world of tomorrow. If you watch the film with this perception in mind, it will become very apparent.

*Tenebrae* occurs in a world inhabited by fewer people with the results that the remainder are wealthier and less crowded. Something has happened to make it that way but no-one remembers, or wants to remember. (Argento in McDonagh, 1994: 166)

Landscapes are mental states, just as mental states are cartographies, both crystallized in each other, geometrized, mineralized. (Deleuze, 2000: 207)

In *Tenebrae*, the gothic sensibility of Argento's earlier work gives way to a modernist palate of muted colours and fractured geometrical spaces. Unlike the saturated canvasses of Argento's early *giallo*, *Tenebrae* offers a rarefied and minimalist landscape with its stark white spaces and high rise architecture. The sense of historical overdetermination that we saw in relation to *Deep Red* has been replaced by an absence of history: there is no childhood trauma to explain the psychosis of either of the murderers, just as there are no identifiable landmarks which signal the narrative's location. Whilst interdiegetic titles tell us that the film is set in Rome, this is an *unheimlich* vision/version of Rome. There are none of the usual monumental or aesthetic visual signifiers of Rome in *Tenebrae*: no Spanish Steps; no Coliseum; and



no renaissance paintings - just as there are no road signs or scriptable signifiers within the geophysical landscape<sup>2</sup>.

Instead in *Tenebrae*, there are a proliferation of any-space-whatevers (l'escape quelconque): the airport terminus; the shopping mall; the high rise tower block; the airport; the piazza and the modernist apartments whose walls isolate and entrap their owners.

*Tenebrae* begins with close-up shots of the steel architecture of a bridge before the direction of shot tilts downwards and tracks an unidentified cyclist, dressed in blue, transversing a deserted cycle path across the bridge. As the camera tracks the cyclist, it constantly cuts between medium and long shots. The cyclist moves towards the camera and out of shot, before the scene cuts to a busy motorway and a close-up shot of the cyclist. Rather than a sequence of logical camera movements, we have a hacked montage of any-shots-whatever - pans, tilts, tracking shots and crane shots. Unlike in organic narration where the camera is motivated by the dictates of character and narrative progression, the camera's constant shifts in perspective constructs a discontinuous and fragmented space, signified by the overlapping perspectives from which the sequence is composed [or decomposed]. This is what Deleuze means what he talks about the disconnection as the first form of the any-space-whatever: 'The

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<sup>2</sup> McDonagh describes *Tenebrae*'s imaginary geography as: pieced together out of fragments of "Rome" - the Rome of travel brochures and coffee table books, whose landmarks signify a teeming metropolis of trattorias, nightclubs and paparazzi - that emphasize vast underpopulated boulevards, piazzas that look like nothing more than suburban American malls, hard-edged Bauhaus apartment buildings, anonymous clubs, and parking garages.' (McDonagh, 1994: 170).

connection of the parts of space is not given, because it can only come about from the subjective point of view of a character, who is, nevertheless, absent, or has even disappeared, not simply out of the frame, but passed into the void.' (Deleuze, 2000: 8).

In "Thinking with Cinema: Deleuze and Film Theory", Jeffrey Bell (1997) defines Deleuze's concept of the any-space-whatever as 'a space such as a metro stop, a doctor's waiting room, or an airport terminal. It is an anonymous space people pass through, or it is what Deleuze might call a nomadic space, a point of transit between 'places' of importance', such as the metro, which is merely the space one passes between home and work.'<sup>3</sup> The opening sequences of *Tenebrae* draw our attention to the relationship between the transitional and the provisional: both in terms of space and of identity. Space in *Tenebrae* is simply a point of transit between one anonymous place and the next - the bridge gives way to the airport terminal, and then as a plane takes off, the film cuts to the outside of a shopping mall in Rome. And it is central that the actual naming of character in *Tenebrae* is delayed until we have already seen Peter Neal in a variety of guises [disguises]: at the airport Neal changes out of his blue shell suit and into a dark business suit. Both space and identity are nomadic, as Bell points out: 'it is the 'any-space-whatever' which is the condition for the possibility of constituting an identity, or for questioning one's identity.'<sup>4</sup> In *Tenebrae*, there aren't stable identities, but serial identities, in which characters

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<sup>3</sup> Bell, Jeffrey (1997). Thinking with Cinema: Deleuze and Film Theory. *Film-Philosophy*. Vol 1 – 1997. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.film-philosophy.com/vol1-1997/n8bell>

<sup>4</sup> Bell, Jeffrey (1997). Thinking with Cinema: Deleuze and Film Theory. *Film-Philosophy*. Vol 1 – 1997. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.film-philosophy.com/vol1-1997/n8bell>

constantly become-other just as fiction and reality become commingled: the fan, Berti, mistakes the fiction for reality - he sees Neal's book as social commentary - just as the writer, Neal, mistakes reality for fiction - Neal investigates the murders by constantly comparing the murders to the fiction.

*Tenebrae* also offers us the most clear example of Deleuze's argument that the "any-space-whatever" functions as a site of disconnection: 'It is no longer, as before, a space which is defined by parts whose linking up and orientation are not determined in advance, but can be done in an infinite number of ways. It is now an amorphous set which has eliminated that which happened and acted in it.' (Deleuze, 1992: 120).

Just as space is disconnected, so characters within that space are estranged and alienated from each other, as Bell argues: 'No-one notes or concerns themselves with one another.<sup>5</sup> The place is crowded but everyone is alone.' The sequence of Bullmer's murder, which occurs towards the end of the film, is one of the best examples of how this works in *Tenebrae*. The murder takes place in a surprisingly empty piazza. As Bullmer sits on a concrete bench waiting for Jane - our attention is continually distracted by a number of extraneous characters either positioned within the frame or in the process of traversing the space. The use of silence for much of the sequence also draws our attention to the disconnections between characters. A man and woman sit by a fountain in the background arguing; the man walks off as a pair of cyclists move through the frame from left to right. The camera returns to Bullmer sitting restlessly on the concrete block, before once again moving distractedly off in

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<sup>5</sup> Bell, Jeffrey (1997). Thinking with Cinema: Deleuze and Film Theory. *Film-Philosophy*. Vol 1 – 1997. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.film-philosophy.com/vol1-1997/n8bell>

another direction. A pair of punks talk in front of a shop, and then move away. Cut back to Bullmer, as a young child runs toward the back of Bullmer to retrieve his football. A man moves towards the child, as in the background a cyclist and a woman walk in opposite directions horizontally across the frame. The direction of the camera keeps cutting: first in front of Bullmer, then to the side and back to the front. This is the sort of omni-directional construction of space that we saw in connection with the art-gallery sequence in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*. Throughout the sequence, the camera keeps on returning to Bullmer, who is caught looking at his watch drawing our attention to the passing of time. As Bullmer gets up, a man moves towards him - almost not seeing him as he walks straight into Bullmer's pathway. Suddenly the music starts up as Bullmer spies a woman in the distance: a shot of a knife and a close-up of Bullmer's stomach as the knife penetrates the flesh repeatedly. The music stops. Bullmer lies on the ground dying as a group of people circle around him. A rapid cut to a pair of legs in red shoes walking rapidly towards Bullmer, briefly stopping, and then walking away.

Disconnection between characters is emphasised in this scene by the frequent spatial dislocations, the fragmentation of the body and the spaces between and in-between those on the periphery. Deleuze talks about the second stage of the any-space-whatsoever: 'What happened is that, from one result to the next, the characters were objectively emptied: they are suffering less from the absence of another than from the absence from themselves.' (Deleuze, 2000: 9). Unlike Argento's previous *giallo*, the central, albeit fractured perspective, of the central protagonist gives way to a multiplication of peripheral perspectives: the suffocation of the shoplifter is an optical drama played out for a tramp, who takes no further part in the narrative, and the death

of Berti is watched by Gianni, a young would-be future agent, who is murdered just as he is on the point of realising the importance of what he saw.

And although *Tenebrae*, is not 'science fiction' in the traditional sense of the word, it shares with [post]modern science fiction a reconceptualisation of modern space as directions and coordinateless. This is the sort of hyperspatiality of William Gibson's urban sprawl (*Neuromancer*: 1984) and Ridley-Scott's compressed cityscape in *Bladerunner* (1982). In *Terminal Identity*, Scott Bukatman argues that the modern images of the city are both boundless and directions - 'co-ordinates are literally *valueless* when all directions lead to more of the same.' (Bukatman, 1993: 126). It is significant in these terms that the first shots we have of the meta-fictional Rome in *Tenebrae* is of a shopping mall. The shopping mall is emblematic of the boundlessness of spatiality in *Tenebrae* in a landscape devoid of temporal and linguistic "signposts." And if as Bukatman suggests that 'positionality has lost its relevance in the "urban nonplace" (Bukatman, 1993: 126), it is almost impossible to get our bearings in *Tenebrae*'s rarefied landscape in which one wide open space leads to the next.

In "The Art of Allusion: Painting, murder and the 'plan tableau'", Chris Gallant utilises the term "painterly" to describe what he calls "the aesthetic sensibilities of Argento's cinema" (Gallant, 2000: 65). Luminous white backgrounds and foregrounds are constantly broken by vibrant splatters of scarlet - shoes, cars, and telephones - fetishistic commodity-images of modern life. And whilst the economy and geometry of the architectural buildings articulate the standardisation and rationalisation of space in the process of technological modernisation, the frequent

disruption and interruption of spatial harmony by the memory-image and/as impulse-image is almost surrealistic in its fetishism of the part-object, even if it is more Bataille than Breton.

And if it is not noticeable, as McDonagh contends, that *Tenebrae* is set in the future, it is all too apparent that this is a 'Rome which has no past.' (McDonagh, 1994: 166). Whilst Argento's *giallo* up to this point have offered us what Deleuze calls 'an architecture of time', *Tenebrae* confronts temporality through the blank canvas of a 'perpetual present', or as Deleuze puts it 'a structure stripped of time.' (Deleuze, 2000: 104). Deleuze explains that: 'we should not rush into thinking that a perpetual present implies less time-image than the pure past.' He continues: 'The difference is thus in the nature of the time-image, which is plastic in one case and architectural in the other.' (Deleuze, 2000: 104). And whilst we have the conventional traumatic event which repeats in *Tenebrae* - the scene of Berti's murder - we also have the continued disruption of the diegetic space through a set of subjective memory-images, or what McDonagh calls 'oneric flashbacks'. (McDonagh, 1994: 176). And as McDonagh points out: 'Though the physical surroundings are different, the dominant aesthetic of the past images is identical to *Tenebrae*'s present-tense imaginary.' (McDonagh, 1994: 176).

The painterly aesthetic of the main narrative is foregrounded in the first memory-image through the interplay between the luminosity of the setting - the brilliant white sands of the beach - and the fetishistic object - red shoes -, which come to symbolise the violent impulses which fracture and fragment the narrative trajectory of *Tenebrae* [Fig 27].



**Figure 27:** The past as oneric flashback in *Tenebrae*

The first memory-image occurs immediately after Peter Neal has been interrogated by the police over the murder of the shoplifter. The scene begins as a play on the signifiers of pornography: a young “woman” seductively disrobing for a group of young men. This pornographic play is disrupted by the sudden eruption of violence as one of the men slaps the woman as she kneels provocatively in front of the men.

The *mise-en-scène* of desire ends with the male subject’s humiliation as he is held down and orally penetrated with the red heel of the fetishistic part-object. The narrative of desire and death which is contained within the memory-image unfolds through two further traumatic repetitions: the first immediately after Berti’s murder and the final one takes place after the violent dismemberment of Neal’s ex-partner, Jane.

In the second image, we see the woman being watched as she talks to a detective. Seconds later, we witness her being violently stabbed. The image ends abruptly. In its final becoming, we see the “woman’s” body on the ground as a pair of hands reaches out to take the red shoes from her feet. The aesthetics of the memory-image parallels the aesthetics of the main narrative. In McDonagh’s words: ‘together the

image clusters - beautiful woman/boys/red shoes, and blood/razor/axe/dead bodies - set the parameters of *Tenebrae*'s fetistic and fetishized visual vocabulary, couched in terms both ritualistic and orgiastically out-of-control.' (McDonagh, 1994: 177).

And whilst McDonagh sees these image clusters as expressive of a non-oedipal sexuality, the same images have lead both Mendik (1996, 2002) and Barber and (2000) to reconstruct *Tenebrae* as an oedipal narrative. Mendik's thesis, first appeared in *Necronomicon: Book One* in 1996 in his article: "Detection and Transgression: The Investigative Drive of the *Giallo*". In this article, Mendik utilises Lacanian psychoanalysis, via Zizek's reading of detective fiction, to read this sequence as a recodification of the primal scene, problematically, 'premised on the male subject's inability to extricate themselves from the humiliated degraded body.' (Mendik, 1996: 50). Using Freud's discussion of the fort/da game in which the child attempts to come to terms with the mother's absence by throwing a reel and uttering the words - fort (here) and da (gone) - Mendik suggests that the first image mirrors the child's initial helplessness and lack of mastery, whilst the second image in which the woman is punished for "her" transgression allows the recording of mastery and control over the originary traumatic event.

The oedipalisation of these images then allows Mendik to 'explain' *Tenebrae*'s metatextuality. In "Transgressive drives and traumatic flashbacks" (Kinoeye. Vol 2. Issue 12. 24 June 2002), Mendik once again argues that the function of the memory-



image is to symbolise the [male] subject's attempt at mastery: 'These inserts indicate the subject's attempts to repeat, work through, and thus master past primal trauma.'<sup>6</sup>

In an otherwise engaging analysis, Barber and Thrower also attempt to reduce the multiplicity of *Tenebrae*'s textual spaces and violent becomings within the oedipal binary which once again centres on the disruption of the narrative flow by the memory-image. For both Mendik and Barber and Thrower, the images of male humiliation followed by "female" punishment are a displacement of male fears around female subjectivity in which the phallus functions as a meta-signifier of identity. Barber and Thrower suggest that the first image, which ends with the penetration of the male subject's mouth by the heel of the red shoe, places the woman in the position of the phallus.

They continue:

Since this symbolic threat displaced patriarchy, it may be assumed that Peter Neal is haunted, like many other men, by the consequences of his inability to conceive of power as a pan-gender phenomenon. If power is exclusively represented as male, under the signification of the phallus, the possibility of female power becomes "phallicized" by default. The apparent contradiction assumes the form of neurosis (or psychosis in Peter Neal's case). In *Tenebrae*, the sequence's unconscious repressed signifier becomes a primary source of motivation for Peter Neal. (Barber and Thrower, 2000: 179).

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<sup>6</sup> Mendik, Xavier (2002). Transgressive drives and traumatic flashbacks Dario Argento's *Tenebrae* (*Unsane*, 1982). *Kinoeye: new perspectives on European Film*. Vol 2. Issue 12. 24 June 2002. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.kinoeye.org/02/12/mendik12.php>

**Anti-Oedipus: beyond the binary**

Both analyses seek to explain and contain *Tenebrae*'s visual pathology by situating the phallus as master signifier which maintains rather than disrupts conventional understandings of gender representations and relations, derived (whilst not citing) from Mulvey's analysis of visual pleasure. In opposition to this is Adam Knee's thesis in "Gender, Genre, Argento" that: 'all traditional positions, former points of identification, are thrown into question, and any strict sense of "otherness," always important to the horror film, thereby becomes diffused as binary distinctions lose their applicability.' (Knee, 1996: 226). In *Tenebrae*, it is the fact that the "woman" in these memory-images is played by a well-known Italian transsexual - Roberto Coatti (Eva Robbins) which undermines the binary logic of the oedipal machine and throws up questions regarding gender identification and identity. *Tenebrae* is the most transgressive of Argento's *giallo* in its constant undermining of gender, sexuality and identity norms: from the overcodification of the signs of femininity in the figure of Jane as iconic femme fatale in the airport sequence; the deconstruction of femininity in the memory-image, to the traumatic becoming-other of Peter Neal. It is though the uncertain "gender" of Coatti and the fluid [homo]sexual desires associated with what can be re-read as a story of male on male eroticism, closely tied into physical violence, which is the main site of deterritorialisation of gender and identity norms.

Yet in the psychoanalytical readings of *Tenebrae* discussed, and in particular, for Mendik the memory-image provides the *key* to understanding the narrative. And whilst Mendik acknowledges the problematic status of Coatti's gender - Barber and Thrower ignore it - he reduces its multiplicity to a function of the binary machine, by

recodifying the body as female. This allows Mendik (2002), via Mulvey, to argue that the third and final repetition of the “primal scene” - the second and third flashback sequences in which the “woman” is brutally murdered and then her shoes taken - functions as a punishment against the transgressive female body.

It seems to me that this codification of the transgendered body as female is highly problematic as it appears to reject the potentiality of subject identity outside of the binary of either/or and the constant slippage in positions of identification which form a central part of Argento's aesthetic as we have already seen. And whilst unlike Neil Jordan's *The Crying Game* (UK: 1992), *Tenebrae* does not foreground overtly the gender transgression of the “object of desire”, the casting of Coatti in this central role has similar implications for the male spectator who is seduced into a trans-gendered desiring position which cannot be explained by traditional theorisations of the cinematic gaze: its compulsory heterosexuality and male/female binary. And even more problematically in terms of these conventional models, the *mise-en-scène* of desire, which visualises male humiliation, seems to speak to masochistic and not sadistic pleasures. The challenge of a masochistic analysis of traditional gendered models of spectatorship is discussed in detail in the next chapter through a close analysis of Argento's *Opera*.

It is the reconfiguration of desire outside of the binary and the concept of “becoming” that forms the connection between Deleuze's work on cinema and his earlier work with Guattari. And whilst wary of creating a unified whole from Deleuze's thought, an understanding of the origins of the concept of “becoming” can help us to re-examine the configuration of sexual desire in Argento's *Tenebrae* in productive rather

than reductive terms. It is with this in mind that I wish to discuss Deleuze and Guattari's original critique of Oedipal thought in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1984).<sup>7</sup>

At the centre of Deleuze and Guattari's critique of Oedipus<sup>8</sup> is the pathologically unstable body of Dr Schreber, previously oedipalised by Freud in his notes on a case of paranoia in 1911 [1910]. Schreber spent long periods of his adult life in and out of psychiatric clinics. His illness however did not prevent him from being appointed as a Senator [Senatspräsident] in 1893 or having a relatively successful married life. At the heart of Schreber's illness was a repeated desire to become woman and to be impregnated by the rays of God: 'On two separate occasions (and while I was still in Professor Flechsig's institution) I have possessed female genitals, though somewhat imperfectly developed ones, and have felt a stirring in my body, such as would arise from the quickening of a human embryo' (Schreber cited in Freud, 1977c: 164)<sup>9</sup>. In his analysis of Schreber's own writings, Freud seeks an explanation of Schreber's paranoia by suggesting that Schreber's desires are symptoms of a perverse homosexual desire for his father, which are then displaced onto the figure of his

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<sup>7</sup> In "Becoming-Woman Now", Verena Andermatt Conley points out the importance of the historical-social context - both *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus* were written in the aftermath of the revolution of 1968: 'when, for a brief moment, before order was re-established in France, it seemed possible to bring about other ways of being - and becoming - than those dictated by capitalist political economy.' (Conley, 2000: 20).

<sup>8</sup> It is essential to recognise that Deleuze and Guattari do not deny the importance of Freud's contribution to modern thought by diagnosing the productive potential of desire, no longer assigned to bodies but mapped out in the movement that defines subject relations to themselves and to the state. For Deleuze and Guattari, Freud's 'greatness lies in having determined the essence or nature of desire, no longer in relation to objects, aims, or even sources (territories), but as an abstract subjective essence - libido or sexuality. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984, 270).

<sup>9</sup> 'He took up a feminine attitude towards God; he felt that he was God's wife.' (Freud, 1997: 164).

doctor as father-figure. He concludes: 'We have hitherto been dealing with the father-complex which was the dominant element in Schreber's case and with the wishful phantasy which the illness centred.' (Freud, 1977c: 196).

In their discussion of Judge Schreber's delirium - his 'becoming pupil, burgomaster, girl, and Mongol', Deleuze and Guattari point out that Freud's analysis<sup>10</sup> attempts to suppress the revolutionary potential of Schreber's desire by inserting the figure of the father as the original source of Schreber's perversion reducing: 'the historical and political content of the delirium back to an internal familial determination.' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984: 74) For Deleuze and Guattari, Freud's attempts to formulate Schreber's psychosis in terms of the Oedipal triangle paradoxically foregrounds the limits of such an analysis. Deleuze and Guattari conclude that: 'the entirety of this enormous content disappears completely from Freud's analysis: not one trace of it remains; everything is ground, squashed, triangulated into Oedipus; everything is reduced to the father, in such a way as to reveal in the crudest fashion the inadequacies of an Oedipal psychoanalysis.' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984: 89). The paradox of the oedipal model is that it needs that which it prohibits in order to exist: 'The personal material of transgression does not exist prior to the prohibition, any more than does the form of persons.' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984: 71). Molar heterosexuality can only be produced by naming and repressing homosexuality as heterosexuality's other: 'the qualitative opposition between homosexuality and heterosexuality, is in fact a consequence of Oedipus: far from being an obstacle to the treatment encountered from without, it is a product of oedipalization, and a counter

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<sup>10</sup> Freud's analysis of Schreber is based upon Schreber's own book *Denkwürdigkeiten eines Nervenkranken* [*Memorabilia of a Nerve Patient*] published in 1903.

effect of the treatment that reinforces it.' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984: 74). And the ultimate effect of oedipal thought is the rewriting of human history in terms of familial conflicts, repressed desires and childhood traumas - a history of desire based around the dialectics of presence and absence: 'All previous history is recast in a new version in the light of castration.' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984: 73).

Deleuze and Guattari find in Schreber's lack of guilt and his obvious enjoyment in his transformations an alternative model of desire to that trapped within the triangular formulation of Oedipal desire. Deleuze and Guattari liberate desire from the repressive figure of Oedipus, from compulsory heterosexuality and from named and gendered bodies. Instead of a politics of lack, there is desire is a positive force which can be revolutionary rather than repressive: 'We believe in desire as in the irrational of every form of rationality, and not because it is lack, a thirst, or an aspiration but because it is the production of desire: desire that produces - real desire, or the real in itself.' (1984: 379). Foucault highlights how the liberation of desire can be a subversive political act:

If desire is repressed, it is because every position of desire, no matter how small, is capable of calling into question the established order of a society: not that desire is asocial; on the contrary. But it is explosive; there is no desiring-machine capable of being assembled without demolishing entire sectors. (Foucault, 1984: i).

Rather than an oscillation between two contradictory identities, Deleuze and Guattari remap Schreber's psychosis fracturings in terms of zones of attraction and repulsion which comes to designate what they call 'the body without organs': 'The body without organs is an egg: it is criss-crossed with axes and thresholds, with latitudes and longitudes and geodesic lines, transversed by *gradients* marking the transitions

and becomings.' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984: 19). The body without organs is one of part objects and desires, flows and intensities, which resists totalisation into a unified whole<sup>11</sup>. The body without organs is both textual and meta-textual, mapped out on the surfaces of the body and/or the cinematic-image itself.

In "Becoming-Woman: Deleuze, Schreber and Molecular Identification", Jerry Aline Flieger suggests that Deleuze and Guattari offer a limited reading of Freud's analysis, pointing out that Freud does not neglect the social-historical significance of the interrelation between Schreber's identification with Jews and his desire to become woman: 'Indeed one could reproach Deleuze himself with reducing the Schreber case to an oppositional 'either/or' frame: Schreber is 'either' a paranoid (in Freud's molar version) 'or' a schizophrenic (in Deleuze's molecular account), influenced either by social factors (family, ideology) or by molecular intensities.' (Flieger, 2000: 49).

Whilst it is important to signal that there are ongoing debates which view Freud's account<sup>12</sup> less reductively than Deleuze and Guattari<sup>13</sup>, the concept of "becoming-woman" tied into "bodies without organs" which is derived from the reinterpretation of Schreber's multiple becomings does provide a powerful alternative model of desire

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<sup>11</sup> It seems to me that this bears many [unspoken] similarities with Lacan's discussion of the mirror stage.

<sup>12</sup> Freud himself ended his analysis with a word of caution over the truth value of his case-study: 'It remains for the future to decide whether there is more delusion in my theory than I should like to admit, or whether there is more truth in Schreber's delusion than other people are as yet prepared to believe.' (Freud, 1977: 218).

<sup>13</sup> Flieger cites the recent study by Eric Santner (1996) on *Schreber: My Own Private Germany: Daniel Paul Schreber's Secret History of Modernity*, Princeton: Princeton University Press: 'For Santner, however, as for Freud, paranoia is not merely a familial/ideological effect, and a socially condition one, it also a very real transformation of a self in response to real conditions (For Freud, psychic reality is 'real'). (Flieger, 2000: 49)

outside of oedipal limits/limitations which is helpful in mapping out an alternative approach to the sexually perverse spaces of Argento's *giallo* not constrained by the either/or of binary sexualities. This reconceptualisation of bodily boundaries and affective becomings also informs Deleuze's discussion of the cinema of the body in *Cinema 2: The Time Image*:

The action-image presupposes a space in which ends, obstacles, means, subordinations, the principle and the secondary, predominances and loathings are distributed: a whole space which can be called "hodological". But the body is initially caught in a quite different space, where disparate sets overlap and rival each other, without being able to organize themselves according to sensory-motor schemata. They fit over each other, in an overlapping of perspectives which means that there is no way to distinguish them even though they are distinct and also incompatible. (Deleuze, 2000: 203).

In cinema of the action-image, the body is the locus of signification: it signifies organised space mapped out in the logical causal-effect relations between action and reaction. This is the oedipal body with its guilty little secret which figures so predominantly in American horror cinema in the 1980s with its emphasis on the familial as the main source of horror: as Tony Williams points out in "Trying to Survive on the Darker Side: 1980s Family Horror", films such as *Maniac* (1980), *Pieces* (1983), *Blood Splash* (1988) 'reveal adult monsters as products of abusive parents' (Williams, 1996, 169). In opposition to this is the mutating, transforming body at the centre of Italian horror discussed in the last chapter, which acts as an obstacle to the formation of fixed systems of meaning. Rodowick describes the bodily surfaces of the time-image: 'Rather than a locus of unfolding actions, the body becomes a read surface where disparate temporal perspectives overlap and conflict without being resolvable in a sensimotor situation.' (Rodowick, 1997: 154). The anti-oedipal body is one of affective becomings, unconstrained by mimesis: 'This is not a



question of identification. When I becomes other, neither is less subject to this virtually. In either case identity is a set of affects, the forces that a body can affect or which affect it.' (Rodowick, 1997: 155). Thinking of desire and identity in affective terms is productive rather than reductive, creative not reflective, and allows us to think differently about the cross gender expression of desire which forms the central image of becoming in Argento's *Tenebrae*.

In what way does the memory-image then provide a model of desire outside of Oedipus and the dialectics of absence and lack? On an evidentiary level, the first image we have of the "not-woman" is one in which she/he is half naked and/or half dressed. Her/his breasts, as her/his costume, signify molar gender. Yet what is concealed is as important as what is revealed. Argento deliberately choose Coatti for the role instead of a "female actress", so it suggests that we should attach some significance to the play on gender as inscribed by the repetition of the "oneric flashbacks." In Mendik's 1996 discussion of *Tenebrae*, he makes reference to Francette Pacteau's construction of the hermaphrodite as 'a figure that carries with it the symbolic signs of castration, (marked by the frequent equation of acts of violence or forced bodily transformation that accompanies such scenarios), as well as the desire to transcend gender distinctions' (Mendik, 1996: 39) only in order to reinforce his argument about identity in terms of oedipal lack. In *The Cinematic Body* Shaviro offers an alternative, more productive definition of the hermaphrodite, derived from Deleuze's discussion of *Proust* (1972), as an: 'aggregate of contiguous and noncommunicating singularities: as in certain plants, male and female partial organs are both present, but separated from one another, in the same individual.' (Shaviro, 1993: 76.7). Rather than Mendik's 'symbolically castrated' body, it is the excess of

gender as inscribed in and by Coatti's body - the possession of both breasts and phallus - which threaten gender categories. Shaviro continues:

Hermaphroditism, then, does not imply or refer back to a lost unity. But neither are its separations and nonidentities the result of lack or prohibition. It avoids the Freudian/Lacanian alternative between an Imaginary illusion of wholeness and Symbolic law of difference via castration, for the hermaphrodite lacks nothing, even though it cannot be characterised as a totality. It contains the different sexes without itself, but also the enormous distances that separate and isolate those sexes. Its constituents are partial objects, parts of machines, micro-organs that remain open to the outside, that cannot function by themselves, but that also cannot be referred back to any closure, to any organic unity of which they would be the parts. They are "fragments whose sole relationship is sheer difference," and that cannot be referred to "a primordial totality that once existed" or to "a final totality that awaits us at some future date" (Shaviro, 1993: 76.7)

The body of Coatti, as hermaphrodite, expresses a gender and sexuality which is both transgressive and transformative. It articulates a "becoming" in that it undoes fixed gender categories based around the binarism of phallogentric subjectivity and shatters narrative coherence: constructing a body without organs. This bodily becoming also situates a non-oedipal desire, which neither strictly heterosexual nor homosexual [and neither bisexual]. Liberated from the repressive apparatus of the oedipal family, we have desire as flow and intensity: "the opposition of the forces of attraction and repulsion produces an open series of intensive elements, all of them positive, that are never an expression of the final equilibrium of a system, but consist, rather, of an unlimited number of stationary, metastable states through which the subject passes." (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984: 19). The irreducibility of Coatti's body to a singular gendered identity can be seen to express: 'new potentialities for desire and identity'. (Rodowick, 1997: 155). This also takes us back to Knee's argument, cited earlier, that the loss of any sense of "otherness" deconstructs the very concept of gender norms and 'offer significant alternatives for horror's generic discourse of gender,

sexuality and power.' (Knee, 1996: 226). And this alternative is not only inscribed by the problematic status of Coatti's body, but is also mapped out in the multiple [molecular] becomings of Berti, Peter Neal and Anne.



**Figure 28:** Jane's "becoming-other" in *Tenebrae*

### **The Impulse-Image and Performance Art**

These becomings can also be considered as expressing what Deleuze's terms the "impulse-image" in *Cinema I: The Movement Image*. Whilst Deleuze situates this cinematic image in the discourse of naturalism (Deleuze, 1992: 126), he argues that it is in the impulse-image that first introduces the concept of direct time<sup>14</sup> as becoming into the cinema. These images are often simple: hunger, greed, desire, but already inseparable from perverse modes of behaviour 'which they produce and animate: cannibalistic, sadomasochistic, necrophilic [..]' (Deleuze, 1992: 128). Unlike Argento's previous *giallo*, which situate some sort of explanatory framework for the [female] protagonist's actions - the rape on Monica in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* and the father's abuse in *Four Flies on Grey Velvet* - there is no such framework through which to understand either Berti's or Neal's actions. Neither

though is it the sort of pure evil that we often see attributed to male monsters in the American Horror Film, the most obvious example of which is Michael Myers in *Halloween*, but an irresistible acting on impulse freed from guilt which is also an act of liberation<sup>15</sup>. This is signalled at the beginning of the film with the voice-over [which would have originally been Argento's in the Italian version] reciting the following words, from the "embedded" book *Tenebrae*:

The impulse had become irresistible, there was only one answer to the fury that tortured him, and so he committed his first act of murder. He had broken the most deep rooted taboo and found not guilt nor anxiety but freedom.

Deleuze argues that taken to their limits, as in the work of Losey, the originary violence of impulses which are 'always in act, but is too great for action' set 'traps which are so many psychological interpretations of his work.' (Deleuze, 1992: 137). It is this abandonment of self, 'the reversal against self', which we also find in Argento's *giallo* that links the impulse-image in with the landscape of perversion that *Tenebrae* so carefully maps within the doubling of Berti and Peter Neal: 'A prey to the violence of the impulse himself, the character trembles on to himself, and in this sense he becomes the prey, the victim of his own impulse.' (Deleuze, 1992: 137). Instead of the psychological mechanism, we can situate *Tenebrae* and Neal's violent "becoming-other" within what Deleuze calls the 'extreme logic of impulses' that Losey's work encounters, which cannot: 'reveal itself in the derived milieu - without shattering the character at a stroke, or in a becoming which is that of his own degradation and death.' (Deleuze, 1992: 138). It is Berti's acting out of Neal's

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<sup>14</sup>According to Deleuze, naturalism: 'embraces time, but only as a destiny of the impulse and the becoming of its object.' (Deleuze, 1992: 127).

fictional fantasies that awaken the violence in Neal entrapping the characters within a double becoming which leads to both their deaths. Like the character in Losey's *Mr Klein* who becomes that which he is assumed to be - a Jew - Peter Neal becomes the "other" as sought by his deranged fan: Berti. And whilst *Tenebrae*'s future landscape is far divorced from the more naturalistic [and realistic] setting of Losey's work, there is a the same sort of Nietzschean aesthetic at work in Argento's characters, of who it might be said: 'the rebel has chosen, not exactly evil, but 'for' evil, and that he attains a sort of beauty through and in a permanent upheaval.' (Deleuze, 1992: 135).



Figure 29: the "art" of death in *Tenebrae*

In *Tenebrae*, this beauty is connected into the artistic impulse to create/recreate, both Berti and Neal are almost deranged artists for who the world is a canvas from which to create fiction from reality, or reality from fiction.

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<sup>15</sup> Deleuze sees these impulse-images as in conflict to an ordinary world: 'they can assume configurations which are very complex, bizarre and unusual in relation to the derived milieu in which they appear.' (Deleuze, 1992: 128).



**Figure 30:** The murderer as performance artist in Soavi's *Stagefright*

In “Murder as Art/The Art of Murder: Aestheticizing Violence”,<sup>16</sup> Steven Schneider distinguishes between aesthetic and moral, psychological and philosophical figurations of monstrosity in modern horror. Schneider argues that the *monster as corrupt work of art* [*The Portrait of Dorian Grey* (1913, 1916, 1945), *House of Wax* (1953), and *Frankenstein* (James Whale: 1931)] has evolved into the *monster as corrupt artist*.



**Figure 31:** Staging the "scene" in Mario Bava's *A Bay of Blood*

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<sup>16</sup> Schneider, Steven (2003). Murder as Art/The Art of Murder: Aestheticising Violence in Modern Cinematic Horror. *Intensities: The Journal of Cult Media*. Issue 3. Spring 2003. A horror special issue. Matt Hills (editor). [Online]. Available at: <http://www.cult-media.com/issue3/Aschneid.htm>



Chapter Seven: **The end of his-story**  
*Argento's Tenebre (Tenebrae: 1982)*

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In the *giallo*, the relationship between aesthetics and cinematics is often foregrounded - in Soavi's *Stagefright*, the monster cuts up bodies and then substitutes bodily parts in order to create a 'plan tableau' of violence in which he sits centre stage caressing his cat [Fig. 30], and in Bava's *A Bay of Blood*, the bodies of the victims are not discarded, but carefully placed for aesthetic effect [Fig. 31].



**Figure 32:** "mad artistry": The Crucifixion scene in *The Silence of the Lambs*

Schneider calls the process in which 'dead bodies are literally reused for practical purposes' as murder as artistic product. Such symbolic positioning of dead bodies can also be seen in mainstream American horror films, for example the crucifixion scene

in *The Silence of the Lambs*, carefully staged by Dr Lecter [Fig. 32], and of course more recently *Se7en* in which the violence done to bodies is laid out to aesthetic affect. One of the other tropes of the monster of corrupt artist, is the 'murder as artistic performance', in which 'the act of murder takes on the aura of a performance-art piece.' Whilst Schneider is at pains to distinguish between textual artistry (the artistry of the murderer) and meta-textual artistry (the artistry of the director), in *Tenebrae* the textual and meta-textual compose the aesthetic sensibility of the narrative.

The final, well-documented, scene of Jane's death is one of the finest examples of Argento's aesthetics. The spray of blood from Jane's dismembered arm is too

excessive not to be theatrical, as is the carefully staged gushing of her blood onto the canvas of the white wall. Jane's death is murder as artistic performance taken to its extremes, within the logic of impulses that *Tenebrae* works within. This aestheticisation of the act of murder is extended, as we will see, in Argento's next giallo *Opera*, in which scenes of violence are careful staged for the 'eyes' of Betty. This is similar to Deleuze's discussion of the impulse-image which represents: 'at the deepest level, the desire to change milieu, to seek a new milieu to explore, to dislocate, enjoying all the more what this milieu offers, however low, repulsive or disgusting it may be.' (Deleuze, 1992: 129).

### **The impossible and the possible**

What is in play is no longer the real and the imaginary become indiscernible in certain very specific conditions of the image, the true and the false now become undecidable or inextricable: the impossible proceeds from the possible, and the past is not necessarily true. (Deleuze, 2000: 275).

The problematic status over Coatti's body is only one of the ways in which the return of the untotalizable and unlocalizable part brings models of the true into question. And if the fragment is the key to understanding the narrative, then it is an understanding of the nature of fabulation and creation: in which the impossible proceeds from the possible, and the past is not necessarily true. Both Mendik and Barber and Thrower's analyses situate a logical relation between the "repressed" past and the present by situating Peter Neal as the central protagonist in both narrations. This reading however is undermined by the textual play of the narrative itself. In order to alleviate Anne's distress when she discovers Neal's psychosis, Giermani provides an explanation for his actions by telling her that he has received information



about Neal's past: "When Peter Neal was a teenager in Rhode Island, a girl he knew was killed brutally. Someone accused him, but there wasn't any real evidence and it was never brought to trial." For a moment, the narrative becomes a totalizable and oedipalised whole: a sexually traumatic event in the past provides an explanation for its acting out in the present. But the moment after this "resolution", there is a hesitation as Giermani qualifies his statement adding "If it was Peter Neal, then he committed an act which haunted his life and twisted his mind forever..". And as McDonagh, points out the key word here is "If" (McDonagh, 1994: 184). To return to Deleuze, 'the past is not necessarily true': and it is the possibility that these images are free floating recollections, dream images, memory-images, from a non-localizable past which prevents the organisation of the narrative into a coherent and intelligible totality. We can see the refusal of the textuality of *Tenebrae* to be totalizable in terms of Deleuze's arguments around the status of narration in the time-image: '[d]escription stops presupposing a reality and narration stops referring to a true at one and the same time.' (Deleuze, 2000: 135).

And in *Tenebrae*, the constant references to the 'outside' - the world of detective fiction - as a mechanism to understand the 'inside', are constantly undermined. Throughout the film, both Giermani (the official detective - a Police Inspector) and Peter Neal (the detective writer), discuss the investigation as if it was a detective "story". At one point Giermani tells Peter Neal that whilst he reads detective fiction - 'Agatha Christie, Mickey Spillane, Rex Stout, Ed McBain', he can never guess who the murderer is. And after Berti's murder, Neal tells Giermani that he has tried to map out the investigation as if he was creating a detective story: 'I've made charts, I've tried building a plot the same way you have. I just have this feeling that

something is missing, a piece of the jigsaw, somebody who should be dead is alive, or somebody who is alive should already be dead.' When asked to explain by Germani, Neal then quotes Conan Doyle: 'You know there is a sentence in a Conan Doyle book: 'When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains is the possible.' To which Germani replies: '*The Hound of the Baskervilles*.' Neal responds in turn: 'Yes, if the impossible in this case is that the chain of killings doesn't make sense, in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, the improbable was a giant ghost mastiff, the improbable in this case is always certain weird, unbelievable, but possible. Truth is always possible.' Of course, this is a misquotation: the quote comes from *The Sign of the Four*, and not *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Truth might be possible, but is always under the sign of the false - always subject to interpretation and misinterpretation.

### **Conclusion: The end of his/tory**

In *Tenebrae*, the impossible is the fact that there is not one, but two killers. Subject positions are fluid in *Tenebrae*'s amorphous reality, stitched together from pieces of the fictional and the real and the detective becomes the victim of his own violent impulses, which in the end result in his own destruction. By reading *Tenebrae* in anti-oedipal terms, we have seen the way in which desiring-production can become a revolutionary artistic impulse which creates rather than represents, however violent and problematic that act of creation may be. We have also seen not just what bodies are, but what bodies can be, in the serial becomings of Berti, Neal and Anne. Instead of the reactionary dialectics of being, we have a liberatory politics of becoming. As Rodowick says: 'Therefore, becoming-other is an affirmative will to power

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expressing the body's own potential to be affected by and to affect, to metamorphose, to ally itself with the affirmative powers of life.' (Rodowick, 1997: 154). And if we have the end of his-story, it also signals the beginning of the new: her-story with Argento's Diva period in which woman become the central protagonists.

## **Introduction**

*Tenebrae* was followed in 1985 by *Phenomena*, which although not strictly a psychological *giallo*, marks a significant transitional point between the male focalised detective stories of his early work and the female centred narratives of his Diva period. In *Phenomena* Argento once again kills off the central male protagonist, Professor MacGregor (Donald Pleasance). This time, however, the demise of the male protagonist occurs early in the narrative, rather than at the end as in *Tenebrae*. The subsequent positioning of a young girl, Jennifer Corvino (Jennifer Connelly) at the centre of the narrative's investigative drive, is symbolic, representing the end of his-story and the beginning of her-story as traversed in his next three *giallo*: *Opera* (*Terror at the Opera*, Italy: 1987); *Trauma* (1993: Italy and USA) and *The Stendhal Syndrome* (*La sindrome di Stendhal*, Italy: 1996).

In the last chapter in my discussion of *Tenebrae*, I discussed the way in which the memory-image (the *mise-en-scène* of [male] desire, [male] humiliation and murder) problematised assumptions around horror as grounded in phallogentric notions of male sadism and female victimology. Indeed, this subversion of gendered ideas around the positioning of men and woman in the cinematic text can be seen throughout Argento's early male centred *giallo*: the image of Sam Dalmas caught between the glass doors of the art gallery in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, both horrified and seduced by the violent events unfolding; Marc Daly's terrorised gaze as the killer tries to enter his apartment in *Deep Red* (his apartment is below the original victim's); and the positioning of Oliver Tobais as the 'damsel-in-distress' stalked and persecuted by an unknown assailant who turns out to be his wife (an obvious inversion of the terrorised "wife" film such as *Dial M for Murder*). This is obviously

very different to the gender dynamics of mainstream (American) horror in which the woman is the primary victim and suggests that accusations of misogyny (for example Guins, 1996) against Argento have been overstated, with little textual evidence to support them.

Deleuze's work on cinema does not directly address questions of gender relationships and representations, although I would argue, that the movement-image operates within the sphere of masculine discourse with its emphasis on continuity and coherence and molar being whilst the time-image can be seen as working with a more feminine mode of language with its emphasis on narrative disruption and modes of becoming. In this chapter, I bring together Deleuze's work on cinema with his earlier discussion of masochism in *Coldness and Cruelty* (1967)<sup>1</sup> in order to explore how the aestheticisation of violence in *Opera* provides an alternative mapping of cinematic desire, pleasure and unpleasure to the static one proposed by conventional feminist interpretations based around the masculinisation of the spectator position.

### **Opera: the politics of displeasure**

Set during a staging of Verdi's *Macbeth* at the Milan Opera House by a horror film director turned theatrical impresario, *Opera* with its central female victim, Betty (Cristina Marshillach), and male aggressor, Inspector Alan Santini (Urbano Barberini), seems to be a more traditional psychological horror film and therefore substantially different to Argento's previous *giallo*. However the relationship between Betty and Inspector Santini is anything but simplistic: Santini is not a typical

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<sup>1</sup> The version of *Coldness and Cruelty* that appears in *Masochism* (1997), Zone Books, New York. (translated by Jean McNeil) alongside Sacher-Masoch's original masochistic fantasy *Venus in Furs*.

male aggressor just as Betty is not the typical gothic 'damsel-in-distress' or even 'final-girl' from the "slasher" film. Instead Santini attempts to liberate Betty from her inhibitions by making her watch a number of brutal murders in the hope that eventually Betty will take up her dead mother's role - with whom Santini had what can only be called a masochistic relationship. By the film's eventual resolution, everybody close to Betty has been murdered "literally" before her eyes: first there is her boyfriend Stefan who is brutally stabbed, then the wardrobe mistress at the Opera House, Julia (Coralina Cataldi Tassoni) is hacked to death (a sequence which includes a close-up shot of a pair of scissors chopping open Julia's throat); a bullet through the eye finishes off Betty's close friend Mira (Daria Nicolodi) and finally her lover, the film director, Marco (Ian Charleson) is killed at his home in the Alps. Totally alone, Betty turns on Santini and violently bludgeons him to death. The final scenes (cut from the American version) are of Betty's descent into madness as she runs up the grassy slopes and talks to the wildlife - almost like a deranged Julie Andrews from *The Sound of Music* on acid!

### **Venus in Furs**

Waiting, stillness, passivity; the characteristics of the *time-image* link into Deleuze's earlier work on masochism: *Coldness and Cruelty* (1967). And just as Deleuze argues that the *movement-image* and the *time-image* belong to two separate conceptual regimes, in *Coldness and Cruelty* Deleuze links sadism and masochism with two incommensurable aesthetic formulations: sadism with activity and the tyranny of the law embodied in the figure of the cruel libertine, and the masochist aesthetic, in which the father is usurped by the cold and cruel mother embodied in the figure of the despotic woman/dominatrix. Against the psycho-pathologies of the

sado-masochistic entity in the work of Krafft-Ebing, Havelock Ellis and Féré and subsequently by Freud, and in order to separate the two, Deleuze returns to the literary aesthetics of sadism in the work of De Sade, and masochism through the work of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch: 'Because the judgement of the clinician is prejudiced, we must take an entirely different approach, the literary approach, since it is from literature that stem the original definitions of sadism and masochism.' (Deleuze, 1997: 14). This is central to the originality of Deleuze's approach towards the scenario of masochism and painful desires in that it foregrounds, rather than denies, the aesthetic origins of the pathological symptom.

At the centre of Deleuze's discussion of masochism is the figure of the woman torturer who 'belongs entirely to masochism; admittedly she is not a masochistic character, but she is a pure element of masochism.' (Deleuze, 1997: 42). Talking about Masoch's writings, he says: 'Masoch and his heroes are constantly in search of a peculiar and extremely rare feminine "nature". The subject in masochism needs a certain "essence" of masochism embodied in the nature of a woman who renounces her own subjective masochism; he definitely has no need of another subject, i.e., the sadistic subject.' (Deleuze, 1997: 42/43) This is in opposition to the Freudian concept of sadomasochism in which there is an identity of experience that links sadism and masochism - the sadist can only gain pleasure from inflicting pain, because in the past, he himself has been subject to pain. Instead, Deleuze suggests that: 'The sadist and the masochist might well be enacting separate dramas, each complete in itself, with different sets of characters and no possibility of communication between them, either from inside or outside.' (Deleuze, 1997: 45).

What is of particular interest when considering the aesthetics of Argento's *giallo* is the constant positioning of the male protagonist in a passive position vis-à-vis the more dominant and aggressive woman. I have already cited the examples of Sam Dalmas, Marc Daly and Oliver Tobais. The most striking image perhaps is that in the memory-image in *Tenebrae* (discussed in the *Chapter Seven*) in which the formative image is of the humiliated and punished male subject. This makes it difficult to contend, as critics have done, that Argento's films are sadistic: both in their construction of the gaze and in the violence of the *mise-en-scène* of murder. At the same time, the primacy of the mother and the absence of the symbolic father in Argento's films from *Deep Red* onwards makes it almost impossible to construct Argento's films in traditional gendered terms. In Argento's supernatural *giallo*, his uncompleted 'three mother's trilogy', the figure of the mother is both despotic and tyrannical. In particular, *Suspiria* is set in a 'fictional' world in which a well-known academy, the *Tanzakademie*, is a cover for a coven of witches lead by an ancient old sorceress called Helena Marcos; and administered by the despotic Miss Tanner (Alida Valli) and Madame Blanc (Joan Bennett). The men at the academy are in servile positions, including a blind piano teacher who ends up in being brutally attacked by his German shepherd.

In *Coldness and Cruelty*, the figure of the mother in the masochist contract is a composite of three mothers: the "uterine," "haeteric" or "generator of disorder", the "oedipal" and sadistic woman, and the good mother; the "oral" or "nurturing" mother. Together the figure of the mother in *Suspiria* and *Inferno* traces a discourse of masochism within the supernatural *gialli* of Argento; the figure of the father marked through his very absence and substitution by the composite mother. As Deleuze argues in his etymology of masochism: 'In short the three woman constitute a



symbolic order in which and through which the father is abolished in advance - for all time.' (Deleuze, 1997: 63).

In "The Witch in Film: Myth and Reality", Sharon Russell puts forward the argument that the witch is a male myth 'designed to excuse the possibility of masculine inadequacy (in men's minds) arising from the differences in male and female physiology' (Russell, 1984: 115). This myth is of the order of sadism which 'is in every sense an active negation of the mother and an exaltation of the father who is beyond all laws.' (Deleuze, 1997: 60). I would argue that Russell's analysis is only applicable to those representations of witchcraft in which the male has ultimate power - films such as *Rosemary's Baby* and *The Devil Rides Out* for example - and not those situated within a predominantly matriarchal society, such as *Suspiria*. At the other end of the scale, as Russell herself points out, the discourse of demonology has provided the language of popular rebellion as in the upsurge in cults in the aftermath of the French Revolution.<sup>2</sup> In *Trauma* as we shall see, the language of revolution is communicated with the multiple visual references to the French Revolution. The multiple figurations of the witch in Argento's supernatural *giallo* and the despotic woman in Argento's psychological *giallo* is much closer aligned to that of the language of rebellion rather than that of phallogocentrism (the witch as a male myth which expresses fears around loss of power).

Deleuze's masochistic aesthetics is not a simplistic substitution of the father-image with the mother-image. Nor is the desiring production of these aesthetics one determined by the dialectical play of presence and absence. In his analysis of the affective dimension of masochism in *The Cinematic Body*, Steven Shaviro's nuanced

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<sup>2</sup> see *Satanism and Witchcraft* (1960) Citadel Press.

arguments around cinematic pleasure highlights the centrality of the spectator's desire for loss of self and prolongation of erotic tension as integral to his/her relationship with the cinematic screen:

Following both Bersani and Deleuze, we may say that the violent stimulation of the body and the loss of ego boundaries that are foregrounded in masochism, but that characterize sexual play in general, are at once desirable and threatening. The self is repetitively shattered by an ecstatic excess of affect, and not primordially "split" by the imposition of "lack." And I do not try to merely to defend myself against slipping into this delicious passivity, this uncontainable agitation; I compulsively, passionately seek it out.' (Shaviro, 1993: 56.6).

Shaviro's argument is important because it returns us to the affective dimension of horror which is often overlooked in the intellectualisation of cinematic spectatorship and its construction of gendered bodies. Horror film affects us directly, evoking bodily responses, which cannot easily be assimilated within the strictures of normative models of gender and sexuality: those models that we have already seen being utilised in the work of Xavier Mendik and Gary Needham. As Shaviro puts it: 'Fearfulness is itself a thrill and a powerful turn-on, as any devotee of horror film knows. It is impossible to reduce sexual passion, and within it "passion for perceiving" that animates the cinematic spectator, to a desire for self-identity, wholeness, security and recognition.' (Shaviro, 1993: 56.6/56.7).

In Gayln Studlar's account of cinematic masochism, again derived from Deleuze's re-reading of Sacher-Masoch, the emphasis on self-abasement and fantasy in the masochistic scenario lead her to situate the dramatology of debasement within the zone of pre-oedipal pleasures. (Studlar, 1992: 775). And whilst this reterritorialisation of masochistic desiring production within psychoanalytical terminology is problematic within the terms of my argument, Studlar's account is

useful in foregrounding the role that fantasy plays in cinematic spectatorship in which:

the pleasure in looking at the dream screen of cinema and the female involves pregenital ambivalence, the role and reaction of the sexually differentiated spectator must be approached in a completely different light. The pregenital pleasures of perversion are not limited to the enjoyment of the male spectator, nor available to the female only if she abandons masochistic identification with the "female object" and then identifies with a male spectatorial position of control. (Studlar, 1992: 789)

Against accusations by Silverman (1992) that Studlar's account of masochistic pleasures is essentialist, Shaviro argues that 'Studlar's theory has the great and radical virtue of grounding spectatorial response in prereflective affect (the primordial experience of pain) rather than in cognitive terms of Oedipal law. The sensations and reactions of the body precede, and never cease to subtend, the categorical demands of the Symbolic order, of conscience and the superego. The ambivalent pleasures of the masochist body provide a rich field for contesting, or eroding phallic power and the global binarization of gender.' (Shaviro, 1993: 58.9). In *Opera*, the contestation of phallic power, central to the masochist aesthetic that both Shaviro and Studlar foreground, can be found in the figure of the despotic m/other or the Diva.

### **Diva**

In her discussion of the iconic status of Barbara Steele, Carol Jenks traces back the relationship between the *giallo* and the disorderly female body to the Divismo: the early Italian Star System in which the central figures, as the word Divismo signifies (Diva meaning Goddess in Italian), were strong and aggressive woman (Jenks, 1996: 88-100). At the same time, the concept of the Diva gained currency from its

association with both Opera and Theatre: 'In these companies not only was the diva the star attraction around which the performance of the rest of the company revolved, but often she was also formally or informally the head of the company and able to determine the repertoire.' (Novell-Smith, 1996: 46). The diva genre flourished in the early part of the 20th century in Italy but came to an end post 1918. In *Italian Film*, Landy ties in the growth of the diva genre with developments at home and abroad: 'The moment of *divismo* coincides with a number of political and cultural developments inherent to the teens and twenties, including the aftermath of large-scale emigration from Italy, the attempt at colonizing Africa, and the unprecedented growth of industrialization and of movements for economic reform, including the rise of socialism (Landy, 2000: 267).' Mainly associated with European Culture post World War 1, the Diva signifies decadence, transgression, passion and 'the world of unattainable desire.' Like the figure of the despotic woman in the masochist contract, the Diva is 'removed from the world of ordinariness' and 'brings to the cinema an operatic fascination with eroticism and violence.' (Landy, 2000: 267).

Landy's description of Francesca Bertini, one of the main Divas of the early years, as a 'persona highly histrionic in physical appearance and gesture with an intense self-preoccupation, a scorn for the commonplace, and a striving for control over others' (Landy, 2000: 268), fits in with the images of the despotic woman in Argento's *Opera* as inscribed within the figures of the dead mother in the narrative's subjective inserts/memory-images and the original Lady Macbeth in the diegetic staging of Verdi's Opera. And although the neurotic and repressed Betty refuses Santini's entreaties to become m/other; once she accepts the role of Lady Macbeth, she is caught up in a violent becoming of her own which ultimately leads her to brutally turn the tables on her attacker, and culminates in her spectacular descent into

madness. In Landy's words: 'The identification of the cinematic diva with the operatic diva is also important, since the same emphasis on fatality, sensuality, loss and power is shared by both.' (Landy, 2000: 268). The Diva, is one more version of "la dolente", the figure of the suffering Italian femme fatale who exceeds attempts at categorisation and classification.

The theatricalisation of female identity is also central to the crisis of the *action-image* that Deleuze situates at the centre of the transformation of the cinematic-image from the *movement-image* to the *time-image*. We saw this in my discussion of Giovanna as "la dolente" in my discussion of *Obsession* in *Chapter One*. In *Opera*, the figure of the mother haunts the subjective-inserts of past transgressions, doubly focalised through Santini and Betty. And it is no coincidence that when talking about the cinema of the body, Deleuze makes reference to the figure of Salomé in *Capricci* as articulating the non-point of desire. (Deleuze, 2000: 190). It is also significant that the role that all three Diva's in *Opera* play is that of Lady Macbeth: Shakespeare's theatrical Diva turned into Verdi's operatic one. And it seems no coincidence that Monica in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, Argento's first film and *giallo*, holds up a blood stained hand towards Sam Dalmas during the art-gallery sequence - the bloody hand is an obvious intertextual link back to Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth. Or, that a painting of Ophelia appears in Argento's next *giallo*, *Trauma*, whilst the sight of Carviaggioi's *Medusa* in *The Stendhal Syndrome* causes Anna to collapse.

In Alfred E. Vecchio's review of the male struggle for power in Verdi's *Macbeth* (New Jersey State Opera Review, Spring 1982), he talks about the mixed reactions to the first presentation of the Opera in 1847:

it lacked, they [the critics] argued, an Italian theme; its mise-en-scene was Nordic; there were no love affairs, no romantic couples. And I might add, the character of Lady Macbeth was entirely too masculinized for Italian tastes. Lady Macbeth surpasses her husband in energy; she has what we loosely term “demonic” impulses. Macbeth, in comparison, is a rather pale figure (contrary to Shakespeare): he rarely behaves independently of his wife. Macbeth is either totally at the mercy of the sorcerer's predictions, or his wife's perverse will<sup>3</sup>.

It is clear to see how the gender politics that surrounded Verdi's *Opera* and those of the original diva genre are at the heart of Argento's subversion of gender relations and representations in *Opera*.<sup>4</sup> As Vecchio states in his review:



**Figure 33:** Diva - Betty as Lady Macbeth in *Opera*

In no other opera does Verdi present with such concentrated brilliance a “history”, (one is tempted to say, a case history), as it were, of a political man caught up in a convulsive struggle for political ascendancy. In no other opera does the composer virtually saturate the stage with purely male struggles for power. Even Lady Macbeth is, to her own destruction, caught up in the agon, the macho struggle for dominion, surpassing Macbeth himself in aggressive, violence and savage contesting.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Vecchio, Alfred E. (1982). Verdi's Macbeth. *New Jersey State Opera Review*, Spring 1982. [Online]. Available at:

<http://www.plumsite.com/aevecchio/macbeth.htm>

<sup>4</sup> In *Broken Mirrors / Broken Minds*, McDonagh talks about an aborted attempt by Argento to stage Verdi's *Rigoletto* prior to the making of *Opera*: ‘the story (adapted from Victor Hugo's 1932 play *Le roi s'amuse* and considered quite scandalous in its day) is pretty horrific. The debauched Duke of Mantua corrupts an innocent girl whose father then hires a professional killer to exact vengeance; the girl learns of the plan and kills herself to save her seducer. Argento's notion was to take the character of the Duke, who taints and corrupts everything he touches, one step further and make him into a literal vampire.’ (1994: 202). It is no surprise therefore as McDonagh points out that the project never made it beyond the planning stage.

<sup>5</sup> Vecchio, Alfred E. (1982). Verdi's Macbeth. *New Jersey State Opera Review*, Spring 1982. [Online]. Available at:

<http://www.plumsite.com/aevecchio/macbeth.htm>

It is these intertextual weavings in Argento's *giallo* that in foregrounding sexual and gender politics allow figurations of femininity excessive and transgressive of the Puritanism of American cinematic morality. Woman in Argento's *giallo* are Diva, even when in Betty's case, they seek to deny their transgressive status [Fig 33]. They call into question the ability of masculine language to contain and control their "demonic" impulses, and in doing so rupture the signifying function of the law. In *Opera*, just as in Argento's previous *giallo*, the return of the traumatic event from the past is one which operates outside of traditional cinematic grammatology as a consequence of its disruption of gender and sexuality norms. In these memory-images (or subjective-insert), a fragmented mise-en-scène of [masochistic] desire unfolds in which we voyeuristically view the eroticised murder of a young woman. The play on signifiers of masculine aggression and female oppression, as in *Tenebrae*, seem at first to situate the sequence within the pathology of female victimology and male sadism. The memory-image's subsequent repetition works to problematise this 'reading': as we see the bound woman from the first image is not a victim, but an active participant, directing the drama of death that the faceless protagonist enacts. As Michael Sevastakis highlights in his review of *Opera* "A Dangerous Mind" (Vol 2, Issue 12, 24 June 2002), the lack of 'coding and transitional devices' between the 'real' and the 'imaginary' also displaces cinematic spatiality and temporality: 'the fantasy sequences are so spatially and temporally disruptive to the main flow of the narrative that at first they appear to be displaced - real images within the narrative but seemingly out of context rather than subjective inserts coming from the viewpoint of a particular character.'<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Sevastakis, Michael (2002). *Opera* "A Dangerous Mind". *Kinoeye: new perspectives on European Film*. Vol 2, Issue 12, 24 June 2002. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.kinoeye.org/02/12/sevastakis12.php>



**The masochist contract: the father is 'beaten'**



**Figure 34:** The captivated spectator: Betty in *Opera*

We are no longer in the presence of a torturer seizing upon a victim and enjoying her all the more because she is unconsenting and unpersuaded. We are dealing instead with a victim in search of a torturer and who needs to educate, persuade and conclude an alliance with the torturer in order to realize the strangest of schemes. (Deleuze, 1997: 20)

It is not surprising taking into consideration the foregrounding of the despotic m/other that Deleuze's definition of the masochist aesthetics could almost be the tag line for Argento's 1987 production of *Opera* in which the victim in search of a torturer is Inspector Santini, the lover of the dead mother of the central character, Betty: a young and up-coming Operatic Diva. He tries to educate, persuade and conclude an alliance with Betty by forcing her to watch helplessly as her closest friends and lovers are graphically murdered in front of her taped open eyes: steel needles threaten Betty with blindness if she closes her eyes. Wishing to recreate his masochistic alliance with Betty's mother, herself a Diva, Santini does not want to possess Betty against her will (as in the case of the sadist) but instead desires to 'fashion' Betty 'into a despot, that he should persuade her to cooperate and get her to sign' (Deleuze, 1997: 21).



In Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs*, Wanda (the Venus in Furs) enters into a masochistic arrangement with a young man, Severin, who seeks to be dominated by this cold, cruel fantasy of a woman. Although reluctant to begin with, Wanda eventually luxuriates in the freedom of her designed role. When Severin complains about Wanda's seemingly indifference to him, she exclaims: 'Dangerous tendencies were lurking in me, and you were the one who awakened them; if I now take pleasure in hurting and tormenting you, it is entirely your fault.' (Sacher-Masoch, 1997: 260). Similarly in *Opera*, Santini attempts to liberate dangerous tendencies in Betty by subjecting her to repeated scenes of violence in which she is helpless to intervene, to the extent of staging his own 'death' at Betty's hands.

As in *Tenebrae*, the relation between monstrosity and artistry is foregrounded. Santini is an artist, carefully composing the scenes of death for the 'pleasure' of Betty - the intra-diegetic spectator. And whilst it has been pointed out *Opera* is one of Argento's most self-referential films and Marco, the horror film director turned theatrical impresario, can be seen as a stand-in for Argento<sup>7</sup>, it is Santini's murderous artistry which mirrors most closely the art of the horror film director. In *The Aesthetics of Murder: A Study in Romantic Literature and Contemporary Culture* (1991), Joel Black argues that 'if any human act evokes the aesthetic experience of the sublime, certainly it is the act of murder. And if murder can be experienced aesthetically, the murderer can in turn be regarded as a kind of artist - a performance artist or anti-artist whose speciality is not creation or destruction.' (Black, 1991: 14).

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<sup>7</sup> see McDonagh, 1994: 209 - 212. She argues 'Sure it's armchair psychoanalysis, but Marco is clearly a more literal stand-in for Argento than any other character he's ever committed to film, and the backstage world of *Opera*'s *Macbeth* - hysterical crew and all - reflects the reality of Argento's shoots.' (McDonagh, 1994: 211).

The art of murder, or artistry, is closely linked into the discourse of masochism, both of which take place under the shadow of violence - but a violence which is careful staged for the purposes of pleasure in order to 'manipulate. the women into the ideal state for the performance of the role he has assigned to her.' (Deleuze, 1997: 124). We can clearly see how violence is closely aligned to artistry in the 'plan tableau' of the brutal and graphic killing of Julia, the Opera's wardrobe mistress. Repeating the double critique of colonialism and phallogentrism of *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, Betty is rendered helpless by being placed in a glass cage in the wardrobe room at the Opera. Betty is flanked on both sides by glass cages which enclose dramatically dressed mannequins: the quintessential image of passive femininity.

In his discussion of Mario Bava's *Blood and Black Lace* (*Sei Donne per l'assassino*: 1964)<sup>8</sup>, Reynold Humphries argues that the play on inanimate (the mannequin) and animate models in Bava's *giallo* - which is primarily set in Cristina's house of High Fashion - performs a critique of the commodification of woman's bodies by the fashion industry, and by association patriarchal society.<sup>9</sup> During the fractured montage of Julia's murder, long shots and part-shots of Betty in her glass cage are interspersed with shots of Julia and the masked intruder, framed by the careful positioning of mannequins in the background - constantly calling our attention to the doubling of woman as image and woman as object and by association the substitutability of one for the other in commodity culture. Humphries talks about the

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<sup>8</sup> Humphries, Reynold (2001). Just another fashion victim Mario Bava's *Sei donne per l'assassino* (*Blood and Black Lace*, 1964). *Kinoeye: New perspectives on European Film*. Vol 1. Issue 27. 26 Nov 2001. [Online]. Available at:

<http://www.kinoeye.org/01/07/humphries07.php>

<sup>9</sup> Humphries, Reynold (2001). Just another fashion victim Mario Bava's *Sei donne per l'assassino* (*Blood and Black Lace*, 1964). *Kinoeye: New perspectives on European Film*. Vol 1. Issue 27. 26 Nov 2001. [Online]. Available at:

<http://www.kinoeye.org/01/07/humphries07.php>

similar staging of femininity in Bava's *giallo*: 'Just as décor and lighting take on a function that deprives spectators of their bearings, so fashion deprives woman of their identity, prior to their being deprived of their very existence.'<sup>10</sup> And just as the 'plan tableau' of Julia's murder is carefully staged for maximum effect for the diegetic spectator - Betty - Santini's first "faked" death is also a piece of performance art, which situates the spectator, like the blindfolded Betty, in a position of blindness which allows the extra-diegetic artist - Argento - and his double - Santini - to manipulate and deceive the extra-diegetic spectator, and their surrogate stand-in. 'the masochistic contract implies not only the necessity of the victim's consent, but his ability to persuade, and his pedagogical and judicial efforts to train his torturer.' (Deleuze, 1997: 75)

The foregrounding of the artistic processes at work in the mise-en-scène of transgression throughout *Opera*, including the symbolic links between woman as image and woman as body, means that it becomes difficult to reconcile the narrative trajectory of this text with traditional theorisations of horror film as the scene/screen of male sadism. And in particular, Santini's desire for punishment at the hands of the murderous m/other and the staging of his own death which immediately precedes his actual death; links the masculine subject in *Opera* into a masochistic mode of subjectivity.

Donna Wilkerson's discussion of the writing subject in Blanchot in "Transgression, Masochism and Subjectivity: the Sacrifice of Self to the (Femininized) Space of

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<sup>10</sup> Humphries, Reynold (2001). Just another fashion victim Mario Bava's *Sei donne per l'assassino* (*Blood and Black Lace*, 1964). *Kinoeye: New perspectives on European Film*. Vol 1. Issue 27. 26 Nov 2001. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.kinoeye.org/01/07/humphries07.php>

Literature in Maurice Blanchot"<sup>11</sup> explores in some detail the transgressive nature of male masochism and its disruption of the active/passive paradigm of western logocentrism through an analysis of the 'simulacral feminine mode' of Blanchot's writing subject. Wilkerson demonstrates how the 'posture of failure' in Blanchot's work involves a turn to the feminine in which 'the subject, via an in-corporation of the feminine (genre), or, rather, a collapsing (reliement) of the masculine into the feminine, becomes in the process "feminised" (i.e. the subject infuses himself in the feminine and thereby speaks/writes from or within this position).' Wilkerson argues that whilst Blanchot's appropriation of the feminine can be seen as working within the limitations of phallogentrism, it only does so 'by placing the (male) subject in a masochistic position which, in the Deleuzian sense, is one of power *and* powerlessness, a construction of power only to surrender better to a suffering yet passionate powerlessness.'<sup>12</sup> We can see a similar 'placing of the feminine' within the male subject in *Opera* as inscribed through Santini's masochistic quest for the despotic m/other in which Santini's assumption of power, through in his manipulation and objectification of the feminine, maps his desire to be placed in a position of powerlessness which is traced in the repetition of his original contractual obligations in the fetishized memory-image. Santini's desire to be placed in a feminised position vis-à-vis the despotic Diva is repetitively traced, as in Blanchot's writing, within this conflagration of fantasy and memory. This acts similarly to Deleuze's reworking of the original scene of sadomasochism, in which his answer to the question 'who is in

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<sup>11</sup> Wilkerson, Donna (1998). Transgression, Masochism and Subjectivity: the Sacrifice of the self to the (Feminized) Space of Literature in Maurice Blanchot. *Australian Journal of French Studies*. Vol. XXXV. No 2. May – August 1998. [Online]. Available at: [http://elecpress.monash.edu.au/french/1998\\_2/wilkerson.html](http://elecpress.monash.edu.au/french/1998_2/wilkerson.html)

<sup>12</sup> Wilkerson, Donna (1998). Transgression, Masochism and Subjectivity: the Sacrifice of the self to the (Feminized) Space of Literature in Maurice Blanchot. *Australian Journal of French Studies*. Vol. XXXV. No 2. May – August 1998. [Online]. Available at: [http://elecpress.monash.edu.au/french/1998\\_2/wilkerson.html](http://elecpress.monash.edu.au/french/1998_2/wilkerson.html)

reality being beaten?' is 'Is it not precisely the father-image in him that is thus miniaturised, beaten, ridiculed and humiliated? What the subject atones for is his resemblance to the father and the father's likeness in him: the formula of masochism is the humiliated father.' (Deleuze, 1997: 60). And indeed, the generation of the new man can only be achieved through the obliteration of the old - the symbolic father and the investing of his functions within the figure of the composite mother:

What does "becoming a man" signify? Clearly it does not mean to be like the father or to take his place. On the contrary, it consists in obliterating his role and his likeness in order to generate the new man. (Deleuze, 1997: 99)<sup>13</sup>

And even if this reconfiguration of masculinity takes place by necessity within the space of phallogentrism, the discourse of masochism through which the male subject seeks to efface itself means that, as Wilkerson argues: 'Masochism indeed represents here a subversion of the (patriarchal) law, insofar as it constructs a male subject free to oscillate between power and powerlessness.'<sup>14</sup>

### **Visual Fascination**

Take a good look, if you try to close your eyes you'll tear them apart. So you will just have to watch everything. (Santini to Betty in *Opera*)

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<sup>13</sup> In 'Masochism and Catastrophe in *Insatiability 1*', David A. Goldfarb (1996) suggests that the phenomena of masochism can be linked with social catastrophe. He argues that the traditional view, of which Deleuze's concept of masochism is a product 'is that masochism is associated with the loss of the father, therefore, instinctual' whilst at the same time 'masochism is strictly a Western phenomena, therefore socially constructed'. [Online]. Available at:

<http://www.echonyc.com/~goldfarb/masochis.htm>

<sup>14</sup> Wilkerson, Donna (1998). Transgression, Masochism and Subjectivity: the Sacrifice of the self to the (Feminized) Space of Literature in Maurice Blanchot. *Australian Journal of French Studies*. Vol. XXXV. No 2. May – August 1998. [Online]. Available at: [http://elecpress.monash.edu.au/french/1998\\_2/wilkerson.html](http://elecpress.monash.edu.au/french/1998_2/wilkerson.html)

In foregrounding the process of spectatorship, *Opera* reproduces the screen of cinematic desire as a space of visual fascination at which like Betty, the spectator, is both simultaneously seduced and horrified by the violent images that appear on it. Although analyses of *Opera* have noted the centrality of masochism to the painful production of the diegetic spectator, they maintain an association between male sadism and the cinematic gaze. This is certainly the stance of Chris Gallant's article "Threatening Glances: Voyeurism, eye-violation and the camera: from *Peeping Tom* to *Opera*" and his review of *Opera* (both of which can be found in the recent published (2000) set of essays and reviews of Argento's films, edited by Gallant, entitled *The Art of Darkness*) and Ray Guin's earlier (1996) "Tortured Looks: Dario Argento and Visual Displeasure." Once again, we can see the continued influence of Mulvey's work on theorisations of the *giallo*.

In "Threatening Glances", Gallant argues that 'the look, the phallus and the phallic blade are all metaphors for each other' (Gallant, 2000: 17). We can compare this to Guin's statement of directorial intent in "Tortured Looks" in which he contends that *Opera* provides visual (visible) evident of Argento's 'ocular obsession with "watching" beautiful woman [which] is shown to the spectator [so] that we can "enjoy" and accept his sadistic, voyeuristic pleasures as our own.' (Guins, 1996: 147): presumably irrespective of any pre-existing gendered, racial, and cultural or other differences. In the same vein, and although both Gallant and Guins foreground the ambiguity of the spectatorial gaze mapped within Argento's fractured montage of violence and violation; the binary dialectics of sadism and masochism are maintained rather than problematised. This allows Gallant to state in his review that *Opera* is a spectacularisation of the 'sodomasochistic' scene in which the determining factor is the desire to feel guilty. (Gallant, 2000: 210). Gallant's reduction of the space of

fantasy to the workings of reality (SM culture) means that the transgressive potentiality of the figure of the Diva, and the importance of the 'role' of Lady Macbeth in the gender and sexual politics of Argento's *giallo*, are subsumed under the metanarrative of sadomasochism of which the Diva is merely symbolic.

Other analyses build upon feminist analysis, influenced by Mulvey, and therefore relate back to the question of visual pleasure, indirectly rather than directly. For instance Michael Sevastakis's statement that *Opera's* discussion of displaced female aggression: 'conflates the relationship between lover and beloved with that of mother and child. But the lover/mother here becomes a *vagina dentata* the prerequisite for entry into this orifice'<sup>15</sup> is an overt reference to the centrality of *woman-as-castrator* as embodied in Barbara Creed's work on the *monstrous-feminine*. In the same area is Xavier Mendik's work - derived from Zizek - which pinpoints the difficulty of detection in Argento's *giallo* as a consequence of transgressive gender, as discussed some detail in the preceding chapters. In "From The Monstrous Mother to The "Third" Sex" (1998), Mendik provides a detailed analysis of female subjectivity in Argento's supernatural *giallo* and *Diva* trilogy based around notions of the *monstrous-feminine* and Kristeva's concept of the abject on which Creed's argument is constructed. In the aforementioned article, Mendik makes the following statement: 'What interests me in the theme of Argento's murderous mothers (and their daughters) is not merely their homicidal intent, but also their physiological construction which often provokes disgust in both the protagonist and spectator.' (Mendik, 1998: 110). And whilst I am reluctant to attribute gendered preconceptions to critical analyses, it seems not incidental that male critics of Argento's *giallo* talk

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<sup>15</sup> Sevastakis, Michael (2002). A Dangerous Mind: Dario Argento's *Opera*. *Kinoeye: new perspectives on European Film*. Vol 2. Issue 12. 24 June 2002. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.kinoeye.org/02/12/sevastakis12.php>

repeatedly about disgust, fear and anxiety in connection with the female body and refute any possible female empowerment that such figurations may or may not entail.

Further, in drawing upon an etymology of fear and disgust, both Mendik and Sevastakis locate *Opera*'s transgressive desires within the [male] individual's pre-Oedipal relations with the repressed maternal agent. This is also, of course, where Studlar's argument around cinematic masochism becomes problematic, as does Clover's otherwise useful theorisation of the reactive gaze in *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*<sup>16</sup>. In "The Final Girl: A Few Thoughts on Feminism and Horror", Donato Totaro contends that Clover's discussion of masochistic pleasures is a straight forward inversion of Laura Mulvey's 'male-centred identification of sadistic-voyeur' into identification with the [masculinised] final girl - the 'masochistic-voyeur.' Discussing this inversion of gender spectatorship, Totaro argues:

Vis-à-vis the Mulvian argument against male-driven cinematic pleasure, Clover does for the horror film what Gaylan Studlar did for the Sternberg-Dietrich films: swapping the Post-Oedipal, male voyeuristic-sadistic impulse for a more feminine, Pre-Oedipal masochistic impulse.<sup>17</sup>

This, as I have already argued, does not mean that Clover's arguments are without merit, but serves to foreground the limitations of discussing cinematic pleasure and spectatorship in European films, as demonstrated through the case study of Argento's *giallo*; whilst retaining the psychoanalytical model. Linda William's discussion of J.

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<sup>16</sup> Clover goes as far as to suggest that: 'Given her assumption that active voyeurism is sadistic, her failure to consider the possibility that passive fetishistic scopophilia may point to masochism constitutes a blind spot.' (Clover, 1992: 206)

<sup>17</sup> Totaro, Donato (2002) The Final Girl: A Few Thoughts on Feminism and Horror. *Offscreen*. January 2002. [Online]. Available at: [http://www.horschamp.qc.ca/new\\_offscreen/final\\_girl.html](http://www.horschamp.qc.ca/new_offscreen/final_girl.html)



Sheridan Le Fanu's 1872 vampire story *Carmilla* provides an excellent example of the type of problems that a feminist critic faces when exploring the possibilities of female sexuality and aggressivity outside of traditional iconic representations of femininity. Female sexuality can only express itself either in dreams and/or death in 'a liminal space within which the subject shifts into another gear, and ceases to define itself according to the either/or choices of the binary, waking world.' (Williams, 1995: 163).

At the same time, we must not forget - as Clover stresses - that feminism has provided an important role in the understanding of gender relations and representations - both as practice and theory - and in particular, the way in which: 'Identifying male sadism, especially towards women, and holding men at least theoretically culpable for such acts as rape, wife beating, and child abuse are major achievements for modern feminism.' (Clover, 1992: 226). And if Clover's discussion of the reactive gaze is in itself reactionary, she does highlight the limitations of continued associations of the cinematic apparatus with male sadism in which: 'the practice of remarking on male sadism in a film (like the showing of male sadism in a film) may be intended to align the remarker with feminism, it also works to naturalize sadistic violence as a fixture of masculinity - one of the few fixtures of masculinity remaining in a world that has seen the steady erosion of such. It is a gesture, in other words, that ends up confirming what it deplors.' For Clover, the concentration on male sadism has led to the relative silence on the subject of male masochism. This she argues forms a 'blank spot' because 'to broach it is not only to bring homosexuality into the picture, but also to unsettle what is apparently our ultimate gender story.' (Clover, 1992: 226).

What Clover's analysis indicates is how difficult it is for a feminist film critic to deny male sadism without denying by association the real effects of male violence in the real world. But we could argue in opposition to Clover's thesis, that this is only problematic if we view the cinematic image as a simplistic reflection of the outside world, rather than a fantastic creation/recreation of the world. This is the sort of binary distinctions and theoretical impasses as I have demonstrated throughout this doctorate, a Deleuzian methodology can allow the [feminist] critic to overcome without denying the real affects of male violence and gender imbalance in the real world.

To return to Argento's *giallo* and my discussion of the masochistic spaces of *Opera*. It is the 'passionate, masochistic excess' inscribed by images of dismemberment, such as the hacking out of Julia's throat and the speeding bullet through Mira's eye in *Opera*, which leads Shaviro to state that: 'it is so wrong to regard the films of someone like Dario Argento as misogynist or vengefully patriarchal fantasies.' Instead '[t]he spectatorial affect of terror is an irrecoverable excess, produced when violated bodies are pushed to their limits.' (Shaviro, 1993: 60.1). In "The Site of the Body in Torture/The Sight of the Tortured Body: Contemporary Incarnations of Graphic Violence in the Cinema and the Vision of Edgar Allan Poe", Wheeler Winston Dixon maps out a similar argument to Shaviro when talking about extreme bodily violation in recent cinematic adaptations of Poe's work including Corman's *The Pit and the Pendulum* and Fulci's *The Tell-Tale Heart*. He argues that: 'The spectacle of the victim in pain in recent graphic horror films becomes a Medusic

construct to be viewed at the risk of one's becoming a potential victim of torture oneself.'<sup>18</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Even when the heroine's survival is at issue - as in *Suspiria* or *Terror at the Opera* - the protagonist's dread, shared by the viewer in a state of fearful anticipation, blends into a kind of ecstatic complicity at the convulsive point of danger and violence. Argento's hyperbolic aestheticization of murder and bodily torment exceeds any hope of comprehension or utility, even as it ultimately destabilizes any fixed relations of power. (Shaviro, 1993: 60.1)

In foregrounding the masochistic fantasy, Dario Argento's *Opera* provides an alternative mapping of spectatorial pleasures which are not limited to the restrictions of the pre-oedipal figuration of the maternal, or notions of liminality. Through using Deleuze's early deconstruction of the traditional and linear psychoanalytical understanding of sado-masochism in *Coldness and Cruelty*, I have demonstrated how the aesthetics of masochism cannot be simply thought of in terms of an inversion of the sadist scenario but provides a more disruptive and productive destabilisation of gender and sexual politics beyond the active/passive paradigm of Western logocentrism.

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<sup>18</sup> Dixon, Wheeler Winston (1994). The Site of the Body in Torture/The Sight of the Tortured Body: Contemporary Incarnations of Graphic Violence in the Cinema and the Vision of Edgar Allan Poe., *Film and Philosophy*, 1 (1994): pp. 62-70

## **Introduction**

Because the girl must become a woman, she is invoked as the becoming of becoming. Man is traditionally defined as being: as the self-evident group of a politics of identity and recognition. Woman, as his other, offers the opening of becoming: and the girl thus functions as a way of thinking woman, not as a complementary being, but as an instability that surrounds any being. (Colebrook, 2000: 2)

In the last chapter, I discussed the centrality of the masochistic aesthetic to our understanding of the complexity of gender relations in Argento's *giallo* through a close analysis of the first film in Argento's Diva period, *Opera*. An alternative reading of *Opera* could have focused in on the central female protagonist's (Betty's) resistance to 'becoming m/other' in her refusal to adopt the role of despotic woman in the dramatology of masochism staged by her [dead] mother's lover, Inspector Alan Santini. Betty's refusal to complete her oedipal trajectory: to identify with the mother and desire the father substitute, suggests that the engagement of Argento's *giallo* with the feminine is more problematic than a simple rejection of existing spectator patterns and constructions of the sadistic gaze.

In this chapter, I appropriate Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "becoming-girl" in *A Thousand Plateaus* to analyse the multiple resistances of the abject and anorexic body of Aura in *Trauma* as a possible alternative to traditional [feminist] theorisations of the role of the female subject in horror film. I draw on two recent feminist interpretations of Deleuzian becomings, Catherine Driscoll's "The Woman in Process: Deleuze, Kristeva and Feminism" and Dorothea Olkowski's "Body, Knowledge and Becoming-Woman: Morpho-logic in Deleuze and Irigaray": both

essays can be found in *Deleuze and Feminist Theory* (2000). I begin however by discussing the marginalisation of the girl and her replacement by the sexualised woman in the theatre of Oedipal desires in terms of 'stolen becomings.' I argue that the restoration of these becomings is central to Deleuze and Guattari's rebellious bodies in *A Thousand Plateaus* and in particular to their formulation of 'becoming-woman' as the point through which all becomings have to pass. I situate my subsequent discussion of the Medusian mother and the anorexic and abject daughter in Argento's *Trauma* as articulating an anti-oedipal politics of [female] resistance against the patriarchal medicalisation and pathologisation of the [female] body. I conclude by considering how the resistances of the 'girl' are a central, if unspoken, component of Deleuze's taxonomy of the *time-image*, and the implications this anti-essentialism has for a feminist theoretical practice founded upon the necessity of maintaining binary distinctions.

### **Oedipus: Territorialization and Marginalisation**

The psychoanalyst presents his story, not as a movement or event of desire, but as a mere interpretation, recovery or revelation of the analysand's truth. Oedipus is, then, yet one more reactive figure of man: an event of thought – the story of Oedipus – is used to explain thought in general. (Colebrook, 2000a: 13)

In psychoanalytical terminology, the pathology of the modern [male] subject is derived from the mythology of Oedipus and its incestuous and murderous [male] desires. This primal myth explains not just the constitution of the individual but the very formation of modern society as outlined by Freud in *Totem and Taboo*. The Oedipal scenario provided not just explanation for individual psychosis but for

national conflicts, such as World War 1. In *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930), Freud diagnosed the growth of Nazism and fascism as a mass investment in a singular super-ego. Oedipus then becomes the meta-narrative of the twentieth century simultaneously explaining the individual [his]story and the historical process itself. In order to construct this as an indisputable "truth" - Oedipus as both as individual and universal experience, Freud lays claim to the evidentiary language of science. This is demonstrated in Freud's "The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex"<sup>1</sup> (1924):

Although the majority of human beings go through the Oedipus complex as an individual experience, it is nevertheless a phenomenon which is determined and laid down by heredity and which is bound to pass away according to programme when the next pre-ordinated phase of development sets in. (Freud, 1977g: 315)

The outcome of the successful completion of the Oedipus complex is identification with the same sex and desire for the opposite sex: a 'normal' sexuality and gender identity: in other words, compulsory heterosexuality. Anything outside of this formulation is pathologic, neurotic, psychotic and/or hysterical. At the centre of this personal his-story is the male child; as for the female child, the path to symbolic subjectivity is not so straightforward: she has to learn to identify with the originary love object (the mother) and instead desire the father and his substitutes. And yet for Freud, the girl child's Oedipus complex<sup>2</sup> is simpler than that of the boy-child:

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<sup>1</sup> Freud's construction of the Oedipus complex through his self-analysis came about almost immediately with his repudiation of his earlier seduction theory.

<sup>2</sup> Freud remained aware that his understanding of female development and feminine sexuality posed a theoretical stumbling block - that it was 'unsatisfactory, incomplete and vague' (Freud, 1977g: 321). Freud's mis-reading of Dora's case, which has been taken up by feminist theorists including Clement and Cixous's "Exchange" in *The Newly Born Woman*, seems to underline the limits of his understanding of female identity outside of the oedipal triangle. See pages 147 - 160.

The girl's Oedipus complex is much simpler than that of the small bearer of the penis; in my experience, it seldom goes beyond the taking of her mother's place and the adopting of a feminine attitude towards the father [...] Her Oedipus complex culminates in a desire, which is long retained, to receive a baby from her father as a gift - to bear him a child. (Freud, 1977g: 321)

Pre-genital sexuality - comprising the oral, anal and phallic stages - is marked out by the dominance of masculinity in both sexes. It is only on completion of the Oedipus complex that the girl loses her 'masculinity complex'<sup>3</sup> foregoing her [homo] sexual desire for the mother and takes up her sexualised and biological place within the oedipal family: 'thus the little girl's recognition of the anatomical distinction between the sexes forces her away from masculinity and masculine masturbation on to new lines which lead to the development of femininity.' (Freud, 1977g: 340). In the moment with the gaze passing between the sexes, gendered identity is constructed around the phallus as ultimate signifier of phallogocentric subjectivity:

A little girl behaves differently. She makes her judgement and her decision in a flash. She has seen it and knows that she is without it and wants to have it. (Freud, 1977e: 336)

In his discussion of "Difference", Stephen Heath talks about the importance of vision in the construction of gendered identities: 'the girl is given in analytic theory to know at once the nothing she sees, confirming in that certainty - the certainty of the analytic scenario that premises the woman as the difference of the man, his term - the nothing to see that the body is brought to know; the woman does represent the lack to see on her body, acknowledging, as little girl, visibility on the side of man.' (Heath, 1996:

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<sup>3</sup> 'After a woman has become aware of the wound to her narcissism, she develops, like a scar, a sense of inferiority.' (Freud, 1977g: 337)

49). As we have already seen this predetermination of gender as organised around the male gaze has been the predominant influence in feminist theorisations of cinematic spectatorship, which as I have argued retains, rather than displaces, normative constructions of gender.

In Freud's Oedipal scenario - his theatre of heterosexual desires - the girl-child is related to the margins, as the object against which the boy-child recognises his phallogentric mastery. In these terms, in order to become woman, the girl-child's identity is stolen in order for her to be positioned only in relation of difference to the male subject.

### **Stolen Becomings**

Oedipus is constructed; the boy is constructed on the basis of construction of the girl. To rearticulate the girl's becoming before her body was stolen from her requires, from Deleuze and Guattari's point of view, the 'anorganism of the body' (The Body without Organs), the restoration of becomings.' (Olkowski, 2000: 104)

For Deleuze and Guattari the place of the little girl in the oedipal story is one of stolen becoming(s). Restoration of these stolen becomings of the girl-child takes centre stage in Deleuze and Guattari's follow up to *Anti-Oedipus* (1972), *A Thousand Plateaus: capitalism and schizophrenia* - first published as *Mille Plateaux* in 1980. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deuzeze and Guattari maintain that the denial of the girl-child's separate identity is the bedrock of patriarchal mythology: 'The girl's becoming is stolen first, in order to impose a history, or prehistory, upon her. The boy's turn comes next, but it is by using the girl as opposed organism, a dominant history is



fabricated for him too.' They continue: 'The girl is the first victim, but she must also serve as an example and a trap.' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 277). It is this production of the molar woman at the expense of the girl's molecular becomings, as what Heath calls not-all (Heath, 1996: 56), which is problematic not just for Deleuze and Guattari but for feminist theory as demonstrated by Irigaray's critique of the stolen becomings of the little girl:

Culturally, socially, economically valorised female characteristics are correlated with maternity and motherhood: with breast-feeding the child, restoring the man. According to this dominant ideology, the little girl can thus have *no value* before puberty. (Irigaray cited in Olkowski, 2000: 92).

While the essentialist feminism of Irigaray might seem incompatible with a Deleuzian [non-essentialist] analysis, Dorothea Olkowski's use of Irigaray's critique of the suppression [oppression] of the girl-child - her valuelessness as subject and corresponding value as image and merchandise - is helpful in illuminating the negativity of the formation of female identity according to the oedipal drama. Olkowski highlights the manner in which the secondary status of the girl-child is continued in her adult life which once again, relegates female identity to a relational and inferior status viz a viz the male subject:

So the woman discards her originary masculinity in order to prop up the male symbolic. Irrespective of her identity: 'society only sees, only wants to see, and only can see in her, the mother, the wife, the nurturer, the caregiver, the support task; her task in life is to restore the man - both the infant and the adult. Her purpose is to give way to and make possible the dominance of the heterosexual male body. (Olkowski, 2000: 92).

It is the fluidity of Irigaray's feminine rewriting - her 'improper language' -, which allows Olkowski (2000: 94) to draw lines of connection between Irigaray's 'morphologic' and Deleuze and Guattari's adoption of the figure of *becoming-girl* as the precondition of all revolutionary becomings in their two volumes of writing. And whilst Irigaray's essentialist reformulation of the body of the girl-child and its pleasurable folds is at odds with the haecceity of Deleuze and Guattari's *Body without Organs*, both models emphasize the positive rather than the negative nature of desiring-production<sup>4</sup>. And both models recover the stolen becomings of the girl-child from the normative and heterosexual [repressed] desires of the phallic economy of male subjectivity. In neither account of desiring-production is the girl-child's identity reducible to her status as inadequate image of an original presence. Just as Irigaray states that 'there never is (or will be) a little girl' (Irigaray, 1985: 48 in Olkowski, 2000), Deleuze and Guattari contend that: 'The girl is like the block of becoming that remains contemporaneous to each opposable term, man, woman, child, adult.' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 277). In both revisions of the Oedipal scenario, the girl-child provides a line of flight which decomposes the dualisms of molar identity. This is what Olkowski means when she says that: 'a becoming produces nothing other than itself.' (Olkowski, 2000: 101). The girl-child articulates the instability of identity, which lies at the heart of the production of Oedipal subjectivity: its potentialities and pluralities. This is why restoring the girl's stolen becomings is vital to any politics of positivity because it disestablishes the fixed binary relations between self and other.

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<sup>4</sup> Irigaray's reconstruction of the story of Alice (1997) in "The Looking Glass, from the Other Side" provides an interesting demonstration of Irigaray's feminine/feminist politics. See Belsey and Moore (ed). *The Feminist Reader*. London: Macmillan Press Ltd. p. 217 - 226.

Colebrook draws our attention to the fact that all becomings are girl-like, because of the girl's 'radical relation to man: not as his other or opposite (woman) but as the very becoming of man's other.' (Colebrook, 2000a: 2). Because the "woman" is not a subject, but a relation against which subjectivity is defined, it is only by "becoming-woman" that identity can free itself from the fixed discourse of molar being:

Although all becomings are already molecular, including becoming-woman, it must be said that all becomings begin with and pass through becoming-woman. It is the key to all the other becomings. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 277)

This is why, as we saw in my discussion of the masochistic aesthetics of Argento's *Opera*, when this becoming is aligned with the figure of the male protagonist, it necessitates both the obliteration of the father-image and the feminisation of the male subject. There can be no "becoming-man" because man is taken as the fixed point of reference - the transcendental centre - which determines the place, and position of all beings and becomings. We have repeatedly seen how this has influenced thinking about the cinematic-image and the mechanics of spectatorship in which the narrative is organised from the privileged point of view of the male subject.

In her incisive book on Deleuze, Claire Colebrook puts Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "becoming-woman" in simple terms: 'What is other than *man-as-being* is becoming-woman. We could not say there is an other of man. This would fall back into a logic of distinct beings; we can only become other than man: become-woman.' (Colebrook, 2002b: 140)

**Trauma: her-story**



**Figure 35:** Her-story: The Medusean Mother and Abject Daughter in *Trauma*

Shot in the United States, and financed with American money, Dario Argento's 1992 production, *Trauma*, with its anorexic heroine, Aura -played with some style by Argento's daughter, Asia Argento - and female-revenge plot, is arguably his most mainstream [Americanised] *giallo*. In her otherwise engaging study of Argento's films, Maitland McDonagh (1994: 221-237) dismisses *Trauma* as 'thoroughly undistinguished', 'dumbed down' and 'blanded out'. She contends that *Trauma* is driven by consumerist rather than aesthetic concerns ('a horribly wrong notion'), from which the weirdness and visual beauty that identify Argento as an auteur are absent. In his review of *Trauma*, Adrian Luther-Smith points out that since its original 'hostile' reception which saw the film as 'a misguided attempt to appeal to a mainstream horror audience by toning everything down that made an Argento movie so special', the film has gained a 'credible reputation' in particularly in the light of the

disappointment which has greeted *The Stendhal Syndrome* and *The Phantom of the Opera*' (Luther-Smith, 2000: 219). Linda Badley suggests a different reason for the less than enthusiastic reaction with which *Trauma* was originally received in "Talking heads, unruly woman and wound culture: Dario Argento's *Trauma* (1993)" (Kinoeye: Vol 2, Issue 12, 24 June 2002): 'Another adjective, unutterable but couched there in the silence was "feminised." The maestro had suddenly gone soft on women. He had crossed the *giallo* form not with a teen slasher so much as a "woman's film" - a made-for-TV "disease-of-the-week" melodrama that which a few (albeit drastic) alterations might pass for a Lifetime Channel five-hanky.'<sup>5</sup>

It is easy to see why *Trauma*, with its anorexic and addicted female protagonist, Aura Petrescu, played with appropriate vulnerability by Argento's daughter, Asia Argento, female head-hunter, Adriana Petrescu - Aura's mother - and repeated lengthy sequences of decapitation has proved so problematic to critics and fans alike used to the hyperbolic aesthetization of films such as *Deep Red* and *Tenebrae* (Fig 35).

In comparison to the carefully staged "plan tableau's" of *Opera*, the viscerality of *Trauma*'s "body-horror" seems to work within a different aesthetic framework: one similar to the slash-and-stalk efforts of American directors such as Sean Cunningham and John Carpenter in which the purpose of the narrative is nothing more or less than the repeated dismembering of the human body, and the ever increasingly body-count

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<sup>5</sup> Badley, Linda (2002). Talking Heads, unruly women and wound culture: Dario Argento's *Trauma* (1993). *Kinoeye: new perspectives on European Film*. Vol 2. Issue 12. 24 June 2002. [Online]. Available at:  
<http://www.kinoeye.org/02/12/badley12.php>

with which the genre has become associated<sup>6</sup>. Whether this is because of pressure from American producers, or the input of Ted Klein who co-wrote the screenplay, is difficult to know. It is well documented however that Argento was less than happy with his experiences during the making of *Trauma*, and is not keen to repeat it<sup>7</sup>.

Despite these differences, *Trauma* is similar to Argento's male lead *giallo* in that the narrative takes the form of an investigation into the repetition of an originary traumatic event from the past in the present which resists the detective's attempts to master its meaning using the discourse of male ratiocination. Indeed the repeated severing of the head from the body can be seen as Argento's most extended critique of Cartesian cogito and of the very logic that underlines the discourse of detection. The past event is particularly baroque - the accidental beheading of a boy-child during his birth and the subsequent use of electro-shock therapy to wipe the memory of the trauma from the mother's - Adriana's - mind. Adriana, however, cannot and does not forget and takes her violent revenge on the doctor and the nurses who were present at the birth replacing the lost head of her son by collecting the heads of those responsible for its loss: there are overt similarities between Argento's protegee's, Lamberto Bava's, earlier 1980 production of *Macabro* (aka *Macabre*) in which a bereaved

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<sup>6</sup> This is true even of recent postmodernist parodies of the genre, such as *Cherry Falls* (Geoffrey Wright, 2000), and the interminably dreadful *Halloween Resurrection* (Rick Rosenthal, USA: 2001) in which narrative logic is privileged over cinematic aesthetics, and traditional psychoanalytical frameworks are offered as explanation of their protagonist's behaviour.

<sup>7</sup> Argento's dislike of the American studio-system comes over forcibly in his interview with Maitland McDonagh (1994) as quoted in my introduction. His words when talking about his experiences of working with the studios during the making of *Suspiria* and *Inferno* clearly demonstrate his dislike for the American system. 'It was', as Argento states 'a very bad situation.' For the complete interview see McDonagh, 1994: pp 239 - 252.

woman keeps the severed head of her lover in the fridge, bringing it out to accompany her in sleep at night<sup>8</sup>. The final set piece, which takes place in Adriana's house, a monument to her dead son, is as highly stylised and baroque as anything Argento has directed. And the film's climax in which a young boy - who lives next door to Mrs Petrescu - decapitates the murderous mother using a handheld wire noose is reminiscent, as McDonagh (1994: 235) points out, of the final scenes of *Deep Red*.

### **Becoming m/other**

Deeply attached to an unstable mother [...] Anorexics are afraid of sex. They want to get back to their childhood before the scary stuff starts (Ben to David in *Trauma*)

With its monstrous Medusean mother, and anorexic and abject daughter, *Trauma* is in keeping with the transgression of the gender representations that that as we have seen is the identifying feature of Argento's *giallo*. And just as consumerism and capitalism are critiqued by the traumatised flesh of Aura and her refusal to take up her place in patriarchal society by becoming m/other; the cast of unsympathetic and manipulative men foregrounds a female/feminist politics of resistance against the constraining definitions of the medicalisation and pathologisation of the [female] body. Both Dr Lloyd, who is responsible for the accidental beheading of Adriana's boy-child, and Dr Judd, Adriana's lover, attempt to subjugate woman by controlling their minds and memories: Dr Lloyd tried to wipe Adriana's memories using Electro-shock therapy and Dr Judd attempts to contain Aura's mind through drugs and hypnotism. Linda Badley foregrounds how in the doubling of mother and daughter,

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<sup>8</sup> The end sequences in which the severed head comes to life and attacks the blind neighbour also is similar to the rebellious heads in *Trauma*.

*Trauma* critiques phallogentric authority: 'Her [Aura's] case makes sense in the light of her mother's fate: becoming an adult female means being embodied and subjected to the authority of doctors'<sup>9</sup>. In these terms, Aura's anorexia can be understood as a result of the medicalisation of the female body: 'Her anorexia, the film implies, is a product of the clinic in the Foucauldian sense, of the medical perspective through which the body became subject to the domination of the head, the mind, the gaze, the speculum and the scalpel.' This is clearly demonstrated when, after a tip-off from Grace (David's girlfriend), Aura is forcibly returned to the Farraday clinic, bound in restraints, force-fed using intravenous fluids and sedated. At the same time, we can 'read' Aura's anorexia as a mark of her resistance to becoming m/other and refusal to take up the maternal place within the familial unit. Unlike Anna in *The Stendhal Syndrome* who externalises her rage onto the symbolic other; Aura's resistances are turned inwards against herself: the bandaging of her breasts and her rejection of food are both symptoms of her refusal to conform to the economically valorised female characteristics associated with maternity and motherhood - whilst Adriana articulates an over codification of these female characteristics.

In *Invalid Women: Figuring Feminine Illness in American Fiction and Culture, 1840 - 1940*, Diane Price Herndl highlights how female illness can be both a product of and a resistance to phallogentric culture. She delimits three interconnected views of female illness: 'as a result of the oppressive use of male power, as the resistance to the oppressive power, or as a means to a kind of power of its own (artistic, political or

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<sup>9</sup> Badley, Linda (2002). Talking Heads, unruly women and wound culture: Dario Argento's *Trauma* (1993). *Kinoeye: new perspectives on European Film*. Vol 2. Issue 12. 24 June 2002. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.kinoeye.org/02/12/badley12.php>



“sentimental”).’ (Herndl, 1993: 5). In her discussion of the interconnection between medical and literary models of invalidism, Herndl argues that women’s illness can stand in all three relations to power at the same time, that it can be: ‘both redemptive and destructive, resistant and dominated, liberatory and oppressive.’ (Herndl, 1993: 5).

In *Illness as Metaphor: Aids and its Metaphors*, Susan Sontag (1983) draws our attention to the punitive manner in which illness has become to be seen in terms of individual responsibility. Talking about cancer, Sontag argues that: ‘Advanced capitalism requires expansion, speculation, the creation of new needs (the problem of satisfaction and dissatisfaction); buying on credit; mobility - an economy that depends on the irrational indulgence of desire.’ She continues: ‘Cancer is described in images that sum up the negative behaviour of twentieth-century *homo economicus*; abnormal growth; repression of energy, that is refusal to consume or spend.’ (Sontag, 1983: 64/65). Just as illness becomes a metaphor through which the state can control the self, its self-infliction can provide a powerful form of resistance to that state imposed disciplining. In *Trauma*, female illness is seen both as a result of male oppression and a resistance against that oppression. The mother and the daughter’s refusal to conform to patriarchal society’s attempt to contain their identities inscribes different “bodily” formulations of this female rage against this oppression: the anorexic denials of the daughter’s refusal to become m/other, and the symbolic overthrowing of patriarchal society by the Medusean mother through the removal and collection of the heads from the bodies of her oppressors.

### **The Mother's Story**

In her review of *Trauma*, Badley privileges the 'psycho-metaphorics of the mother's back story' as the film's real text, over the social issue of the daughter's abuse and anorexia. *Trauma* becomes for Badley an Oedipal narrative of castration, decapitation and murderous maternity in which the collection of heads act as a fetisation for female lack<sup>10</sup>. Despite this reductive [psycho]analytical reading of the mother's story, Badley's analysis is useful in that it foregrounds the merging of the personal and the political which is in integral component of *Trauma*'s bodily poetics in which animated heads separated from bodies, whisper clues to the killer's identity and scream as they fall down deserted lift shafts inscribe a visceral and rebellious



**Figure 36:** The demise of the Cartesian Cogito: Dr Judd's death in *Trauma*

discourse against the constraints of the Cartesian cogito and the rationalistic logic of masculine subjectivity. This poetics is foregrounded in the The French Revolution sequence, acted out with paper puppets, and choreographed along to the strains of Le Marseilles, with which the film begins.

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<sup>10</sup> Badley, Linda (2002). Talking Heads, unruly women and wound culture: Dario Argento's *Trauma* (1993). *Kinoeye: new perspectives on European Film*. Vol 2. Issue 12. 24 June 2002. [Online].

Available at: <http://www.kinoeye.org/02/12/badley12.php>

Badley comments that this sequence: 'places the trauma in the context of Dr Guillotin's "humane" machine, the Reign of Terror and Madame Tussaud's atrocity exhibit.'<sup>11</sup> This interconnection between the personal and the political is made clear when the paper puppet theatre appears later on a table in the memorial room to Nicholas (Adriana's dead son).

Badley also foregrounds the metaphorical dimensions of the politics of decapitation: 'We should think also of the fall of Cartesian logic (of the *cogito* as represented by the head), the rule of the mob (the body politic) and of revolutionary French ideas.'. This visceral referencing to the demise of Cartesian logic is central to the [feminist] politics of *Trauma*, and is extended as we shall see in Argento's final film in the Diva trilogy: *The Stendhal Syndrome*. Like the twisted spaces of Adriana's traumatised mind and the bound places of Aura's anorexic body, the narrative of *Trauma* refuses to conform to the male detective's - David's - rationalistic attempts at understanding. Adrian Luther-Smith points out: 'Like many male protagonists in *gialli*, David is impotently caught up in the murderous event beyond his own control.' (Luther-Smith, 2000: 222). In a similar manner to Marc Daly in *Deep Red*, David is unable to reconcile the visible signifiers of violence within his understanding of male violence and female victimology. And in both films, it is the figure of the monstrous mother that is the sight/site of the originary disruption.

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<sup>11</sup> Badley, Linda (2002). Talking Heads, unruly women and wound culture: Dario Argento's *Trauma* (1993). *Kinoeye: new perspectives on European Film*. Vol 2. Issue 12. 24 June 2002. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.kinoeye.org/02/12/badley12.php>

### **Aura's Enigma**

The working title of the film - *Aura's Enigma*<sup>12</sup> - foregrounds the centrality of the female discourse of resistance and rage to the narrative trajectory. This explains why the actual process of detection takes second place to her-story, and also why the film has been denigrated by some critics and fans as a "woman's picture" - The issue of anorexia, is after all, conceived of mainly as a woman's issue. Against Badley's demotion of the daughter's story to a secondary importance to the mother's rage and resistance, I would argue that it is Aura's traumatic and traumatised resistances to becoming mother that are in fact crucial to our understanding of the [feminist] politics of the film. We need to understand that Aura's rejection of food is not just a social issue, but is symbolic of the daughter's resistance to becoming m/other and thus adopting the appropriate position within the Oedipal triangle.

And although in the last chapter I questioned critics use of abjection as a means through which to understanding the traumatic bodily becomings of Argento's Divas, Kristeva's discussion of the processes of abjection at work in the formulation of symbolic subjectivity is useful here in delimiting the nature of Aura's resistances. In her discussion of the role of religious ritual in the formation of the 'clean and proper subject', Kristeva highlights the importance of giving and receiving food in the child-mother dyad: "The nutritive opening up to the other, the full acceptance of archaic and gratifying relationship to the mother, pagan as it might be, and undoubtedly conveying paganistic connotations of a prolific and protective motherhood, is here the condition for another opening - the opening up to symbolic relations, true outcome of

the Christic journey.' (Kristeva, 1982: 115). It is therefore no coincidence that in the casting out of the devil from the daughter, as discussed in Mark 7:27, takes the form of the mother giving of 'privileged food' to the daughter to enable her recovery.

For Kristeva, the abject is an essential part of the subject and represents that which has been suppressed in order for the subject to enter into the symbolic order. She argues that food loathing 'is perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection': a double process through which the subject simultaneously resists and claims patriarchal subjectivity: 'I abject *myself* within the same motion through which "I" claim to establish *myself*.' (Kristeva, 1982: 3). It is central to Aura's resistances that her relationship with David is underlined/undermined through her relationship to food; just as David's attempts to domesticate and subjugate Aura are expressed through the medium of food.

Aura and David first meet before the death of her "parents", when David saves Aura from jumping off a bridge. David takes Aura to a cafe where he insists that she eats. It is only to stop his persistent questioning that Aura concedes to his request, but immediately after runs to the toilet where she ejects the food and its symbolic connotations. In a later scene, David comes back to his apartment to find the remnants of his fridge strewn about the kitchen, and Aura in the toilet retching. And when eventually the relationship becomes sexual, David tries to mould Aura into a patriarchal image of sexualised femininity giving her money with which to buy food, and thus provide for him, to which Aura's response is telling enough: 'I'll try to make

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<sup>12</sup> Based on a short story written by Argento called *L'Enigma di Aura*

you dinner.' It is no coincidence that immediately after this "morning-after" scene, Aura flees David's house and returns to her mother.

In "The Woman in Process: Deleuze, Kristeva and Feminism", Catherine Driscoll (2000) traces the figure of the girl as a connective assemblage between Deleuzian becoming and Kristevian abjection: 'in their accounts of body, desire and subjectivity both Deleuze and Kristeva produce 'the girl' as an impossible figure of anticipation and escape from the Oedipal framework, and thus within dominant understandings of how the subject is constituted.' (Driscoll, 2000: 64). This is similar to the manner in which Colebrook's reading of Irigaray discussed earlier takes up the figure of the pre-oedipal girl as articulating a 'female' identity outside of symbolic signification. It is no coincidence therefore that Driscoll also refers to Irigaray's concept of the girl-child in her article: 'As Luce Irigaray explains, the daughter can become neither the father nor the mother, given that the mother is not a subject.' (Driscoll, 2000: 74). Driscoll demonstrates how both Deleuze and Guattari's and Kristeva's use of the girl works to disorganise oedipal desire and territorialisations; even though their relations to psychoanalysis are fundamentally exclusive. Driscoll draws on Kristeva's understanding of the feminine within language - *L'écriture féminine*<sup>13</sup> (Kristeva, 1986: 200) - in highlighting how Kristeva's recourse to the imaginary provides a similar mapping of "becoming" to that of Deleuze and Guattari. (Driscoll: 2000, 77). Indeed it is significant that both Kristeva and Deleuze make references to the work of Virginia Woolf in whose writing the figure of the girl is centralised in terms of

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<sup>13</sup> *Écriture Feminine*, meaning feminine or female writing, is associated with what is known as "French feminism" and in particular with the works of Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva.

becomings which are not fixed in relation to patriarchal culture: the boy who becomes woman in *Orlando* is perhaps the best example of Woolf's transgression of binary gendered distinctions. But, it is necessary to note, as Driscoll does, that Kristeva and Deleuze and Guattari approach Woolf's writing differently: 'While Kristeva uses Woolf as representative of the gender order's entrenchment, Deleuze attaches her to the girl's role in slipping through and between signifying orders, including the psychoanalytical subject's dualism.' (Driscoll, 2000: 81). With this in mind, it is still possible, as Driscoll does (2000: 82), to retrieve Kristeva's concept of the subject in process - 'sujet-en-proces' - with its multiple disruptions of the symbolic with Deleuze's liberation of desire and its subversion of gendered binaries: both of which unsettle the signifying process of subjectivity.

In *Trauma*, Aura's ambiguous relations to food, her refusal to become m/other in her affair with David, fits in with Herndl's formulation that illness can be utilised as a textual strategy for subverting patriarchal norms. In desiring not to be mother; inscribed through the binding of her breasts and her androgynous form, Aura simultaneously seeks to remain a child, and not to enter into the familial triangle as a sexualised woman. Like her mother's, Aura's protest against patriarchal subjectivity, is one inscribed and transcribed by the postures and performances of her traumatised flesh. In doing so, Aura acts as a 'block' of becoming - a subject in process - to the multiple attempts of the judico-medical establishment to contain her identity to its status as other. Rosi Braidotti in "Teratologies" situates the hidden epidemic of anorexia-bulimia - which strikes one third of all younger women in the Western world - as an example of the body striking back with a vengeance. (Braidotti, 2000: 160) - a

body politics which upset the body politic. And in “Is Sexual Difference a Problem”, Colebrook asks the following question: ‘mightn’t the anorexic body, which posits a radical disjunction between body-image, lived body and empirical body, disrupt the dreamed-of unity of the phenomenological subject?’ (Colebrook, 2000b: 125). But what liberatory possibilities can be seen in the anorexic body - a body like that of the addict, which is turned towards death rather than life? This is the question that Deleuze and Guattari raise in their discussion of addicted body: ‘drug addicts erect a vitrified or emptied body, or a cancerous one: the casual line, creative line, or line of flight immediately turns into a line of death and abolition.’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 285). In his discussion of the bodily transgressions of performance art in “Incorporeal Part II: Fervent Machines”, Robert Lort argues that there is a fundamental [political] difference between the schizo body and the fascist body: the productive and the unproductive: “The fascist body remains repulsed by its corporeality, its physicality and especially its genitalia.’ in opposition to which is ‘[T]he Body without Organs [...] [which] is capable of multiple and continuous conjunctions and disjunctions, connections and reconnections; of effecting multiple arrangements and continuous rearrangements between the organs, machines, objects and adjacent planes.’<sup>14</sup>

Is Aura’s body then merely a fascist body turned towards death, at odds with the schizoid politics of her Medusean mother? Does *Trauma* merely inscribe the impossibility of becoming-woman through which Aura’s possibilities are limited by

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<sup>14</sup> Lort, Robert (2000). Incorporeal Part II: Fervent Machines. *Azimuté*. Volume One. [Online]. Available at: [http://home.pacific.net.au/~robertl/azimute/texts/fervent\\_machines.html](http://home.pacific.net.au/~robertl/azimute/texts/fervent_machines.html).



either death or recuperation back into the patriarchal signifying order? Am I making too much of Aura's anorexia? The problematics of the daughter's bodily resistances can be elucidated by a consideration of the intertextual reference in *Trauma* to that other rebellious daughter, Shakespeare's *Ophelia*. In my analyses of *Opera* and *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, we saw the implicit and explicit referencing to explicit referencing to Lady Macbeth: one of Shakespeare's other disruptive woman. In *Trauma*, David sees a painting of Ophelia in a window of a shop, in front and to the left of the painting is a girl with long dark hair - who we only see from the back - resembling Aura. And it is immediately after David sees the portrait, that he notices Aura's bracelet on the wrist of a passer-by, which leads him to the mother's house and Aura herself.

In *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980*, Elaine Showalter (1985) discusses the significance of Ophelia in the representation and pathologisation of the female body from the Victorian times onwards. Talking about the shift in the view of mental illness at the end of the 18th century, Showalter highlights how the dialectics of 'reason and unreason took on specifically sexual meanings, and [...] the symbolic gender of the insane person shifted from male to female.' (1985: 8). This cultural shift in the representation and legislation of madness led to the figure of the "mad woman" being romanticised into three main visual images: 'the suicidal Ophelia, the sentimental Crazy Jane, and the violent Lucia.' (Showalter, 1985: 10). The use of Ophelia to represent a particular type of melancholic femininity was not new to art, having been utilised by Renaissance artists to designate an improper sexuality. Showalter elucidates: 'Ophelia's flowers [...]

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came from the Renaissance iconography of female sexuality; in giving them away, she symbolically “deflowers” herself. Even her death by drowning has associations with the feminine and the irrational, since water is the organic symbol of woman’s fluidity: blood, milk, tears.’ (Showalter, 1985: 11).

The Operatic connections between feminine sexuality and madness, which we saw foregrounded in the narrative trajectory of Argento’s *Opera*, are also an important intertextual referencing as the adaptation of Scott’s *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1919) into eight separate operatic productions - including Donizetti’s *Lucia di Lammermoor* - demonstrates: ‘It has been suggested that the popularity of these operas indicates a subversive feminist sympathy in the audience; the female opera-goer could experience vicariously “the melancholia, the delirium, the suicides and the murders, and the colartura ravings of genteel male-dominated woman [..]”. (Showalter, 1985: 14/15).

Showalter describes how the figure of Ophelia also became the most popular image through which the signifiers of feminine madness were inscribed within the Victorian asylums themselves: ‘Victorian psychiatrists and superintendents of lunatic asylums were often enthusiasts of Shakespeare. They turned to his plays for models of mental aberration that could be applied to their clinical practice, and in the case of Ophelia was one that seem particularly apt.’ (Showalter, 1985: 90). The hysterical female body pathologised and medicalised was also the theatrical and operatic body. Starving oneself to death became a mechanism of female sacrifice and protest, as Bram Dijkstra contends in *Idols of Perversity* ‘Death became a woman’s ultimate sacrifice of her being to the male she had been born to serve. To withhold from them

this last gesture of her exalted servility was, in a sense, an act of insubordination, of “self-will”. (Dijkstra 1986: 29)

Instead of asking if rebellion was mental pathology, we must ask whether mental pathology was suppressed rebellion. Was the hysterical woman a feminist heroine, fighting back against confinement in a bourgeois home? Was hysteria - the “daughter’s disease” - a mode of protest for woman deprived of other social or intellectual outlets or expressive outlets?’ (Showalter, 1985: 147).

There is little doubt in *Trauma* that Aura’s anorexia is a [feminist] mode of protest to the attempts of the male [medical] establishment to pathologise her bodily transformations leaving her with only with two choices: both of which constitute an abolition of self: death or marriage. This explicit criticism of the suppression of woman’s subjecthood is significantly enough marginalized by recent psychoanalytical readings of *Trauma*: both of which foreground the association between the portrait of Ophelia and Aura. In “The Phantom’s Bride: Hysteria, abjection and corporality: the Gothic heroine from page to screen”, Gallant (2000) appropriates Aura’s ‘hysteria’ to consolidate his ‘traditional’ psychoanalytical position in which the male subject is the privileged figure: Gallant argues: ‘The notion of female subjectivity becomes unsustainable - what we are seeing may be a narrative told predominantly, through female characters, but the structures of voyeurism and fetishism, as well as the controlling voice of the storyteller, are inevitably defined as masculine. In all three films [*Suspiria*, *Phenomena*, *Opera*], the heroine with whose point of view we are invited to identify is rarely released from the objectifying gaze, the eroticising gaze of the masculine spectator.’ (Gallant, 2000: 52).

For Gallant, following Mendik, the careful placement of John Everett Millais' Ophelia for the view of the male spectator [David] in *Trauma* suggests the primacy of the masculine gaze (Gallant, 2000: 58). In the scene, Gallant is also able to "recognise" other paintings - one of which seems to be a representation of either Salome or Herodias - bearing the severed head of John the Baptist - which Gallant 'reads' in terms of Creed's castrating mother - as castrator. (Gallant, 2000: 60). Like the male doctors in *Trauma*, and the male alienists/psychoanalysts in the Victorian institutions, Gallant seeks to subdue the problematic becomings of both daughter and mother. It is difficult not to see this appropriation of female subjectivity by male theorists as an attempt at domination and subjugation of female identity by silencing and containing her protesting bodily becomings. By privileging David's gaze over that of both Aura and Adriana, Gallant reduces the textual intensities back to the Mulveyian model.

In order to agree with these types of "readings", we need to forget not only that Aura is the central witness to the narrative enigma but also that most scenes/sequences are focalised through the gaze of either the anorexic daughter or the Medusean mother, and to reduce the implicit mirroring between the addicted body of David and the anorexic body of Aura that is central to the transgression of gendered binarisms. It is the ambiguity of *Trauma's* ending that perhaps forms the central resistance to this psychoanalytical appropriation. It seems at first that with the elimination of the mother, and Aura's return to David, that both forms of rebellion have been in vain. After all Aura is brought back into a patriarchal definition of appropriate femininity, one defined and confined by her relationship with the phallogentric subject. Whilst

on one level it is possible to see this feminine return to the familial fold as articulating the impossibility of female identity outside of patriarchal definitions [which would accord perhaps with Gallant's thesis]; the displacement of this final oedipal scene for an alternative "imaginary" space works to deterritorialise this oedipalisation.

The film ends not with the conventional Hollywood 'embrace', but rather transforms itself into wide-screen format and the camera leaves the couple, tracking down the street eventually ending up focussed on a balcony in the now rarefied frame. The sequence with which the film ends is of a figuration of a "woman" dancing: this is the same "woman" that we saw dancing in an earlier sequence within the hallucinatory spaces of Aura's drugged mind. The displacement of the figure of the woman between two separate worlds: the real and the imaginary retains the molecular becomings of woman even as it insists on her "real" molar identity. In this way, the blank wall of Oedipal signification is broken apart by this final act of deterritorialisation. Deleuze links the female body into a strange nomadism: 'In the same place or in space, a woman's body achieves a strange nomadism which makes it cross ages, situations and places (this was Virginia Woolf's secret in literature).'

(Deleuze, 2000: 196).

### **Conclusion: the politics of bodies**

But the chain of states of female body is *not* closed: descending from the mother or going back to the mother, it serves as a revelation of men, who now talk about themselves, on a deeper level to the environment, a room, or a train, a whole art of sound. (Deleuze, 2000: 196)

In exploring the foregrounding of a bodily language of rebellion and resistance, I have suggested that the body-politics of *Trauma* can be interpreted as an act of resistance to the oppressive nature of patriarchal society that constitutes woman as “not-all”, as a non-subject. The dual figures of the Medusean mother and her anorexic daughter provide different oppositional strategies to the language of reason and male rationality as implied by the causal-effect logic the discourse of detection. This is keeping in line with Argento's other *giallo*, and their critique of phallogentrism, colonialism and imperialism.

The attempts of the mainly male theorists of Argento's films, such as Gallant and Mendik, to recuperate the narrative uncertainty by masculine potency [as contained within the normalisation of the gaze], I suggested are an attempt at silencing the subversive and transgressive spaces of Argento's *giallo*. In particular, the molecular becomings of Aura and her dispersion between different planes of existence at the conclusion of the film provide a textual resistance to this attempt at appropriation. And whilst there are problems in constituting lines of connection between post-structuralist feminist thought and Deleuze and Guattari's non-essentialism, this assemblage of theorisations - coming from the same historical moment in time - has allowed us to explore the ways in which the figure of the girl is a central component in articulating a politics of difference not based upon the psychoanalytical theory of binary oppositions. It is perhaps in his articulation of female and feminist becomings that Argento's philosophical approach to the cinematic image can be clearly seen.

## Introduction

When 'The Repressed' of their culture and their society come back, it is an explosive return, which is absolutely shattering, staggering, overturning, with a force never let loose before, on the scale of the most tremendous repressions: for at the end of the Age of the Phallus, women will have been wiped out or heated to the highest, most violent white-hot fire. Throughout their deafening dumb history, they have lived in dreams, embodied but still deadly silent, in silences, in voiceless rebellions. (Cixous, 1990: 325)

*The Stendhal Syndrome* (*La sindrome di Stendhal* 1996) completes Argento's Diva Trilogy, and is his most extensive mediation of female subjugation and subjectivisation in patriarchal society<sup>1</sup>. Closer in visual imagery and thematic concerns to the *rape-revenge* film than the *giallo*, *The Stendhal Syndrome* is an uncomfortable viewing experience for the unsuspecting spectator expecting the familiar pleasures offered by the structure of the latter. There is no hidden gothic secret of incestuous desires or pre-diegetic violence to uncover, and as the violent attacker/rapist is revealed after the opening sequences, no need for the conventional unmasking of the concealed killer at the conclusion of the narrative.

In this chapter, I extend my discussion of the multiple-connections between feminist and Deleuzian theorisations of the politics of becoming. In line with Conley's argument (2000: 32), I map the potentiality of the transformative [female] subject in *The Stendhal Syndrome* within the twin bodily reconfigurations of Deleuze and Guattari's "the Body without Organs" and Helene Cixous's "Newly Born Woman":

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<sup>1</sup> Part of this first appeared in my review of *The Stendhal Syndrome*: Female subjectivity and the politics of "becoming other". *Kinoeye: new perspectives on European Film*. Vol 2. Issue 12. 24 June 2002. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.kinoeye.org/02/12/balmain12.php>

## Chapter Ten: **The Laugh of the Medusa**

Dario Argento's *La sindrome di Stendhal* (*The Stendhal Syndrome*, 1996)

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both of which bodily reconstructions remap the surfaces of the flesh with a politics of potentiality outside of the molar fixity of oedipal subjectivity. As *The Stendhal Syndrome* builds on the format of the *rape-revenge* film rather than the *giallo*, I begin with a brief discussion of the origins and structure of the *rape-revenge* film and its emergence within the radical feminist politics of the 1970s. Continuing my earlier argument that the feminist analyses of Creed and Clover are unable to account for the excessive re/presentations of female identity in horror film, I demonstrate the limited applicability of these models to the *rape-revenge* film through a short analysis of the figure of Jennifer, the “original” iconic angel of vengeance, in *I Spit on Your Grave*. In my ensuing discussion of female identity in *The Stendhal Syndrome*, I highlight the manner in which Argento’s film draws on the conventions and codings of the *rape-revenge* film and in particular the similarities between the figure of Jennifer in *I Spit on your Grave* and Anna in *The Stendhal Syndrome*. This allows me to situate the feminine language of Argento’s [post]modern *rape-revenge* film - mapped out in the bodily transformations of Anna - as a line of resistance to psychoanalytical recuperations of appropriate femininity that assert masculine power and potency through the suppression of the female [bodily] voice (Gallant, 2000 and Mendik, 1996/2002).

Drawing on the arguments already put forward in my discussion of *Opera* around the monster as corrupt artist and murder as performance art, I argue that Anna’s multiple becomings are attempts to aesthetically reconstruct her identity outside of patriarchal determinations using her own body as a canvas. These transformations I argue can be thought of in terms of molecular becomings: the birth of a body newly created and without organs; liberated from the ‘prison of logic of meaning and of the Oedipal



subject (Conley, 2000: 21). In particular, I focus in on the slippage of subject and object implied within the introjection of the male subject, Alfredo, by Anna and Anna's consequent reconfiguration as "becoming-woman" and the manner in which this the metamorphosis of the self is inseparable from the transgression of temporal chronological order and spatial coherence. I conclude by arguing that the bodily textuality of *The Stendhal Syndrome* inscribes a female gest - or feminine imaginary - which not only resists psychoanalytical interpretation [appropriation] - but forms a feminist politics of becoming.

### **The Stendhal Syndrome: Great Works of Art have Great Power**

On leaving the Santa Croce church, I felt a pulsating in my heart. Life was draining out of me, while I walked fearing a fall. — Stendhal, *Naples and Florence: A Journey from Milan to Reggio* (1817)

In 1987, 107 cases of the Stendhal Syndrome—a condition in which the viewer of great works of art is overcome by temporary psychosis—had been documented by Professor Graziella Magherini, on whose book, Dario Argento's 1996 film is loosely based. Anna Manni (Asia Argento) who plays the central protagonist, a young police officer attached to the rape-squad in Rome, suffers from the Stendhal syndrome which makes her vulnerable to the aggressive attentions of Alfredo Grossi (Thomas Kretschmann), a violent rapist and murderer of a number of women in Rome and Florence. During an arranged meeting with a possible informant [who we discover later is Alfredo] at the Uzzi Gallery, Anna is overcome by the paintings and sculptures and passes out, hitting her head on the edge of a table as she falls. Suffering from temporary amnesia, Anna returns to her hotel room where through a

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series of temporal and spatial dislocations, earlier events which show Anna on the scene of a brutal murder in Rome unfold. Similarly to the structure of the *rape-revenge* film: the first part of the narrative graphically details Anna's brutal assaults at the hands of Alfredo and the second part Anna's equally violent revenge.

In the film, Argento utilises the analogy between painting and cinema to provide his most extensive, and at times difficult, mediation on the nature of violence and the possibility of its transference: embodied within the doubling of Anna and Alfredo. *The Stendhal Syndrome* is similar to both *Trauma* and *Opera* in that it provides a detailed mapping of a young woman's futile attempts at self-determination and self-expression within an oppressive patriarchal society of which the male monster is but a symptom of a deeper underlying corruption. In *The Stendhal Syndrome*, the female subject's, Anna's, multiple becomings and struggle for an identity outside of ideological and oedipal norms is contained within the complex transformations which result from the repeated violent rapes/attacks on her by Alfredo which take her from violated virgin to femme fatale, from victim to victimiser and from abused to abuser. Anna is Argento's most elaborate and detailed portrait of "la dolente": the "sufferer", whose suffering takes her beyond the restraints of patriarchal society and its codings.

*The Stendhal Syndrome* functions both as a complex painterly composition, showing Argento's usual flair for the visual as well as aural aspects of the cinematic image, and as a commentary on the use of violence<sup>2</sup> in traditional forms of visual iconography, painting and the conventions of modern generic cinematic expression in horror and

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<sup>2</sup> There is obvious irony in the fact that Argento as director as violence is commenting on the possible consequences of the very representations that he is known for.

the *giallo*. It is no surprise therefore that *The Stendhal Syndrome* has had problems finding the critical and cultural acclaim of his earlier and less contentious *gialli*. The most vitriolic response to the film was Harvey's Fenton's labelling of it as "an abomination" in the UK magazine *Flesh & Blood*.

### **The rape-revenge film**

Actually, the rape-revenge film goes the slasher one better, for *rape-revenge* films not only have female heroes and male villains, they repeatedly and explicitly articulate feminist politics. (Clover, 1992: 151)

Both Barbara Creed (1992: 128-38) in *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, feminism, psychoanalysis* and Carol Clover (1996, 137-65) in *Men, Women and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* suggest that the female protagonist of the *rape-revenge* film is the double of the stalker film's "final girl" in that both representations collapse distinctions between victim and violator, sadism and masochism, and both condense male castration fears onto the female other (whether she is figured as castrated or "castrator"). However, the slasher film's figuration of the final girl as androgynous - consider, for example Laurie Strode (Jamie Lee Curtis) in John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978) - diverges significantly from the more feminine body of the female protagonist in the *rape-revenge* film. In addition, whilst there are often symbolic males to provide lawful intervention and/or protection in the slasher genre, most of the men depicted in the *rape-revenge* film are inscribed as violent at worst and ineffectual at best. The *rape-revenge* cycle is synonymous with 1970s feminism and although Meir Zarchi's *I Spit on Your Grave* (1977) is perhaps the most infamous example (a film which has been banned in the UK until this year), Clover situates its

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"origins" in Wes Craven's low-budget *Last House on the Left* (1972) and its mainstreaming in Lamont Johnson's *Lipstick* (1976).

In a recent conference paper, *Angels of Vengeance: Femininity, Feminism and Female Fury in the Rape-Revenge Film* [Screen 2002], I highlighted the limitations of Carol Clover and Barbara Creed's theorisations of female power in relation to the *rape-revenge* film through a critique of their separate analyses of the figure of Jennifer, one of the original 'angels of vengeance', from the 1976 film *I Spit On Your Grave*. As there are overt similarities between the figuration of Anna in *The Stendhal Syndrome* and Jennifer in *I Spit on Your Grave*, and significant differences in narrative structure, a short analysis of the later is helpful in providing a foundation for my subsequent discussion of the Medusean rage of Anna in *The Stendhal Syndrome*.

In *I Spit on Your Grave*, whilst on a working holiday in the country, Jennifer, a writer for woman's magazines, is brutally violated on three separate occasions in what seems to be a ritualistic affirmation of masculinity by a group of four men. With her long flowing locks providing a contrast to her fragile, frail and almost genderless body, Jennifer is the original iconic figuration of female fury. The repeated and extended violations of the female "victim" is similar to the multiple attacks on Anna in *The Stendhal Syndrome*. Using natural lighting, shot on location and with no extraneous sound effects or music, the semi-documentary style of the film is without doubt significantly different to the hyperbolic aestheticisation of Argento's female *giallo*. In the "revenge" part of the narrative, Jennifer uses her [female] sexuality to lead the men to their violent deaths: the most horrific of which is the bathtub castration sequence. Dressed primarily in white - signifying purity - throughout the

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revenge part of the narrative, and despite the violent actions of the female “victim”, we are asked to both sympathise and emphasise with Jennifer’s plight.

In de-eroticising rape as space of [male] fantasy (as suggested by films such as *Straw Dogs*), the *rape-revenge* film has been read as expressive of 1970s feminist politics in that it inscribes rape as an issue of power rather than sex. Talking about *I Spit on Your Grave*, Clover contends that it ‘is nothing more or less than a dramatisation of the “castrate rapists” slogan of the seventies’. (Clover, 1992: 153) Clover utilises the figuration of the ‘final girl’ derived from her analysis of the *slasher-genre* [talked about in detail in earlier chapters] to argue that Jennifer allows the male spectator to explore the fantasy of parricide (Clover, 1992: 164) by adopting the ‘feminine position’ in the masochistic scenario inscribed by the dualistic functioning of ‘rape’ and ‘revenge.’ By mapping out the figure of the “final girl” onto the more multiplicitous figure of “woman” as both “victim” and “violator” in the *rape-revenge* film, Clover’s analysis ends up by reducing the possibility of female empowerment; problematic as it is. There is little to be had, I would argue, from comparing figures such as Jennifer, who are woman, with “final girls” such as Laurie in *Halloween* and Sally in *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*.

Creed offers a similarly reductive analysis of the function of gender and sexuality in *I Spit on Your Grave*. Again, the argument is based around patriarchal privilege as articulated within the meta-narrative of psychoanalysis. Creed is even more dismissive of the genre’s potentiality for female expression than Clover, arguing that female empowerment is an illusion and that the narrative is in fact deeply misogynist. Creed contends that the film eroticises the revenge sequences in order to ‘offer the

[male] spectator the promise of an erotic pleasure associated with a desire for death and non-differentiation.’ (Creed, 1992: 130). The problem with both accounts of the *rape-revenge* film is that they appropriate the feminist message for the pleasure of the male spectator.

In opposition to these [feminist] accounts, I would argue that Jennifer’s violent transition from victim to violator destabilises the paradigm of molar identity politics in that she literally dismembers the male body and the oedipal psycho-sexual dimensions of symbolic subjectivity. Indeed in her reassembling of her writing - previously torn up by the group of man during her multiple violations - and her disassembling of the male body, Jennifer’s revenge fractures the molarisation of both female and male identity. At the same time, in its construction of its fictionality of social commentary, *I Spit on Your Grave* ends up limiting the possibilities of Jennifer’s becomings and her opposition to the molar: with the framing of the narrative within a logical two-part temporal structuring - rape then revenge - the film is unable to explore the full extent and excessiveness of non-oedipal female identity. *I Spit on Your Grave* is restricted by its reliance on behaviourism and psychological realism in which: ‘the sensory-motor link must be very strong, [and] behaviour must be truly structured.’ (Deleuze, 1992: 155).

As in *I Spit on Your Grave*, in *The Stendhal Syndrome*, rape is an issue of power rather than sex. This is clearly indicated at the visual level through the repeated imposition of Alfredo's reflection over and above Anna's - first seen in the clear glass of a taxi window and later in the mirrored spaces of Rembrandt's *The Nightwatch* in Anna's hotel bedroom [Fig 37]. However whilst it is possible to see Jennifer’s

translation from feminine victim to masculine violator in terms of inversion rather than subversion of identity norms, Anna's multiple and molecular becomings and the fragmentation and fracturing of narrative coherence, cannot be seen in terms of a simplistic mimicking or imitation of the masculine, sadistic self as represented through the figuration of Alfredo—the bourgeois intellectual who defines his own subjectivity through the subjugation of women [Fig. 37].



**Figure 37:** the rape of Anna in *The Stendhal Syndrome*: Fact or Fantasy?

Her painful introjection of Alfredo's identity articulates a schizoid rather than Oedipal subjectivity - a radical splitting of the very idea of the subject which destabilises the boundaries between inside and outside, self and other, masculine and feminine. This of course repeats the merging of separate

gendered identities articulated through Adriana's - the Medusean mother - memorialisation of her boy-child, Nicholas, in Argento's second diva film *Trauma*. We could think of this introjection of the [male] subject as symbolising the death of the Cartesian subject and his replacement/displacement by the female other. This is not an organic whole - a matter of synthesis - but a body without organs, an affirmative reconstruction of the 'faceless and transpositional subject.' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984: 78). Talking about Schreber, Deleuze and Guattari stress the inbetweenness of the schizophrenic subject which lies at the heart of their anti-oedipal thought:



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He is and remains in disjunction: he does not abolish disjunction by identifying the contradictory elements by means of elaboration; instead, he affirms it through a continuous overflight spanning an indivisible distance. He is not simply bisexual, or between the two, or intersexual. He is transsexual. He is trans-alive dead, trans-parent child. He does not reduce two contraries to an identity of the same; he affirms their distance as that which relates the two as different.' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984: 76/77).

In *The Cinematic Body*, Shaviro comments on the manner in which the body without organs destabilises biological constructions of gender: 'And the molecular components of this machine, the particular partial organs, each may be biologically "male" or "female" but they no longer function, or do not yet function, in terms of the , 1993: 78.8).



**Figure 38:** Anna's "phallicization" in *The Stendhal Syndrome*

Anna's symbolic self-castration, as she cuts her hair following the first attack, and her subsequent adoption of masculine characteristics after Alfredo's bloody death at her hands—best seen in the disturbing sequence when she attempts to rape Marco (Marco Leonardi), her work colleague and

former boyfriend provides us with an example of this subversion of the molar, binary code of gender which cuts across the feminine/masculine paradigm [Fig 38]. Instead of a simplistic mimicking of male identity, Anna functions as a "block of becoming", a site of pure intensity which deterritorialises traditional iconographic representations of woman as mother and/or virgin and their opposites, the temptress and/or murderess and which is not, I would argue, restorative by recourse to the ideology of the



masculinisation of the position of the spectator as contained within the feminist accounts of the *rape-revenge* film as discussed.

### **Aesthetics and Politics**

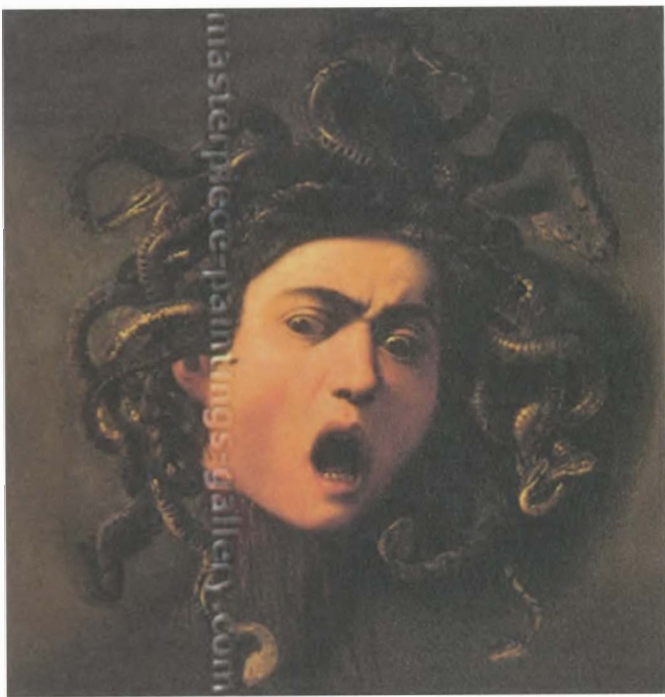


Figure 39: Caravaggio's *Medusa*

This foregrounding of anti-essentialist politics is inseparable from the feminist poetics implicit within the narrative's foregrounding of the links between the painting and cinema. Argento's use of paintings to mirror the thematic concerns works, I would argue, as a mechanism to explore the politics of the female struggle for subjectivity outside and inside the cinematic frame. It is therefore significant enough to the film's politics and poetics that Anna's attack of the Stendhal Syndrome is brought on by the impossible conflict between traditional Renaissance representations of "woman" - Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus*, Botticelli's *Primavera* and Caravaggio's *Medusa*. The painting of Medusa is the last image that Anna sees before her collapse. This is not the first time that Argento has expressed cinematically an affinity between the visual image and the painted image in the terms of pictorial violence - In *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, a painting of an attack on a young woman provides the vital clue to the motivation of Monica, the female killer; in *Deep Red*, a child's painting functions similarly. In *The Stendhal Syndrome* as in *Trauma*, painting is used both as a means

of criticising phallogocentric discourse which can only conceive of woman in terms of binary oppositions and as a possible/provisional modality of resistance. In his review of the film, Robert Daniel points to the relationship between madness and art in Argento's *gialli*, and in particular in relation to the *The Stendhal Syndrome*: 'Art, in *The Stendhal Syndrome*, almost becomes a character within the film. Anna's debilitated reaction to the paintings in the Uffizi gallery allows Alfredo to kidnap and terrorize her. Argento's ambivalent attitude towards art is crystallized here; it can blacken the soul. Anna's affliction in the Uffizi obfuscates the investigation, allowing a murderer to kill again.' (Daniel, 2000: 232).

In "Murder as Art/The Art of Murder: Aestheticizing Violence in Modern Cinema Horror", Steven Schneider<sup>3</sup> also foregrounds the relationship between painting and violence in *The Stendhal Syndrome*, stating that: 'The message conveyed by this film seems to be that art itself is horrifying - in its sublimity, its emotional charge, in its power to compel aesthetic response.' Schneider draws our attention to the manner in which Anna's inability to extricate herself from various pictorial universes is closely tied into her becoming-other: 'There is a kind of analogy being effected here: the horror of art is the horror of unwelcome preoccupation, or possession - the horror of being haunted.'<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For a detailed discussion of Steven Schneider's argument, see *Chapter Eight: Coldness and Cruelty: Argento's Opera*.

<sup>4</sup> Schneider, Steven (2003). Murder as Art/The Art of Murder: Aestheticising Violence in Modern Cinematic Horror. *Intensities: The Journal of Cult Media*. Issue 3. Spring 2003. A horror special issue. Matt Hills (editor). [Online]. Available at: <http://www.cult-media.com/issue3/Aschneid.htm>

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Anna's inability to separate herself from the world of painting - and by association patriarchal oppression - is clearly demonstrated in the scenes where Anna tries to overcome her trauma by externalising her anger onto the blank canvas, at the behest of her psychologist, Dr Cavanna (Paolo Bonacelli). With only the tools of her oppressors through which to redefine herself (the ideology and iconography of patriarchy contained within its linguistic and symbolic structures), Anna's attempt at catharsis is futile and she soon abandons the frame, turning instead to her own body as canvas. The scene ends with Anna's traumatised body covered in black and red paint, in a foetal position on the floor of her room.



**Figure 40:** Painting the female body in *The Stendhal Syndrome*

Like cinema, painting is inscribed as a repressive medium, one whose ideological framework allows no space for the female gaze and therefore no possibility of self-determination outside of male desire.

This is shown earlier in the film, in the stunning opening sequences, in which Anna moves from in front to inside the frame of Bruegel's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, suggests the suffocating entrapment of the female subject within the conventions of the painterly (and by extension, cinematic) frame. This critique of the painterly and the cinematic gaze suggest that Gallant's appropriation of female subjectivity within the traditional coordinates of the masculine gaze in Argento's

*gialli*, introduced in the last chapter, is an active mis-reading of the part of the male critic.

Also highly problematic is Xavier Mendik's psychoanalytical reading of *The Stendhal Syndrome* in "Transgressive drives and traumatic flashbacks: Dario Argento's *Tenebrae*" (*Kinoeye*, Vol 2, Issue 12, 24 June 2002) and in particular his reading of the scenes of Anna's violations as 'fantasy assaults', not real, but contained within her overactive imagination. In relegating Anna's assault to the realm of [male] fantasy, Mendik manages to marginalizes the very real effects of male violence on the female subject which I have demonstrated are at the centre of *The Stendhal Syndrome*'s female/feminist poetics.<sup>5</sup>

Asia Argento's performance of Anna's gradual descent into madness is imbued with both power and restraint. This is apparent even in the dubbed English version of the film, as Anna's emotions are transcribed into visual signifiers through the lines and poses of her traumatised body. In her final transformation [Fig 41], as iconic femme fatale (complete with blonde wig, red lipstick and high heels), Anna takes her violent revenge on the world of patriarchy: a world, which insists on viewing her within the limitations of image and desire and which ultimately, fails her.

Once again turning her body into a canvas, Anna this time reconstructs herself as ultimate object of male desire: a masquerade (like Anna's glasses) which men are

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<sup>5</sup> Mendik, Xavier (2002). Transgressive Drives and Traumatic Flashbacks: Dario Argento's *Tenebrae*. *Kinoeye: new perspectives on European Film*. Vol 2. Issue 12. 24 June 2002. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.kinoeye.org/02/12/mendik12.php>

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unable to see past, and for which her psychologist pays the ultimate price: violent dismemberment at Anna's hands near the end of the film.



**Figure 41:** Anna's final "becoming" in *The Stendhal Syndrome*

The possibility of redemption and/or liberation in her relationship with Marie (Julien Lambroschini), a young French art-restorer, is negated when Marie is eventually killed as part of Anna's continued movement towards total annihilation of self,

utter self-destruction. Dressed predominantly in white, marked by blood (representing her violation), Argento uses the signifiers of pietistic art to emphasise Anna's suffering. In the most disturbing sequence of the film, the final and extended violation of Anna, she is restrained on the floor of a cave with her arms and feet positioned to mimic that of Christ on the Cross. And the conclusion alludes visually to paintings of Christ's entombment as Anna's limp and broken body is held up towards the camera's objectifying view.

### **The Laugh of the Medusa**

To begin, Oedipalisation along with fetishisation and castration - deterministic traits that delimit and imprison the sexes - have to be done away with. They are but words that fix terms in a universalising configuration. (Conley, 2000: 26)



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Throughout this thesis, we have repeatedly seen how the fluid identities of Argento's Divas are situated in opposition to the fixed molar register of phallogocentric subjectivity from the murderous Monica in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*; through the anorexic Aura in *Trauma* and culminating in the violent becomings of Anna in *The Stendhal Syndrome*. In particular, we have seen how the figure of the girl-child in *Four Flies on Grey Velvet*, *Trauma* and *Opera*, the pre-pubescent, not-yet sexualised and not yet woman, invests meaning into the figure of the female outside of mere point of definition for the boy-child as difference. We also saw in my discussion of Kristeva and Irigaray in the last chapter the way in which post-structuralist feminism has utilised the figure of the girl as a point of resistance against oedipal triangulation.

And we have also seen how the mainly male theorists of Argento's *giallo* have utilised the meta-narrative of psychoanalysis in order to try and explain the textuality instability in terms of traditional gendered and sexual norms. As a final point of opposition to these reductive readings –such as those espoused by Gary Needham and Xavier Mendik and discussed in detail in preceding chapters - I want to suggest that in privileging feminine imagery - the gothicisation of spatiality; the dechronologisation of temporality; the irrational and the perverse - Argento's *giallo* operate within what Cixous terms in "Sorties" a 'woman's imaginary' and to draw a connective assemblage between the body without organs and the newly born woman.

I shall write about women's writing: about what it will do. Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies - for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. (Cixous, 1990: 316)

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In “The Laugh of the Medusa”<sup>6</sup>, Cixous uses the Greek myth of Medusa in order to challenge patriarchal construction of female subjectivity in terms of lack and absence. In it she calls on “woman” to reconstruct their identities outside of the dialectical paradigm of phallogentrism and to reconstruct a language not confined by the masculine/feminine binary opposition: a bodily and feminine language. She demonstrates the manner in which woman have been mythologized within the twin figurations of the Medusa and the Abyss. “They riveted us between two horrifying myths: between the Medusa and the Abyss.” (Cixous, 1990: 325). Cixous argues that before these his-stories of frightening female sexuality, women have learnt to be ashamed of their corporeality and power. In *The Stendhal Syndrome*, Anna’s problematic relationship with male images of femininity - the paintings that cause her mental disintegration - and her body are inscribed as part of the same patriarchal and phallogentric discourse of female subjugation. And Alfredo’s violent appropriation of Anna’s body is situated as symbolic of a more generalised and pervasive patriarchal oppression.

In a similar manner to the positioning Clarice in Demme’s *Silence of the Lambs*, Anna may be a member of the forces of the symbolic as an officer of the law but she remains both marginal and marginalized by its very functioning. This is demonstrated in *The Stendhal Syndrome* in a key scene, which takes place after Anna’s violation. Called to a meeting of her colleagues, she sits silently around a large table whilst the men discuss and decide her fate. Small and fragile compared to the large bodies of the other officers, Anna almost seems to be incidental to the *mise-en-scène* of male

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<sup>6</sup> “The Laugh of the Medusa” was first published in France in 1975 within what is known as “second wave feminism”

power and privilege. Her multiple [molecular] becomings take the form of attempts to reappropriate her body - her bodily painting as she is reborn/newly born from violated virgin to femme fatale complete with blonde hair, sunglasses and high heels. Anna “becomes” Medusean as she utilises her female sexuality to destroy her male oppressors. Like Cixous’s “women”, Anna has to write the body in order to reclaim her identity: ‘Writing is for you, you are for you; your body is yours, take it.’ (Cixous, 1990: 117).

### **Writing with the Body**

In her later “Sorties”, Cixous defines the space of bodily [female] writing and its rupture of phallogentric signification, in terms not un-reminiscent of those of Deleuze and Guattari: ‘I will say: today, writing is woman’s. This is not a provocation; it means that woman admits there is an other. In her becoming-woman, she has not erased the bisexuality latent in the girl as in the boy.’ As far Deleuze and Guattari, transformation can only take place through the feminine, the possibility and metamorphosis made possible by the non-subject status of “woman”:

If there is a self proper to woman, paradoxically, it is her capacity to deappropriate herself without self-interest: endless body, without ‘end’, without principal ‘parts’; if she is a whole, it is a whole made up of parts that are whole, not simple partial objects but varied entirety, moving and boundless change, a cosmos where Eros never stops travelling, vast astral space. She doesn’t resolve around a sun that is more star than the stars. (Cixous, 1997: 96).

In “Becoming-Woman Now”, Verena Andermatt Conley provides an incisive discussion of the connections between the newly born woman and the body without organs. Conley contends:



The Body without Organs (BWO) does away with mental and physical obstacles and smoothes out space. It is not without echoes at a certain level of Cixous's Newly Born Woman (NBW), who continually engenders herself through passages of the other in herself and of herself in the other. (Conley, 2000: 22).

In *The Stendhal Syndrome*, Anna's becoming-other is mapped out through her introjection of the sadistic masculine self and is tied into a deformation and reformation of narrative time and space. At one point, Rembrandt's *The Nightwatch* becomes a door inscribing rhizomatic links between Florence (the present) and Rome (the past), through which Anna passes from one time to another and from one space to the next. This signals both a spatial and temporal disjunction, which is central to the breakdown of epistemological systems of knowledge, as past and present inhabit the same painterly, hallucinatory and cinematic frame. It is this temporal and spatial dislocation, which allows us to draw connections between Deleuze's taxonomy of the time-image and Cixous's conceptualisation of the space of female writing. Conley points out that: "by shifting Cixous's reflections on to the plane of Deleuze's taxonomy of cinema, [allows us to] contemplate how becoming-woman is not limited to women filmmakers.' (Conley, 2000: 30). Conley foregrounds how in Deleuze's discussion of the intersection between cinema and the body in *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, he makes reference to female authors and female directors as a privileged cinematic space through which the binary distinction between mind and body is reworked: 'Deleuze undoes masculine and feminine paradigms: the body is not to be overcome nor does one think through the body. Rather, one must plunge into the body to reach the unthought, that is (material) life.' (Conley, 2000: 31). This is clearly very close to Cixous's call for a bodily feminine voice not based upon the dialectics of lack.

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In *The Stendhal Syndrome*, the story is secreted by the traumatic gestures and performances of Anna's violation body. Her self-mutilation, her self-castration and her self-renewal are all inscribed upon the contours of her flesh. Her pain is expressed through and by her body, and the narrative is motivated by these transmutations of Anna's bodily becomings.

### **Conclusion**

We could put Deleuze's pronouncements side by side with Cixous's preoccupations with a bodily voice that goes far beyond the wilful, legislating subject. (Conley, 2000: 32).

As we have seen for both Deleuze and Cixous, the bodily voice of the woman inscribed by and through the contours of her body which articulates a profound dislocation of traditional binaries and structures that locate identity within the molar and the discourse of the major. Just as Cixous argues that woman 'jams sociality [...] [and] inscribe[s] with her body the differential, punctured system of couples and opposition', Deleuze contends 'a woman's body achieves a strange nomadism which makes it cross ages, situations and places (this was Virginia Woolf's secret in literature).' This 'female gest [...] overcomes the history of men and the crisis of the world.' (Deleuze: 2000, 196).

In *The Stendhal Syndrome*, the traditions of painting are used to critique the violence of Western culture's objectification of the female body and self. And the multiple "becomings" of Anna, which take her from violated to violator, rework the cycle of

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abuse as explored in *Trauma* through the anorexic body of Aura Petrescu (also played by Asia Argento), thereby engaging with a much neglected area in the horror genre: the consequences of male violence on female subjectivity. Anna's becomings provide a "block" through which Argento can reconfigure traditional iconographies of gender representation in the horror film. He is thus able to provide a detailed and disturbing commentary on the consequences of violence on the female subject.

It is all too easy to dismiss *The Stendhal Syndrome* as an aberration, an anomaly, in an otherwise fairly cohesive body of work. But this implies a failure to contextualise the film within Argento's increasing exploration of feminine subjectivity as inaugurated by the figuration of the female in *Phenomena*. It is hoped that Argento's much feted return to the traditions of the *gialli* in his latest film, *Non ho sonno* (*Sleepless*, 2001), does not have the consequence of marginalizing the more interesting concerns of his Diva trilogy.

In general, the gender-political range is broader in the European horror film, and these films should be mined by feminist writers and theorists, rather than merely attempting 'against the grain' readings of familiar, over-analyzed American models. (Totaro, 2002<sup>1</sup>)

Even taking into account recent "postmodernist" revisions of the horror film, and in particular the "rejuvenation" of the "slasher" film with Wes Craven's *Scream* (1996) and Wes Williamson's *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (1997), it could be argued that American horror retains rather than subverts fixed gender paradigms which "naturalize" through repetition male violence and female violation. The protracted "garage" sequence in *Scream* and the concluding battle between the "final girl" and the primal father figure in *I Know What You Did Last Summer* could be said to attest to the persistence of traditional models of gender and genre in the horror film. Or at the very least, these films point to the manner in which theoretical and psychoanalytical models of the horror film have become embedded within the very filmic frame.

As Totaro points out, the gender-political range in European horror film is much less stable and simplistic than that of the puritanical mainstream American horror film. With their "aggressive" and "sexualised" woman and "passive" and "impotent" men, Argento's *giallo* provide a demonstrative pedagogy of Totaro's thesis, clearly highlighting the limitations of utilizing existing [feminist] models derived through analyses of American horror. It is not, as I have maintained throughout, that these models - derived from Mulvey - are without merit, but rather that they cannot account for the more perverse pleasures of becoming, opposed to the binary machine of being,

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<sup>1</sup> Totaro, Donato. (2002). The Final Girl: A Few Thoughts on Feminism and Horror in *Offscreen*. January 31, 2002. [Online]. Available at: [http://www.horschamp.qc.ca/new\\_offscreen\\_final\\_girl.html](http://www.horschamp.qc.ca/new_offscreen_final_girl.html)

as inscribed within Argento's *giallo*. The use of the iconographical, the multiple visual references to theatre and opera on the one hand, and piestic imagery on the other, places Argento's female characters well outside these traditional models: necessitating a more informed, historical and culturally inflected approach to understanding gender representations in [horror] film. As we have seen, Argento's woman are reconfigurations of the conventions of "la dolente": the suffering woman, a central component of Italian cinema from its early years: either explicitly as in *Opera*, or implicitly through mise-en-scène and framing in *The Stendhal Syndrome*. In opposition to these strong and sympathetic female characterisations, are the mainly "unsympathetic" male protagonists; such as Marc Daly in *The Bird with a Crystal Plumage* and Tobais in *Four Flies on Grey Velvet*; who function as symbols of patriarchal and capitalist oppression. The constant inability of the central [male] protagonist in Argento's early *giallo* to classify, categorise and colonise the [female] "Other" goes beyond, as we have seen, simplistic questions of patriarchal power and privilege, and inscribes instead an implicit and at times explicit critique of capitalism, imperialism and the politics of consumerism.

And yet, the main [male] theorists of Argento's films, as I have shown throughout thesis, continue to utilise psychoanalytical paradigms of lack, castration and [male] anxiety as a mechanism through which to "interpret" and to render "intelligible" his *giallo* as most recently evidenced through Gary Needham's discussion of the origins of the genre (2002a). But as we have seen, Argento's characters refuse oedipalisation as mapped out *most* thoroughly in the multiple resistances of his transgressive woman, who act as lines of flight away from gendered binaries and the either/or of the psychoanalytical paradigm as shown through the excessive femininity of

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Argento's Divas: Betty in *Opera*; Aura in *Trauma*; and Anna in *The Stendhal Syndrome*. Oedipal explanations constrain and contain gender and sexual identities through the operation of what Butler calls 'exclusionary means' (Butler, 1990: 8). And whilst both Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis situate 'gender' as a social construction, it is mapped on and through the visible [and biological] sign of difference. In Argento's *giallo*, the visual operates within the "powers of the false" through which the signifiers of gender and sexuality are released from their normative signifieds. The central protagonist, the cultural "other", who continually fails to decode the narrative enigma, fails to do so because [s]he utilises a normative paradigm of bodies and genders which equates masculinity with violence, and femininity with passivity. Through their operation as metafilms, Argento's *giallo* refuse the operation of visual pleasure which is made possible through the effacement of the cinematic mechanism allowing the mechanics of suture to function. In these terms to dismiss Argento's work as exploitative and misogynistic, cinematic demonstrations of the truth-value of Mulvey's original thesis around visual pleasure, is to repeat the act of narrative mis-reading that form a central convention of Argento's *giallo*.

In opposition to this, I have argued that Argento's *giallo* can be considered as examples of what Deleuze calls the "time-image": provoked and profound mediations on cinema as affective "becoming", not reducible to the either/or dialectical models of identity, gender and sexuality. Instead, we have the "in-between" as evidenced by the incoherent body of Coatti in *Tenebrae*'s memory-images and Anna's multiple and molecular becomings in *The Stendhal Syndrome*; the "inhuman": a camera-consciousness liberated from the human: the extensive detailing or inventory of settings as in the art-gallery sequence in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, or the

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non-human: events perceived from the point-of-view of insects - a fly in *Phenomena*, or birds, ravens in *Opera*. Instead of a synthesizing viewpoint, we have the fragmentation of the narrative into multiple perspectives which resist reformation into a unified whole. It is this ability of cinema's power to see: 'in an inhuman and multiple way, that gives us' as Colebrook argues in her book on Deleuze, 'a whole new way of thinking.' (Colebrook, 2002a: 6/7). To return to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome: 'It is not easy to see things in the middle, rather than looking down on them from above or up at them from below, or from left or right to left: try it, you'll see that everything changes.' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 23).

This is what could be called Argento's critical legacy to cinema in that if we pay attention to the fluid surfaces and multiple intensities of the cinematic-image, his *giallo* enable us to see and think differently. This may not be particularly easy, it is much simpler to "interpret" his films in terms of well-worn and theorised analytical paradigms; to constrain and contain their "becomings" within the binary logic of psychoanalytical discourse. Returning everything to [male] anxiety created by the "primal" scene/seen - both the sight and cite of difference - psychoanalysis enables the critic to retain normative constructions of gender mapped out at the intersection of male sadism and female victimology. The logic of the binary machine pays little attention to Argento's films as "cinema" and the experimentation with the technology of vision; the baroque and painterly canvasses; and the disjunction between the visual and the aural components of the image integral to his work as we have seen throughout this thesis, become subsumed under the weight of gendered difference.

Whilst Argento's films challenge us to think differently, beyond the limits of fixed models of thought and simplistic paradigms of spectatorship and pleasure based upon

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these models, they do not constitute a denial of the very real affects of violence in the “outside” world: after all as we have seen his *giallo* can be considered extended criticisms on patriarchal and capitalist oppression; the commodification and commercialisation of the female body and the “imperialistic” impulse of the cultural “other”. Often contained at the level of iconographic “imagistic” systems; a convention as we have seen as specific to Italian national cinema; the political is mapped out through the stylised and visual excesses of the *mise-en-scène*. Argento's *giallo* are not symbolic but allegorical; as demonstrated most fully in the multiple references to the Holocaust in *Deep Red* and *Suspiria*; which means that his *giallo* are not simply meta-narratives on spectatorship, which without doubt they are, but more historically located mediations on the nature of seeing and its relationship with violence as articulated through the colonial self's abortive attempt to colonise the “other”: as most coherently expressed in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*.

Binary logic and biunivocal relationships still dominate psychoanalysis (the tree of delusion in the Freudian interpretation of Schreber's case), linguistics, structuralism, and even information science.’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 5).

Using Deleuze's work on cinema, together with his earlier work on capitalism with Guattari, has enabled a more productive consideration of the appeal of Argento's work, than available through psychoanalytical paradigms. The difference between these approaches is best expressed through recourse to Deleuze and Guattari's distinction between the rhizome and the root. Psychoanalytical models of visual pleasure and cinematic spectatorship presuppose that: ‘the tree is already the image of the world, or the root the image of the world-tree’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 5). However, approaching cinema in terms of the time-image, as rhizome, enables us to talk about: ‘multiplicities, lines, strata and segmentalities, types, bodies without



organs and their construction and selection.’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 4). Thinking about cinema in terms of the time-image refuses to privilege the outside over the inside, as Deleuze and Guattari contend talking about the “book”: ‘There is no difference between what a book talks about and how it is made.’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 4). In these terms, we could argue that the time-image is not a model, or a tracing, which presupposes a world that is quantifiable and ready-made. Instead the time-image is a map, which is open and connectable, has multiple entryways, and has to do with performance rather than competence. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 12/13). Or indeed that the time-image is “rhizomorphous”: composed of a play of images.’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 15).

Instead of thinking within and through the human, Argento's *giallo* are open to the possibility of the inhuman and the machinic, which is productive of an “active”, rather than a “reactive” ethics. The impossible shot which penetrates skin and bones; metal and wood, seen from an improbable angle and/or viewpoint: the speeding bullet through the keyhole in *Opera*; and the fly's point-of-view in *Phenomena* (already cited) are examples of Argento's technological and philosophical approach to cinema as possibility, an machinic assemblage - a body without organs; outside the synthesizing viewpoint of the transcendental spectator and the mechanics of gendered visual pleasure. Argento's *giallo* are affective experiences made up of singularities, of tones and textures; saturated painterly canvasses; discordant but triumphant scores, which cannot be reduced to language, but need to be experienced as “cinema”, as “possibility” and as “difference”.

Argento's critical legacy is inseparable from his creative legacy. His cinematic influence extends well beyond his native Italy, and derivative imitations of his work,

such as Antonio Bido's *The Cat's Victims (Il Gatto Dagli Occhi Di Giada*, Italy: 1977), called by Brushini and Tentori 'as an enjoyable un-editing and re-editing of the classic *Deep Red*', but in reality a poor substitute for the hyperbolic aestheticisation of Argento's *giallo*<sup>2</sup>. And it seems significant that the most marked examples of his influence can be found in films with strong, central female [feminist?] characters, such as Toshiharu Ikeda's *Evil Dead Trap* (1988: Japan); Takashi Miike's *Audition* (1999: Japan: South Korea); Daniel Liatowitsh's and David Todd Ocvirk's independent American horror film *Kolobos* (1999) and Cindy Sherman's feminist "slasher" film *Office Killer* (1997: USA).

This is demonstrated in particular in terms of Hong Kong cinema, in which the name Argento functions almost as a "brand" in terms Hong Kong horror films: as a point of marketing within what is called "Category 3 Horror". In "Better Beauty Through Technology: Chinese Transnational Feminism and the Cinema of Suffering", *Senses of Cinema*. Issue 35. January 2002, Arthur Grossman suggests that low-budget exploitation cinema allows an opening for alternative narratives, outside the mainstream:

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<sup>2</sup> Cited on the back of the video cover: Redemption Video



Figure 42: *The Mistress*

low-budget category 3 films, because they don't demand to be taken seriously, can provide disempowered audiences and embattled film directors alike with a safe space to nakedly enact political agendas that would in mainstream films be sanitized, coded with labored metaphors, shrouded in subtext, or disallowed entirely.<sup>3</sup>

That Argento should be considered a point of reference for the sort of conflation of sex and politics that is often embedded within the narratives of Category 3 films is without doubt significant. Talking about Ivan Lai's *A Fake Pretty Woman*, Grossman argues that the film espouses an 'anticapitalist agenda in lieu of the reductive castration anxiety symbolism that usually poses as "feminism" in the exploitation film.'<sup>4</sup> And whilst I would be reluctant to see Argento's *giallo* in terms of exploitation cinema; the use of violent SM imagery in many Category 3 films, and the centrality of dominant [dominatrix] woman, which allows an exploration of female sexuality beyond the binary, clearly links into and within Argento's cinematic philosophy in which the commodification of female bodies forms a part of an ongoing critique of capitalist systems of oppression.

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<sup>3</sup> Grossman, Andrew (2002). Better Beauty Through Technology: Chinese Transnational Feminism and the Cinema of Suffering — Feminism adrift in a sea of ogling orientalism, global capitalism, and fatalist aesthetics. *Senses of Cinema*. Issue 35. January 02. [Online]. Available at:

<http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/35/chinesefeminism5.html>

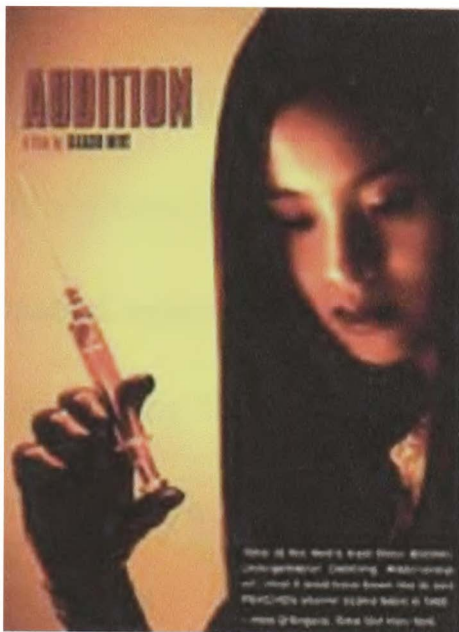
<sup>4</sup> Grossman, Andrew (2002). Better Beauty Through Technology: Chinese Transnational Feminism and the Cinema of Suffering — Feminism adrift in a sea of ogling orientalism, global capitalism, and fatalist aesthetics. *Senses of Cinema*. Issue 35. January 02. [Online]. Available at:

<http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/35/chinesefeminism5.html>

Argento has also been cited as partly responsible for the renaissance in Japanese horror film, although this may be slightly overstating the mark. But it is clear to see his influence in Toshiharu Ikeda's *Evil Dead Trap*, which is pointed to as a pivotal cinematic text in this renaissance.

Like Argento's *giallo*, *Evil Dead Trap* defies classification. A hybrid of the sub-genre of the American "slasher" film and the body-horror of Cronenberg, and Japanese science fiction cinema, *Evil Dead Trap* offers a number of overt intertextual references to Argento's *giallo* in terms of cinematography, iconography and music. The first half of the film takes place in an abandoned warehouse, where a masked man in black gloves and a raincoat [a convention of the *giallo* as we have seen] stalks a group of mainly young woman: who as it has been noted are played by Japanese porn stars.

Long takes; skewed camera angles and minimal editing are "directly" representative of Argento's cinematography; whilst the music, sampled from the soundtrack of *Deep Red*; provides a more direct and explicit link. The second half of the film: the confrontation between the "final girl" and the monstrous "male" is more Cronenberg than Argento. And whilst it might be difficult to ascribe a feminist sensibility to *Evil Dead Trap*, it paved the way for films such as Takashi Miike's *Audition* (1999: Japan) and the *Ring* trilogy.



**Figure 43:** Asami in *Audition*

At the centre of Miike's *Audition*, is the figure of Asami (Eihi Shiina), a beautiful young woman, who attends the audition, that gives the film its title, by TV producer Aoyama Shigeharu (Ryo Ishibashi), who is looking for a potential and passive wife: the idealisation of appropriate Japanese femininity. Much feted for the violence of its closing sequences, when Asami armed with steel wire saws off Aoyama's feet, as retribution for the men in her life who have systematically abused and oppressed her, *Audition* bears comparison both aesthetically and thematically to Argento's *The Stendhal Syndrome*.

With their long dark hair, and multiple/molecular "becomings", Asami and Anna are almost mirror images, connected both iconographically and thematically in their violent resistances to male oppression. [Fig 43 and Fig 44]



**Figure 44:** Anna in *The Stendhal Syndrome*

In American horror film, Argento's influence can also be seen. The recent low-budget *Kolobos* (1997) contains multiple references to European horror generally, and Argento's films specifically. Again as in *Evil Dead Trap*, one of the ways in which Argento is cited is in terms of music: the score bearing an uncanny resemblance to the

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Goblin soundtrack for *Suspiria*. And also as in *Evil Dead Trap*, the cinematography is similar to Argento's: made up of long takes, distorted angles and constant deframings and reframings within doorways. If we miss the point, then there is a direct visual reference: this time to *Deep Red*, in a brutal murder scene towards the film's conclusion in which a male character has his mouth repeatedly and brutally bashed against the edge of a sink. And again, we have a central female protagonist, Kyra (Amy Weber), as both victim and violator, and through whose "neurotic" vision the narrative is focalised; defies classification in traditional gendered binaries:.



**Figure 43:** The mousy but dangerous Dorine in Cindy Sherman's *Office Killer*

Finally, Cindy Sherman's *Office Killer*. Better known for her self-portraits, Sherman's own 'feminist' take on the "slasher" film, *Office Killer*, stars Carol Kane in the central role as Dorine Douglas: a seemingly, shy and unassuming office worker. Sacked from her

job as a copyeditor on a magazine, called the "Constant Consumer" [pun intended], Dorine takes violent revenge on her co-workers, murdering them one by one: transforming in the process from a timid, downtrodden "final-girl" to iconic femme fatale by the end sequences. Sherman has directly referenced Argento as a source of inspiration for her film. A feminist and political critique of consumerism, commodification and capitalism, *Office Killer* once again demonstrates the profound impact of Argento's work on horror cinema generally, and indeed on what could almost be called "feminist" and/or counter-cultural paradigms of horror cinema.

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It is clear that both critically and creatively Argento's influence cannot be underestimated. And this legacy clearly demonstrates that it is within the reworking of the relationship between gender and genre that Argento's influence can be most evidently seen. I started this thesis by arguing that Argento can be seen as an example of what Deleuze calls a great director, as creator of cinematic philosophy, with which *Cinema 1: The Movement Image* begins. It seems appropriate to end this with another quote from Deleuze, but this time from the conclusion to *Cinema 2: The Time Image*:

The theory of cinema does not bear on the cinema, but on the concepts of cinema, which are no less practical, effective or existent than cinema itself. The great cinema authors are like those painters or the great musicians: it is they who talk best about what they do. But, in talking, they become something else, they become philosophers or theoreticians - even Hawks wanted no theories, even Godard when he pretends to distrust them. Cinema's concepts are not given in cinema. And yet they are cinema's concepts, not theories about cinema. So that there is always a time, midday-midnight, when we must no longer ask ourselves, 'What is cinema?' but 'What is philosophy?' Cinema itself is a new practice of images and signs, whose theory philosophy must produce as conceptual practice. For no technical determination, whether applied (psychoanalysis, linguistic) or reflexive, is sufficient to constitute the concepts of cinema itself. (Deleuze: 2000: 280)



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- Antonioni, Michelangelo (1960). *The Adventure*. Italy/France
- Antonioni, Michelangelo (1966). *Blow-up*. UK
- Argento, Dario (1971). *The Cat O'Nine Tails*. France/Italy/West Germany
- Argento, Dario (1970). *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*. Italy/West Germany
- Argento, Dario (1972). *Four Flies on Grey Velvet*. Italy/France
- Argento, Dario (1975). *Deep Red*. Italy
- Argento, Dario (1977). *Suspiria*. Italy /West Germany
- Argento, Dario (1980). *Inferno*. Italy
- Argento, Dario (1982). *Tenebrae*. Italy
- Argento, Dario (1985). *Phenomena*. Italy
- Argento, Dario (1987). *Opera*. Italy
- Argento, Dario (1992). *Trauma*. USA/Ital
- Argento, Dario (1996). *The Stendhal Syndrome*. Italy
- Argento, Dario. (1998). *The Phantom of the Opera*. Italy/Hungary
- Argento, Dario and Romero, George (1990). *Two Evil Eyes*. USA/Italy
- Argento, Dario (2001). *Sleepless*. Italy
- Bava, Lamberto (1980). *Macabre*. Italy
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- Bava, Mario (1963). *The Whip and the Body*. Italy/France
- Bava, Mario (1964). *Blood and Black Lace*. Italy/Monaco/France/West Germany
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- Bava, Mario (1971). *A Bay of Blood*. Italy
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- Bava, Mario (1973). *Lisa and the Devil*. Italy/West Germany/Spain
- Antonio Bido (1977). *The Cat's Victims*. Italy
- Bionchi, Andrea (1980). *Burial Ground*. Italy
- Blassiti, Alessandro (1929). *Sun*. Italy
- Blassiti, Alessandro (1957). *Europe by Night*. Italy
- Bigelow, Kathryn (1990). *Blue Steel*. USA
- Camerini, Mario (1935). *I'll Give a Million*. Italy
- Camerini, Mario (1937). *Mr Max*. Italy
- Capuana, Luigi (1942). *The Sleeping Beauty*. Italy
- Capuana, Luigi (1942). *Five Moon Street*. Italy
- Carpenter, John. (1978). *Halloween*. USA
- Corman, Roger (1961). *The Pit and the Pendulum*. USA
- Craven, Wes. (1972). *The Last House on the Left*. USA.
- Cunningham, Sean (1980). *Friday 13th*. USA
- D'Amato, Joe (1980). *The Grim Reaper*. Italy
- D'Amato, Joe (1980). *Erotic Nights of the Living Dead*. Italy
- D'Amato, Joe (1997). *Caligula: The Untold Story*. Italy
- Dallamoria, Massimo (1974). *What have you done to her daughters?* USA
- Dante, Joe (1981). *The Howling*. USA
- De Sica, Vittorio (1948). *Bicycle Thieves*. Italy
- Demme, Jonathan (1991). *The Silence of the Lambs*. USA
- Deodata, Ruggero (1976). *The Last Cannibal World*. Italy



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- Fisher, Terence (1968). *The Devil Rides Out*. USA
- Freda, Riccardi (1957). *The Vampires*. Italy
- Freda, Riccardo (1959). *Caltiki The Immortal Monster*. Italy/USA
- Fulci, Lucio (1971). *A Lizard in a Woman's Skin*. Italy
- Fulci, Lucio (1979). *Zombie Flesh Eaters*. Italy
- Fulci, Lucio (1980). *City of the Living Dead*. Italy
- Fulci, Lucio (1981). *The House by the Cemetery*. Italy
- Fulci, Lucio (1981). *The Black Cat*. Italy
- Fulci, Lucio (1981). *The Beyond*. Italy
- Fulci, Lucio (1982). *The New York Ripper*. Italy
- Francisci, Pietro (1957). *The Labors of Hercules*. Italy/Spain
- Franju, Georges (1957). *Eyes without a face*. Italy/France
- Garnett, Tay (1946). *The Postman always rings twice*. USA.
- Genina, Augusto (1936). *The Siege of Alcazu*. Italy
- Genina, Augusto (1940). *The White Squadron*. Italy
- Gillet, Robbe (1961). *Last year in Marienbad*. France/Italy
- Godard, Jean-Luc (1967). *Weekend*. France
- Greenway, Peter (1996). *The Pillow Book*. France/UK/Netherlands
- Hitchcock, Alfred (1954). *Rear Window*. USA
- Hitchcock, Alfred. (1958). *Vertigo*. USA
- Hitchcock, Alfred (1960). *Psycho*. USA
- Hitchcock, Alfred (1963). *The Birds*. USA
- Ikeda, Toshiharu. (1988). *Evil Dead Trap*. Japan
- Jordan, Neil (1992). *The Crying Game*. UK/Japan

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- Lado, Aldo (1972). *Who Saw Her Die*. Italy
- Lanzmann, Claude (1985). *Shoah*. France
- Leone, Sergio (1964). *A Fistful of Dollars*. West Germany/Spain/Italy
- Leone, Sergio (1968). *Once Upon a Time in The West*. Italy/USA
- Lewin, Albert (1945). *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. USA
- Liatowitsh, Daniel and Ocvirk, David Todd. (1999). *Kolobos*. USA
- Lustig, William. (1980). *Maniac*. USA
- Miike, Takashi (1999). *Audition*. Japan/South Korea
- Mogherini, Flavio (1977). *The Pyjama Girl Case*. Italy
- Niccol, Andrew (1997). *Gattaca*. USA
- Ossorio, Amando de (1976) *Lorely's Grasp*. Spain
- Ossorio, Amando de (1974). *Night of the Sorcerers*. Spain
- Peckinpah, Sam (1971). *Straw Dogs*. UK
- Polanski, Roman (1968). *Rosemary's Baby*. USA.
- Powell, Michael (1960). *Peeping Tom*. UK
- Preminger, Otto (1949). *Whirlpool*. USA
- Rafelson, Bob (1981). *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. USA/Germany
- Ridley-Scott (1982). *Bladerunner*. USA.
- Ridley-Scott (1991). *Thelma and Louise*. USA
- Roeg, Nicholas (1973) *Don't Look Now*. UK/Italy
- Rollin, Jean. (1970). *Le Frisson des Vampire*. France
- Rollin, Jean (1971). *Requiem for a Vampire*. France
- Rollin. Jean (1973). *La Rose de Fer*. France
- Rollin, Jean. (1979). *Fascination*. France
- Rossellini, Roberto (1945). *Rome, Open City*. Italy

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Scavolini, Romano (1981). *Blood Splash (Nightmares in a Damaged Brain)*. USA

Sherman, Cindy (1997). *Office Killer*. USA

Simón, Juan Piquer (1981). *Pieces*. USA/Spain /Puerto Rico

Soavi, Michele (1987). *Stagefright*. Italy

Soavi, Michele (1989). *The Church*. Italy

Tolk, André (1953). *House of Wax*. USA

Visconti, Luchino (1942). *Obsession*. Italy

Visconti, Luchino (1960). *Rocco and His Brothers*. . Italy

Whale, James. (1932). *Frankenstein*. USA

Williamson, Kevin (1997). *I Know What you Did Last Summer*. USA

Zarchi, Meri (1977). *I Spit on Your Grave*. USA