Artistic Imagery in Dario Argento’s Cinema

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the work of Dario Argento, a filmmaker whose cinematic style and use of technology have helped popularise Italian Horror both domestically and internationally. Specifically, this analysis engages with Argento’s use of an art-historical repertoire within his cinema, namely the appropriation of architectural, pictorial, and sculptural references, and argues for their importance in terms of reading the main films that constitute my primary corpus. Existing research has only sporadically and superficially treated this area and no systematic survey has been undertaken.

The purpose of my analysis is twofold. Firstly, I discuss how art-historical references are integrated into Argento’s oeuvre via copying and quotation, and how they function in the film texts in terms of colour, framing, and lighting. Secondly, I explore whether the iconographic and symbolic processes through which this art-historical repertoire is enacted form a strict bond with the film’s narrative texture. In doing so, my research delivers a broad range of analysis, from narrative to stylistic detail, through an intra-artistic methodological approach.

My corpus comprises four different films spanning across Argento’s career: *Profondo rosso* (1975), *Suspiria* (1977), *La sindrome di Stendhal* (1996), and *Il fantasma dell’Opera* (1998). These films have been selected for two specific reasons. On the one hand, they are the ones containing the greatest number of artistic references. On the other hand, they take into consideration a variety of aesthetic qualities and narrative solutions that, combined together, provide an exhaustive overview of the director’s artistic imagination. Other films from Argento’s forty-year-long career are cited in relation to the aesthetic and thematic affinities with the primary corpus.

Because of my intra-artistic approach, which takes in both Argento’s attention to aesthetic detail and to the synergy of the aesthetic and the narrative within a film through the art historical repertoire, I highlight a new aspect of the semantic, stylistic, and technical complexity of the director’s cinema in terms of influence, referentiality, and intertextuality.
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All my admiration and respect go to Italian filmmaker Dario Argento. Thank you very much, maestro, for sharing your creativity and visual flair with your audience. You have a special place in my heart.

To Pietro Giulio.
Introduction

Io faccio un cinema che mi assomiglia. Sono appassionato di musica e ci metto la musica; sono appassionato di architettura e le scenografie sono interessanti; sono appassionato di quadri e quindi studio i colori, anche le composizioni delle inquadrature. Addirittura faccio lo storyboard: ho sempre fatto lo storyboard e la shooting list.¹

(Dario Argento in Vito Zagarrio 2008a: 33)

Dario Argento’s assertion is a crucial starting-point for a general consideration of the director’s body of work. As McDonagh (1994: 45) has discussed, throughout his forty-year-long career as a director Argento’s discerning engagement with style and technique has delighted the most exigent and sophisticated horror audiences and aroused the curiosity of film criticism. Argento’s background lies in working as a film critic for the Roman newspaper Paese Sera in the decade preceding his debut as a filmmaker, which came with L’uccello dalle piume di cristallo (1970). Throughout the 1960s, the director worked as a screenwriter for many of the exploitative genres, such as the commedia all’italiana and the spaghetti western, and his most distinctive features as a writer lie in his collaboration on the first draft of the script for Sergio Leone’s C’era una volta il West (1967), together with the then twenty-six-year-old Bernardo Bertolucci.² These experiences as a critic and as a screenwriter have allowed Argento to explore the narrative of the exploitative genres and, at the same time, to become familiar with some of the stylistic and technical tropes typical of art movies, such as German Expressionism of the 1920s, Alfred Hitchcock, and the French Nouvelle Vague (Bondanella 2002: 420; Menarini 2008:

¹ All quotations from the original Italian and French have been translated by the author of this thesis and included in the footnotes. [My cinema reflects my personality. I am passionate about music and I study music. I am passionate about architecture and mise-en-scène and I study them. I am passionate about canvasses and I study their colour palette and the composition of each shot. I even create the storyboard: I regularly prepare the storyboard and the shooting list].
² For more information on the collaboration between Argento and Bertolucci on the first draft of the script for Sergio Leone’s C’era una volta il West, see De Fornari (2008: 90-92). For a full list of films on which Argento collaborated as a screenwriter, see Zagarrio (2008c: 356-357); and Pugliese (2011: 160).
Specifically, as Thoret (2003: 79-80) and Pezzotta (2008: 84-86) have argued, Argento’s background as a critic and as a screenwriter has allowed him to experiment with a captivating combination of auteurist and popular cinema that explores the narrative repertoire typical of Italian Horror of the 1960s using a highly innovative style and technique. Since L’uccello dalle piume di cristallo, Argento has adhered to the Giallo’s narrative tradition inaugurated by Mario Bava’s La ragazza che sapeva troppo (1962) and Sei donne per l’assassino (1964) and combined it with a range of highly sophisticated visual tropes, such as complex camera angles, flamboyant cinematography and mise-en-scène, and unsettling soundtrack, which have been re-elaborated and re-shaped throughout the 1980s and 1990s in a subsequent corpus of films of remarkable aesthetic and stylistic consistency. In this respect, because of the adherence to exploitative genres in narrative and the combination of auteurist tropes in style and technique, Argento’s cinema may cohere with Vincendeau’s definition of “international luxury product”. According to Vincendeau (1995: 30), an “international luxury product” is an example of “high art” cinema in style and use of technology, which has the specific aim of targeting middle class and middlebrow audiences with more demanding artistic and cultural values. The identification of Argento’s cinema with Vincendeau’s definition of “international luxury product” is also due to financial reasons. Grandson of an Italian film distributor in Brazil and son of a film producer and a star system photographer, Argento has had production control of his films since the 1970s, running the SEDA production company together with his father Salvatore and his brother Claudio (Pugliese 2011: 20-21). While his colleagues

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3 For more information on the art and popular cinema that managed to attract Argento’s attention in the period he worked as a film critic and as a screenwriter and contributed to influence his narrative and style as a director, see Bisoni (2003: 65-72); and Della Casa (2008: 68-72).

4 For more information on the coexistence of “high art” cinema through style and use of technology and popular cinema through narrative devices in Argento’s corpus of films, see also Manzoli (2008: 105-112).

5 The SEDA Spettacoli was run by Dario’s father Salvatore together with Italian producer Franco Pedacchia and produced the director’s work until 1977. In 1977, the SEDA passed to Dario’s brother Claudio who continued his father’s work together with Italian producer Alfredo Cuomo under the name of Intersound Roma until 1980 and Sigma Cinematografica until 1982. Left alone, Dario Argento first founded D.A.C. Film and then A.D.C. Film, which specialised in horror cinema made by him and by other horror filmmakers for a niche market until 1996. (Wood 2005: 11; 59). Dario Argento’s agreement with producer Giuseppe Colombo was the opportunity to create Cine2000, which lasted until 2000. Dario Argento then reunited with his brother Claudio and founded Opera Film that produced the director’s work until 2007. For more information, see also Gomarasca (2008: 246-252).
working on Italian Horror and Gialli were mainly aiming at commercial success through a series of mid- to low-budget films with relentless production practices, as a director Argento has constantly transcended the cyclic, production-line, spin-off system industry and has rarely worked on extremely low-budget cinema or cinema “made to order” (Met 2006: 201-202; Bondanella 2009: 409). Because of his popularity at the box-office since his directorial debut, Argento has been able to cover the cost of his films on the Italian market alone. He has eventually cashed in on his own reputation, and his international cult status has helped him to maintain quality in his genre films by means of a relatively big production budget and assured international distribution (Wood 2005: 59).6

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, however, Argento’s creativity in style, scrupulousness for technical achievement, and dependence on intriguing and evocative images have been broadly labelled by film criticism as the director’s means of distracting public attention from a general lack of storytelling in his cinema. The only remarkable consideration of style and use of technology in Argento’s cinema came from specific domestic and international horror fanzines (Gallant 2001a: 66). American film reviewer Judith Crist from The New York Magazine, for example, wrote in a review about Il Gatto a Nove Code on 7 June 1971: “the film’s flashy-stylish extravagance counts only as a device put in place to distract attention from the perceived weaknesses of the distinctly un-Hollywood approach to storytelling” (McDonagh 1994: 69). With the publication of Maitland McDonagh’s study on Argento (1991), this negative trend has been rapidly replaced by an increasing critical appreciation and revaluation of the director’s body of work.7 Specifically, the combination of exploitative genres in narrative and “high art” cinema in style and technique that is typical of Argento’s work has been the object of critical study since the beginning of the 1990s in conjunction with a revaluation of the horror genre at an international level. In the first edition of her volume on Argento, McDonagh retraces the director’s

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6 For more information on Argento’s fortune at the box-office since the 1970s, see Montini (2008: 63-67).
7 McDonagh’s first edition of her critical study on Argento is now outdated as it analyses the director’s career from his directorial debut with L’uccello dalle piume di cristallo (1970) to his collaboration with American filmmaker George A. Romero in the two-episode horror film Due occhi diabolici (1990). Because of the commercial success and the international consideration it received, however, McDonagh’s study was re-published in 1994 and in 2010 with updated material. For my thesis, I have focused on the 1994 and 2010 versions.
creative evolution from his first experiences as a film critic and screenwriter to his debut as a filmmaker in the 1970s, going on to consider his work up to the early 1990s. In doing so, McDonagh tries to demonstrate how Argento’s background as a film critic and screenwriter was crucial to his future aesthetic and narrative choices as a director. According to McDonagh, the fact that Argento worked as a film critic and screenwriter allowed him to become familiar with the style and technique of some of the auteurist cinema, such as German Expressionism of the 1920s, Alfred Hitchcock, and Michelangelo Antonioni, and to transfer the visual tropes typical of this cinema to the narrative tradition of the domestic Giallo sub-genre inaugurated by Mario Bava in the 1960s. In this way, Argento was the first director of Italian Horror to blend the visual tropes of auteurist cinema, such as complex camerawork, flamboyant cinematography and mise-en-scène, and unsettling soundtrack, with a popular genre hitherto little accustomed to stylistic and technical experimentalism. McDonagh then analyses Argento’s narrative and style from L’uccello dalle piume di cristallo (1970) to Due occhi diabolici (1990), following this perspective of a combination of auteurist and popular influences at the basis of his cinema. The aesthetic and narrative influences in Argento’s corpus of films are not restricted to the aforementioned auteurist and popular cinema, but also derive from modern and contemporary literature. While the noir fiction genre of Fredric Brown’s The Screaming Mimi (1949) lies at the heart of L’uccello dalle piume di cristallo’s plot, nineteenth-century Gothic fiction is a source of inspiration for Argento’s foray into supernatural horror, such as in the case of Thomas de Quincey’s book Suspiria de Profundis (1845) for Suspiria (1977) and Inferno (1980), and Edgar Allan Poe’s horror tales for Due occhi diabolici. As a result, McDonagh’s study revolves around the conclusion that Argento has consciously taken inspiration from both the cinema of the past - both auteurist and popular - and literature in order to create a personal cinema that is fully recognisable in narrative and style.

McDonagh’s critical success was followed by two domestic studies in 1997: the first by Daniele Costantini and Francesco Dal Bosco, and the second by
Antonio Tentori. Moreover, the contemporary interest in the study of Argento culminated in a complete retrospective at the Cinémathèque de Paris in February 1999 (Bisoni 2008: 59). Costantini-Dal Bosco and Tentori focus on the auteurist aspect of Argento’s cinema from a different perspective in relation to the previous study by McDonagh. Rather than dwell on the parallel with the cinematic and literary influences of the past at the heart of Argento’s aesthetic and narrative choices, these volumes are more centred on listing the peculiarities in narrative and style inherent to the director’s cinema. Indeed, the auteurist peculiarity of Argento’s cinema is perceivable in the director’s use of elaborate camerawork, such as the persistent use of dislocated and unconventional POVs, lavish cinematography and *mise-en-scène*, such as in the case of the outmoded IB stock used in *Suspiria* and *Inferno*, and evocative soundtrack ranging from the orchestral tunes and beat, rhythm and blues by Ennio Morricone in the early 1970s *Gialli* to the progressive rock written by The Goblin in the films of the mid-1970s and 1980s. These critical works claim that such a combination of the acoustic and the visual creates the real effectiveness of Argento’s cinema and helps to distinguish the director’s films from other Italian horror films of the period between the 1970s and 1990s. Moreover, according to Costantini-Dal Bosco and Tentori, Argento’s artistic coherence in style and use of technology, as well as the obsessively repeated peculiarities in narrative that derive from his adherence to the *Giallo* sub-genre inaugurated by Mario Bava, lie at the heart of the director’s recognition as an auteur.

The combination of McDonagh’s critical approach and this new trend in studies of the director’s work paved the way for a series of critical articles and volumes throughout the 2000s. On the one hand, these critical works of the 2000s strongly rely on Argento’s conscious references to a variety of previous cinematic and literary traditions as being a peculiarity of his cinema. On the other hand, their aim is to enhance further analysis of Argento’s sustained engagement with style and use of technology as being the motive for his

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8 Tentori’s study has been subsequently published in D. D’Alto, R. Lasagna, and S. Zumbo, eds. (2000: 13-43).
9 Argento has been one of the very few filmmakers in contemporary Italian cinema, together with Nanni Moretti, to be celebrated as *Auteur-Cahiers* by the French Cinémathèque in 1999. For more information on this recognition, see Lucantonio (2003b: 211-219); and Bisoni (2008: 59).
recognition as an auteur. Among these worldwide studies, the most noteworthy are the collection of critical articles on individual films edited by Chris Gallant (2001), the special issues on individual films which appeared online in the academic journal *Kinoeye* between June and July 2002, the collection of critical articles edited by Giulia Carluccio, Giacomo Manzoli, and Roy Menarini (2003), and the one edited by Vito Zagarrio (2008). Also noteworthy are the studies by Bernard Joinsten (2007), Jean-Baptiste Thoret (2008), James Gracey (2010), and Roberto Pugliese (2011). All these studies are aimed at consolidating the auteurist theory of Argento’s cinema through further analysis of his style and use of technology. In the case of the academic journal *Kinoeye*, the emphasis is almost entirely focused on the role of complex camerawork and mismatched soundtrack in Argento’s cinema, which, when combined, contribute to the attractiveness and impact of the sequences of murder. In the case of Gallant’s collection, the stylistic and technical aspects of Argento’s cinema are analysed in detail through a close reading of some of the key sequences involving murders and tortures. Carluccio-Manzoli-Menarini and Zagarrio also consider Argento’s previous engagement as a film critic and screenwriter as the reason behind his narrative as well as his stylistic and technical choices. Moreover, both volumes also devote a series of articles to Argento’s style and use of technology which claim him as an important influence for a new generation of international cineastes - not only engaged with horror - such as David Fincher, Robert Rodriguez, and Quentin Tarantino. Also meaningful is the collection of material in Alan Jones (2004) and Fabio Maiello (2007). The studies by Jones and Maiello, while they do not undertake a full critical analysis of Argento’s work which takes into account his aesthetic and narrative choices, nevertheless contain detailed and up-to-date information on the director’s stylistic concerns as well as on the cinematic technologies he adopted during his forty-year-long career. These studies gleaned their information by interviewing Argento and his cast and crew and these sorts of written documentaries have enhanced the understanding of

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10 For a detailed list of international filmmakers who have been inspired by Argento’s style and use of technology, see also Bruschini (2008: 184-189).
Argento as an artist and as a man and have contributed to a fuller appreciation of his cinema by justifying the director’s choices from his personal perspective.

Recent literature has also explored Argento’s oeuvre in terms of the dynamics of gender, gaze, and spectatorship in the horror genre that have been put forth in film studies in the last decades. Steven Shaviro (1993: 50) has employed Argento’s Opera (1987) as an example of “counterparadigm for film spectatorship” because of the film’s “subversive, complicitous, and irreducibly ambiguous blurring of traditional polarities between male and female, active and passive, aggressor and victim, and subject and object”. In Opera, a female character forces her male lover to murder and torture other women while she watches close by in a state of sexual arousal and voyeuristic pleasure. As Laura Mulvey (1989: 14-26) has argued, the structuring of the cinematic gaze in mainstream Hollywood cinema is most frequently articulated as a fetishistic imaging of women – the object of the look - from the point of view of men’s scopophilia— the pleasure in looking. Specifically, mainstream Hollywood cinema has the tendency to develop the dynamics of looking into an active / male and passive / female division of labour that serves to control both narrative and stylistic structures. The woman displayed functions both as fetishistic object for the male character within the screen story and as a voyeuristic object for the male spectator with a shifting tension between the looks on either side of the screen. While fetishism overplays the woman's objectification, puts her on a pedestal, builds up the glamour and physical beauty, and invests in her the potential for erotic satisfaction, voyeurism is primarily associated with a male fantasy of mastery and control. By constrast, Shaviro (1993: 49-50) has pointed out that Mulvey’s dynamics of strictly generic gendered positionalities and spectatorship in Argento’s Opera are completely reversed. The female character in Opera is totally aware that these gruesome scenarios of death have been staged by her male lover for her own scopophilia in a “conventional binary opposition of sadistic male violence and helpless female passivity”. At the same

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11 Mulvey’s article “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” was originally written in 1973 and was published for the first time in 1975 in Screen.
time, as audiences watch such spectacles from the female character’s POV, they tend to identify with her scopophilia.

Recent scholarship on horror cinema has also focused on re-elaborating the dynamics of gender as well as the positioning of gendered spectatorship by moving away from the generalised perspective of a male-identified masculine serial killer attacking and / or raping a female victim. Barbara Creed (1993) has analysed and listed a variety of cases of female monstrosity and perpetuation of crimes across the horror genre, thus claiming an oscillation in possible identification for both male and female audiences between monster and victim. Vera Dika (1987) has also focused on the subgenre known as “stalker film”, identifying the gendered mix of the form’s audiences, its heroes or heroines, its “stalkers”, and its “victims”. In addition to this, Carol J. Clover (1992; 2000: 125-174) has discussed a highly significant uncertainty in configurations of gender and a lack of binaristic alternation between distinct male / female positions in modern horror subgenres. As a result, the spectatorial experience for the genre’s audience is primarily a “feminizing” one, requiring a certain level of identification with female characters in danger and, thus, the reflection of one’s own humiliation and passivity. In doing so, Clover has argued that the characterization of the male gaze as sadistic, as previously theorised by Laura Mulvey, Christian Metz, Kaja Silverman, and Gaylin Studlar, is replaced by a masochistic dimension of male voyeurism instead. In this respect, Adam Knee (1996: 230) has asserted that Argento’s work consistently foregrounds ambiguities of gender and spectatorship as laid out by Clover, Creed, and Dika. Furthermore, it demonstrates the potential for a progressive recasting of the horror genre’s gender politics, owing to a distinctive combination of factors. One such factor is the constant presence of castrating and masculine female figures and the non-heterosexual orientations of many male and female characters, both killers and victims. According to Knee (1996: 215), since his directorial debut Argento has tended to represent his killers visually as a single hooded and cloaked figure, often turning out to be a bi-gendered and “multiple-personed” individual acting as one. At the same time, the director’s victim is often presented as ambiguous in both his / her gendered characteristics and his / her sexual preferences. As the
identity of the killer is never made clear before the film’s conclusion, spectators are constantly forced to guess at the psychopath’s biological sex, most of the time turning out to be a woman with multiple personalities. Rather than a male sadistic threat, we are confronted with an identity that is equivocal to gender, sexuality, and motivation. Moreover, Knee has suggested that as the serial killer’s identity is not revealed until the film’s conclusion, his / her gaze comes to have omniscience and power through the interplay of conventional camerawork and POV shots without a discernible pattern. Within this context, the serial killer’s eye in Argento’s films becomes pivotal as an organ which is itself not intrinsically gendered, but which is at the centre of erotic and sensory experience in terms of audiences’ identification and scopophilia. What the audiences experience in all of the stalking sequences is a feeling of sensory excitement, as they become involved in a game that is partially rooted in the ambiguity of the holder of the gaze. At the same time, the audiences experience the roles of active / passive, sadistic / masochistic, stalker / stalked themselves through the interplay of POV shots between the murderer and the victim-to-be.

More recent literature has also examined Argento’s oeuvre focusing on the correlation of gender difference and violence from a cultural and historical perspective. Giorgio Bertellini (2004: 215) has argued that the correlation of gender difference and violence in Argento’s Gialli of the 1970s, and more generally in Italian Horror from the 1960s, was already central to anthropological and medical debates in Italy since the 19th century. In the late 19th century, criminologist Cesare Lombroso and anthropologist, neurologist, and physiologist Paolo Mantegazza devoted several studies to “hysterical” criminal women and womanhood in general, and their influential work inspired and shaped a remarkable facet of Italian literature. Suffice it to mention the popular serialised dark melodramas of untenable female maladies and passion written by Ada Negri and Matilde Serao, but also by Luigi Capuana and Igino Ugo Tarchetti since the mid-19th century. Much of this literature described murder scenes and also revealed a strong interest in the female’s hidden pathology, whether medical,
moral, or psychological. More significantly, Bertellini has interacted with previous analyses of Argento’s cinema conducted by Ray Guins (1996: 141-153) and Julien Fleury and Serena Gentilhomme (1998: 67-85) to further explore both the theme of the two relatives united by an indissoluble bond of blood, and that of a male submissive character trying to protect, and becoming accomplice of, a female castrating psychopath. According to Bertellini, these have been recurrent themes in Argento’s cinema since *L’uccello dalle piume di cristallo*, in which a submissive husband tries to cover up for his psychotic wife who was victim of a sexual abuse in the past and now comes to self-identify with her rapist by killing other women. In *Profondo rosso*, a homosexual character is the victim of an oedipal complex as he manages to protect his mother from a murder that she committed in the past to avoid being placed in a mental institution. As far as the oedipal relationship between mother and child is concerned, Bertellini has stated that *Profondo rosso* is closely related to Argento’s *Trauma* (1993). In both films, a murderous woman, who has to cover up a past traumatic event, is the killer, and her child plays the double role of accomplice and victim of his / her castrating mother. In this respect, Maggie Günsberg (2005: 133; 135-136) has suggested that cultural and historical contextualisation is crucial in evaluating the investigation of deranged femininity in the domestic horror tradition from where Argento’s cinema sprang. Günsberg has argued that the portrayal of deranged femininity in Italian Horror indicates the extent of the threat believed to be posed to masculine identity and patriarchal order by women in the late 1950s and the early 1960s. During this period, women started to unite together and campaign for social improvement in a still rural and traditional Italy. Italian women got the vote in 1946 and “the economic boom of the late 1950s drew them into paid employment, disturbing previously held certainties about women’s mental and physical limitations” (Wood 2005: 56). Thus, this provided a context of domestic anxiety and suspicion regarding the actual and historical threat of increasing female autonomy outside the domestic sphere.

Whilst I acknowledge the importance of such areas and the need to analyse and further develop them within Argento’s cinema, including my primary corpus,

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12 For more information on this narrative production, see Billiani and Sulis (2007).
my study seeks to complement such existing literature by addressing new and underexplored areas in terms of influence, referentiality, and intertextuality between the director’s cinema and the fine arts. I refer to Argento’s use of a specific art-historical repertoire within his films, namely the appropriation of architectural, pictorial, and sculptural references which, by the director’s own admission, have been a constant source of inspiration for him. As Argento (Zagarrio 2008a: 32-33) has stated: “in questo campo io ho una grande esperienza. Sono appassionatissimo di arte, lo sono stato fin da bambino: di quadri, di architetture [...] di sculture, di antichità”.

Both some of the critical studies mentioned above and some of the various official and unofficial fanzines and websites devoted to horror cinema have already discussed briefly this aspect of Argento’s work. Their analysis, however, has rarely gone further than a mere comparison of images between a specific work of art and a specific shot composition in one of Argento’s films. In this respect, particularly useful are the series of interviews with Argento contained in some of these critical volumes, such as the one conducted by Gabrielle Lucantonio (2003a: 9-25) and included in Carluccio, Manzoli, and Menarini (2003) and the one conducted by Vito Zagarrio (2008a: 29-49) and included in the collection of critical articles on Argento’s cinema edited by the same author (2008). Also noteworthy are the interviews involving the cast and crew who have worked with the director, which are contained in Jones (2004) and Maiello (2007). This material proves particularly useful when it comes to identifying Argento’s use of an art-historical repertoire in a specific film and sequence. For example, from scrutinising such material it is possible to identify Argento’s intention to pay homage to American Hyper-Realism of the 1960s, Giorgio De Chirico, and Edward Hopper in some of the key sequences of Profondo rosso (1975), to M.C. Escher’s work as the pictorial inspiration behind the interiors of the academy of dance in Suspiria (1977), and to Arnold Böcklin’s tableaux for the mise-en-scène of the protagonist’s hidden lair in Il fantasma dell’Opera (1998) and Georges De La Tour’s chiaroscuro as the main source of reference for the cinematography in the same film. Moreover, a
small segment of previous critical literature has already attempted to investigate Argento’s use of an art-historical repertoire and symbolism, and to relate it to the films’ narrative and visual impact. In this respect, the most sustained contribution has been an article by Chris Gallant (2001a: 65-73) included in the already mentioned collection of critical articles on Argento’s cinema edited by the same author (2001). In the article, the film critic defines Argento’s cinema as “painterly”. Specifically: “painterly is a particularly apt term for the aesthetic sensibilities of Argento’s cinema, a body of work across which aesthetics operate on a number of different levels” (Gallant 2001a: 66). According to Gallant (2001a: 68), from a technical point of view Argento makes use of art within his cinema both by placing canvasses on the set – diegetic - and by emulating well-known pictorial iconography through composition - plan-tableau. For the definition of plan-tableau, Gallant cites Bonitzer. As Bonitzer (1985: 30) has suggested, the plan-tableau is the shot that intentionally reproduces a painting either by explicitly citing it or by evoking the same chromatic, luminous, and spatial features of the referenced painting. Specifically:

The function of the plan-tableau is interactive [...] Ambivalence, discourse in two voices, the unstable mixing of the high (painting) and the low (cinema), of movement (the shot) and of stasis (the painting) [...] The plan-tableau is extra-narrative in function, which is why it has been employed by those cinéastes who privilege mise-en-scène and the plastic over the scenario and narrative progression, like Godard and Pasolini (Bonitzer 1985: 31, 33).^{14}

Thus, Gallant relies on Bonitzer’s definition and states that the effect created by the plan-tableau in Argento’s cinema involves a moment of inanimation both of narrative progression and of on-screen movement, which is designed to be appreciated in its own right within a larger filmic context. Specifically, it manages to impart a certain aesthetic approach to the shot composition in the same way as elaborate camerawork, lavish cinematography and mise-en-scène, and unsettling soundtrack typical of Argento’s body of work (Gallant 2001a: 68).

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^{14} For more information on how the technique of the plan-tableau is used in cinema, see Bonitzer (1985: 29-43); and Costa (1991: 170; 2002).
Carluccio’s article (2003: 55-62) included in Carluccio, Manzoli, and Menarini (2003) briefly takes into consideration Argento’s appropriation of art in *Profondo rosso* from an extra-narrative perspective. According to Carluccio (2003: 56-57), Argento’s use of the *plan-tableau* of Edward Hopper’s *Nighthawks* (1942) within the real location of *Piazza CLN* in Turin in one of the key sequences of *Profondo rosso* generates a strict metaphorical connection between the American painter’s emptiness of spaces and gloominess of atmosphere in his canvass and the feeling of *mal de vivre* that is traceable in the male protagonist’s experience within the film. Vivien Villani’s article (2008: 172-175) included in Zagarrio (2008) argues that it is the dark side of the artistic creation that is appealing to Argento. According to Villani (2008: 173-174), Argento’s cinema provides a continuous meditation on the act of contemplation itself, in which a specific piece of art can make the film’s protagonists feel perturbed and which embodies a mysterious influence in them that is able to unleash their repressed anxieties and unconscious psychoses. To demonstrate this statement, the critic provides some key examples starting from the experience of the serial killer in *L’uccello dalle piume di cristallo*. In the film, the desire to kill is triggered by the contemplation of a naïf *tableau*, which reminds the female killer of a traumatic past experience of sexual abuse. The killer unconsciously associates her history of sexual abuse with the painting and this causes the return of her repressed trauma. In the film’s final denouement, it is eventually explained that the killer’s tendency to display paranoia led her to self-identify with the attacker rather than with the victim of the abuse. Villani then passes to the example of the female protagonist’s visit to the Uffizi Gallery in *La sindrome di Stendhal* (1996), in which the contemplation of a painting by Brueghel, together with an experience of rape by a violent torturer, activates in the heroine an inner mechanism that will eventually transform her into a serial-killer. Thus, art in Argento’s cinema embodies a devastating force that manages to bind the senses and make people lose their mental balance and self-control. In a different article from the same collection, Vito Zagarrio (2008b: 13-28) has noted that in Argento’s cinema pure art is often hidden in a gesture that is typical of the horror genre. In the director’s work, art is turned into a weapon like a blade and a knife. Zagarrio
considers the epilogue of *L’uccello dalle piume di cristallo*, in which the male protagonist is physically trapped beneath a spiky piece of sculpture by the serial killer. Similarly, the glass feather of a peacock sculpture becomes a pin that pierces a human neck in *Suspiria*, while a piece of modern metal sculpture accidentally pierces the serial-killer’s stomach and causes his death in *Tenebre* (1982).

As a result, the aforementioned articles have already stressed some of the key roles of art-historical references within Argento’s cinema: artistic imagery as stalling of narrative progression and the subsequent focus on the aesthetic composition of the reference through diegesis and *plan-tableau*; artistic iconography as strictly related to the film’s narrative which is able to metaphorically convey a connection between the pictorial reference itself and the content of the film in question and to intervene in the story by triggering a variety of psychological states in the film’s protagonists, such as in the cases of *L’uccello dalle piume di cristallo* and *La sindrome di Stendhal*; the act of murder turned into an act of artistic creation through the transformation of a piece of sculpture into a weapon, such as in the cases of *Suspiria* and *Tenebre*. However, because of the variety of art-historical references within Argento’s cinema and the way they contribute to a particular film’s narrative texture through iconography and symbolism and amend the visual texture of the film in question through composition of the shot, this aspect of investigation deserves much fuller and more comprehensive attention. Although previous critical debates have already introduced the way some of the art-historical references in Argento’s cinema may contribute, at times, to the narrative texture of a film through iconography and symbolism, at others, to the visual texture of a film through the composition of the shot, what is lacking is a complete analysis of the interaction of these roles. That said, my thesis aims to answer the following research questions: *Which art-historical repertoire features in Dario Argento’s cinema? How and to what extent does a specific art-historical repertoire contribute to a particular film’s narrative and visual texture? What iconographic, symbolic, and thematic affinities can be detected between the art-historical references and the sequences from the films by Argento analysed?*
In order to answer these questions, my analysis engages with the existing literature that contextualises Argento’s cinema within Italian Horror in terms of narrative and style and connects such literature with recent studies on the interplay between painting and cinema conducted by Pascal Bonitzer (1985) and Jean-Louis Leutrat (1988). Drawing on Bonitzer and Leutrat, I capitalise on citation and intertextuality between painting and cinema without overlooking larger cinematic issues, such as the construction of space, framing, referentiality, and temporality. Yet my methodology also differs from the two scholars in significant ways. Like in the case of Jacques Aumont’s investigation (1989), Bonitzer and Leutrat organise their discussions around a series of theoretical issues involving the surface similarities between painting and cinema rather than focusing on the aesthetic and thematic affinities between a specific film or shot and the pictorial references alluded to and / or cited in it.15 By contrast, I have structured my research around individual films. From the evocative specificity of a single shot or sequence in a film containing a specific artistic reference I have provided more general hypotheses related to the interaction between the reference and the film in question in terms of stylistic and thematic affinities. That said, my investigation delivers a broad range of analysis, from narrative to stylistic detail, through an intra-artistic methodological approach. Such an approach aims to detect the images from art history that are present in a particular film by Argento through diegesis and plan-tableau and analyse the iconographic, symbolic, and thematic affinities that surface between the art-historical references and the film’s narrative and visual texture. What binds the structure of my chapters is not just an analysis of the aesthetic qualities of the artistic references within the director’s work and the way they function in the film texts in terms of colour, framing, and lighting. It is also the narrative use of

15 Aumont’s conclusions are opposite to the ones presented by Bonitzer and Leutrat. Instead of concentrating on surface similarities and notions like influence and referentiality, Aumont tackles issues of general incompatibility between painting and cinema, such as the way technology forces filmmakers and painters to work with colour in completely different ways, without citing any specific painting in film. Another investigation that is part of the dialogue between painting and cinema has been conducted by Anne Hollander (1986). Hollander searches through the history of art for the kinds of paintings that anticipated what cinema later on did with movement. According to Hollander, cinema is a mass medium whose images are capable of moving each viewer in a highly individual way. In this respect, the paintings that best anticipated this psychological impact are the ones from Northern Europe, where Protestantism favoured a more private apprehension of images. As a result, Hollander’s work is more concerned to analyse which kinds of paintings anticipated cinema rather than the several ways in which cinema references painting.
the artistic imagery and the myriad of possibilities these aesthetic and narrative complementarities may offer. In this respect, my work is closer to the intertextual and thematic methodological approach applied by Angela Dalle Vacche (1996). The choice of such a methodology is primarily due to the variety of art-historical references in each film by Argento analysed and to the multitude of iconographic, symbolic, and thematic affinities that can be detected between the artistic reference and the film or sequence in question.

My corpus of work comprises four different films spanning Argento’s career: Profondo rosso (1975), Suspiria (1977), La sindrome di Stendhal (1996), and Il fantasma dell’Opera (1998). The rest of the films that comprise the director’s forty-year-long career are eventually cited in relation to the aesthetic and thematic affinities with the aforementioned corpus of work. Chapter Two considers La sindrome di Stendhal, which is the real manifesto and the most explicit reflection on the role of artistic imagery within Argento’s cinema. The criteria for selecting the remaining corpus of work are twofold. On the one hand, these films are the ones containing the greatest number of artistic references. On the other hand, they take into consideration a variety of aesthetic qualities and narrative solutions that, combined together, provide an exhaustive overview of the director’s artistic imagination. These remaining films are treated in chronological order for clarity. By treating the relationship between Argento and artistic imagery from Profondo rosso to Il fantasma dell’Opera I also show the evolution of this relationship from 1975 to 1998. Chapter One - Contextualising Dario Argento within Italian Horror deserves separate consideration. This is an introductory chapter whose purpose is to outline the significant themes and visual tropes that Argento inherited from the previous domestic horror and Giallo tradition of the 1960s and also to demonstrate the basis of the cinematic vocabulary I have adopted in the other chapters. The purpose of the chapter is twofold. On the one hand, it contextualises Argento within a historical period to foster further understanding of the industrial and legislative conditions of Italian popular cinema in which Argento started his career. On the other hand, it shows Argento’s strict affiliation to an earlier cinematic tradition that produced modest box-office successes throughout the 1960s. Particularly, the research question I
answer is: Which central themes and visual tropes did Argento inherit from the domestic horror tradition of the decade preceding his directorial debut? By answering this question, I provide a context for Argento’s cinematic career within Italian Horror while linking the director’s main themes and visual tropes to an earlier tradition championed by Mario Bava’s and Riccardo Freda’s Gothic Cycle of the 1960s. Therefore, the chapter presents an overview of the two different cycles of Italian Horror, Gothic Cycle and Giallo Cycle, identifying their distinctive features and outlining some of the ways in which Argento borrowed from them in order to carve out an authorial niche for himself.

Chapter Two - Associating States of Mind with Iconography in La Sindrome di Stendhal (1996) analyses the existing clinical pathology known as Stendhal Syndrome, which describes a temporary mental and physical discomfort affecting an individual exposed to art, in order to show how Argento uses it as an expedient to deal with the female protagonist’s family background and subconscious as they are gradually revealed through pictorial iconography. To prove this, the first two questions I answer are the following: Which pictorial repertoire functions as a catalyst for the female protagonist’s Stendhal Syndrome? Is there a symbolic association between the pictorial iconography displayed in the film and the female protagonist’s repressed memories and unconscious psychoses? After experiencing the emotional malaise clinically known as Stendhal Syndrome at the Uffizi Gallery, the female protagonist also becomes the victim of a serial rapist who abuses her sexually as soon as she arrives back at her hotel room. This traumatic experience increases the woman’s anxieties that were already affected by the contemplation of art. This mixture of art-induced psychosis and physical violence creates a devastating effect on the heroine which leads to her loss of identity and her consequent self-identification with her torturer. This mixture of art and violence is also represented by pictorial symbolism. The final question I answer is the following: Through which pictorial repertoire is the relationship between art and violence enacted? In answering that question, I show how the debilitating consequences deriving from this traumatic experience of rape and violence, and that are fully traceable in the protagonist’s body and mind, are
Chapter Three - The Interplay of Imagery, Camerawork, and Soundtrack in Profondo Rosso (1975) argues for Profondo rosso as a turning point in Argento’s cinematic career both in aesthetic and in narrative terms. Here, artistic imagery assumes a prominent role since, on the one hand, it consolidates the stylistic structure and technical achievement of camerawork, mise-en-scène, and soundtrack through a specific symbolic repertoire, and on the other hand, it essentially contributes to the narrative development of the story through the pictorial technique of the trompe-l’oeil. In addition, pictorial devices are used symbolically to communicate the male protagonist’s emotional and physical inability to interact with the people surrounding him. In order to demonstrate this, the question I answer is the following: How and to what extent does the art-historical repertoire contribute to Profondo rosso’s stylistic and narrative effectiveness? In Profondo rosso, Argento manages to develop his story through the medium of elaborate camerawork, unsettling soundtrack, evocative imaginary, and symbolic repertoire, which in some sequences completely replace the dialogues and the narrative devices.

Chapter Four - The Expressionist Use of Colour Palette, Set Design, and Spaces in Suspiria (1977) analyses how the interplay between aesthetic, narrative, and the artwork as shown in Profondo rosso, in Suspiria evolves and almost becomes a single and indiscernible element. In my opinion, Suspiria derives the use of cinematography and set design and representation of spaces from the cinematic tradition of German Expressionism of the 1920s. In this respect, German Expressionist Cinema of the 1920s tended to show the characters’ states of the body and the soul through cinematography, set design, and representation of spaces, rather than through narrative progression. If we adopt the term expressionist for Suspiria, it proves useful to analyse the reason behind a specific use of cinematography, set design, and representation of spaces in the German Expressionist Cinema of the 1920s and to analyse whether this use and representation are fully applicable to Argento’s film. In light of this, in this
chapter I address the following question: *In what way and to what extent does Argento’s use of colour palette, set design, and representation of spaces contribute to identifying Suspiria as his expressionist film par excellence?* By answering the question, I demonstrate how *Suspiria* is the first and most explicit of Argento’s films in which the expressionist use of cinematography, set design, and representation of spaces completely achieve a dramatic status by becoming full projections of the characters’ bodily and mental states and by functioning as effective characters in themselves.

*Principles of Dualism through Iconography in Il fantasma dell’Opera (1998)* is my final chapter. Although the film is critically recognised as the lowest point within Argento’s career, in my opinion, *Il fantasma dell’Opera* plays a key role in my analysis of artistic imagery in the director’s cinema. The film is loosely adapted from Gaston Leroux’s 1910 literary classic *Le Fantôme de l’Opéra* (1910). At the heart of Leroux’s narrative structure and psychological characterisation of the main roles lies a double principle of dualism. On the one hand, this dualism is expressed through the physical deformity and propensity for murder of the male hero on the one side, and his purity of feeling for the art of music and for the female heroine on the other side. The male hero’s physical deformity and psychological dualism are also symbolically conveyed in the coexistence of a familiar space through the opulent environment of the Paris Opera House to represent his good side and a horrific space through the basement to represent his evil side. On the other hand, Leroux’s dualism in the plot is expressed through the complex relationship between the hero as a villain and the heroine as a victim, both codified in their propensity to do evil and good. Argento’s film uses a specific pictorial iconography and symbolism in order to convey, re-interpret, and re-shape the narrative principles of dualism at the heart of Leroux’s original novel. Thus, the research question I ask is the following: *How and to what extent does Argento’s use of a specific pictorial repertoire in Il fantasma dell’Opera help to re-interpret and re-shape at an aesthetic level the principles of dualism that lie at the heart of Leroux’s Le Fantôme de l’Opéra?* By answering the question, the purpose of my analysis is to show how Argento’s adaptation manages to fully re-
visit and re-shape Leroux’s principles of dualism through pictorial iconography and symbolism rather than through narrative progression.
Chapter 1

Contextualising Dario Argento within Italian Horror

“To me, there is something strangely offensive about the idea of screen violence “justified by the plot”

Stephen Thrower (1999: 153)

“Sei arrivato a portare all’attenzione della critica, del pubblico, un genere che in Italia non veniva considerato”

Mario Bava on Dario Argento (Lucantonio 2003a: 17)

Closest to Argento’s concerns and historically indispensable to any consideration of his films is Mario Bava [...] Argento’s debt to Bava is most apparent in The Bird With the Crystal Plumage, whose mise-en-scène - while more sophisticated than that of the average low-budget thriller - only indicates the direction the director would take later in his career.

(Maitland McDonagh 1994: 25; 51)

McDonagh’s assertion is crucial in contextualising Dario Argento’s sustained engagement with the domestic horror tradition from which he sprang in the early 1970s. Throughout his forty-year-long career as a director, Argento has been able to transcend the cyclic and spin-off system industry typical of Italian Horror of the 1960s and 1970s, and to rise to the status of internationally recognised art director within a typically popular genre. Nevertheless, Argento’s cinematic inspiration lies partly in a domestic horror tradition made under an impoverished and rapid production-line mode which he has improved in terms of style and technique through a range of sophisticated visual tropes, such as complex camerawork and flamboyant mise-en-scène, made possible by the higher budgets his films have commanded (Hunt 2000: 328). This opening chapter contextualizes Argento within the Italian horror genre of the decade immediately preceding his directorial debut in 1970 with L’uccello dalle piume di cristallo and analyses to what extent the director has been influenced by that decade in narrative and style. In this regard, the research question I shall answer is: Which central themes and visual tropes did Argento inherit from the domestic horror tradition of the decade preceding his directorial debut? By answering this
question, I will offer a historical backdrop outlining the significant cinematic themes and visual tropes that gave rise to the Italian Horror and Giallo tradition of the 1960s and 1970s that are related to Argento’s cinema. The first section shall take into consideration some of the central themes and visual tropes of the Italian Classic Horror Cycle from 1956 to 1966, with specific attention to Riccardo Freda’s and Mario Bava’s essential contribution to Italian Horror. Specifically, I will demonstrate how, since Freda’s I vampiri (1956) and Bava’s La maschera del demonio (1960), Italian Horror has been able to take a certain artistic distance from the much more consolidated Anglo-American tradition. This narrative and visual distance serves to define Italian Horror and was responsible for opening the domestic floodgates to the more prolific horror sub-genre known as Giallo.

The second section shall explore the Giallo Cycle from 1970 to 1982. In this context, Argento’s contribution is fundamental. The director was able to combine some of the central themes and visual tropes of Bava’s seminal Gialli La ragazza che sapeva troppo (1962) and Sei donne per l’assassino (1964) in L’uccello dalle piume di cristallo and to re-elaborate them in a more technically accomplished and visually sophisticated style. Argento’s formula has become the trademark of the whole Giallo tradition up to 1982, the date officially ending the cycle. Finally, I will briefly introduce Argento’s technical concern and visual sensibility as the reason behind the director’s international acclaim and recognition as an art filmmaker. This general consideration of the director’s technical and visual mastery also lies at the heart of my whole thesis when I will deal with the inspiration which Argento took from artwork and his extensive use of a repertoire of art-historical motifs in a selected corpus of films.

1.1. The Italian Classic Horror Cycle (1956-1966)

The traditionally popular genre of horror “was as much a foreign narrative form in the history of Italian cinema as was the western” (Bondanella 2009: 306). Unlike other Italian popular genres of the 1960s, such as the commedia all’italiana and the peplum, Italian Horror did not develop from an earlier cycle during the era of Italian silent cinema (1905-1930). Throughout this period the domestic production companies were uninterested in the genre, the
costume drama and the historical epic being the industry’s most popular and profitable investment (Bondanella 2009: 5). This lack of interest continued during the Fascist Era (1922-1945), in which the strictest regulation of censorship by the regime’s Direzione Generale per la Cinematografia (DGC) tended to control the depiction of horrific themes and visually shocking images (McCallum 1998: 2; Günsberg 2005: 136; Bondanella 2009: 306). Nor was there a consolidated and extended tradition of Italian Gothic literature and theatre equivalent to that of Anglo-Saxon cultures (Günsberg 2005: 136).

The narrative tradition that lies behind the official birth of Italian Horror with Riccardo Freda’s *I vampiri* (1956) was thus imported from a variety of foreign sources. Freda’s film primarily consisted of a low-budget experiment aimed at domestic profit and in the wake of the previously commercially successful expressionist cinema, such as Stellan Rye’s *Der Student von Prag* (1913), Robert Wiene’s *Das Kabinett Des Dr. Caligari* (1920), and Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau’s *Nosferatu* (1922), and the horror cinema produced in Hollywood by Universal Studios during the 1930s under expressionist influence, such as Tod Browning’s *Dracula* (1931), Rouben Mamoulian’s *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1931), and James Whale’s *Frankenstein* (1931) (Jancovich 1992: 53-54; Berenstein 1996: 14; Günsberg 2005: 137; Bondanella 2009: 306). Indeed, *I vampiri* emerged on the eve of a second Anglo-American horror renaissance, which was marked by Terence Fisher’s *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957) for the low-budget British Hammer Film Productions, Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho* (1960), and Roger Corman’s *The House of Usher* (1960) (Bertellini 2004: 213-214).

In this regard, the birth of Italian Horror is due to the fact that post-World War II Italian popular cinema had a history of making low-budget carbon-copies

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1 During the era of Italian silent cinema, the only recorded attempt at embracing the horror genre was Eugenio Testa’s *Il mostro di Frankenstein* (1920), which is now lost (Günsberg 2005: 136; Paul 2005: 11-12; Bondanella 2009: 306). Two previous examples dealing with the fantastic and the supernatural were Luigi Maggi’s *Satana* (1912), a three-episode film about the devil, and Raimondo Scotti’s *L’atleta fantasma* (1919), the story of a masked fighter of evil. However, these two films did not show any systematic approach to the genre because of their farcical and operatic nature (Hunt 2000: 329). For a list of “horror-related” films during the Italian silent period, see Palmerini and Mistretta (1996: 8).

2 As Paul (2005: 8-9) has discussed, the only domestic attempt to deal with horrific images and themes in theatre is present in the Italian branch of the Grand-Guignol, which was based in Rome from 1908 to 1928. This theatre emerged in the wake of the French Théâtre de la Terreur, whose central themes and visual tropes will be discussed in Chapter 3 - Section 3.3.2.
of previous commercial successes in America and Britain (Newman 1988: 187). As Wood (2005: 35) has discussed, in this period box-office popularity was central to the development and identification of Italian popular genres. As the production system in Italy in the period post-World War II was not based on the large-scale studio filmmaking of the Hollywood companies, any single producer or distributor had the power to decide whether a film could be made or not, without concerted legislation and policies. Italian producers and distributors tended to present annually an output composed of different genres of film in order to minimise commercial risk, and tried to respond creatively to changes in public taste and the dynamic development of domestic society. In the case of Italian Horror, although Freda’s I vampiri grossed a very small amount of money at the box-office, the success of Terence Fisher’s Dracula (1958) in Italy convinced the domestic production companies to pursue the genre with five films in 1960, paving the way for the so-called Italian Classic Horror Cycle (Günsberg 2005: 138). However, as these films also produced only modest successes at the box-office, the Italian Classic Horror Cycle continued sporadically until 1966, the year generally seen as marking its close with Mario Bava’s Operazione paura and Camillo Mastrocinque’s Un angelo per Satana (Günsberg 2005: 138).  

The centrality of box-office popularity and the necessity to invest in financially secure projects is the reason behind the filone phenomenon in Italy. The term filone must not be confused with the definition of film genre. Film genres are certain types of films, such as the comedy, the musical, and the science-fiction, which are linked by a common identity of shared thematic and technical conventions that reappear in film after film (Bordwell and Thompson 2008: 318-320). Filone is an Italian word that is specifically referred to a strand of similar films with shared thematic and technical conventions, which were made in a relatively short period of time “until public interest was seen to wane” and which tended to emulate previously successful films both domestically and internationally (Wood 2005: 11). As a specific filone was exploited in Italy, a level of product differentiation started taking place in order to test the market for change. Thus, a number of sub-filoni, a hybrid form combining different successful genres, was created in order to adapt to a more exigent public taste. These new sub-filoni often showed a sort of hybridization because of their persistent interaction of different genres. For a detailed list and analysis of the Italian filoni in popular cinema, see also Edmonstone (2008). 

These films are: La maschera del demone by Mario Bava, Il mulino delle donne di pietra by Giorgio Ferroni, Seddok l’eroe di Satana by Anton Giulio Majano, L’amante del vampiro by Renato Polselli, and L’ultima preda del vampiro by Piero Regnoli (Brunetta 1991: 616-617; 1993: 408-411). For a historical contextualisation and a critical analysis of these films, see Mora (1978: 287-322); Colombo and Tentori (1990); Bruschini and Tentori (1997); Paul (2005); and Lupi (2011).

According to Günsberg (2005: 138), Italian Horror from 1956 to 1966 never exceeded annual production of five or six films, totalling only around 30 films, similar to the Hammer output in the same period. In comparison with the numerous and commercially successful pepla - around 300 from 1957 to 1967 - horror represented both quantitatively and financially a relatively minor production of Italian popular cinema.

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1.1.1. **Central themes and visual tropes of the Italian Classic Horror Cycle**

Ignoring by Italian critics and scholars until the mid-1970s, the Italian Classic Horror Cycle has constantly been accused of amounting merely to an imitation of its Anglo-American counterpart (Brunetta 1993: 585-586). Together with the British Hammer Film Productions and Roger Corman’s Poe stories, it has immediately come under attack for never transcending the B-movie level and for predominantly focusing on controversial and shocking themes, such as bodily corruption and disfigurement, incest, gynophobia, necrophilia, torture, and an “unhealthy” focus on taboos linked to sex at the expense of a coherent plot and complex character development (Hunt 2000: 326-327; Günsberg 2005: 139). Nevertheless, as Newman (1986: 20) has stated:

> While it is undoubtedly true that many Italian genre movies are simply worthless carbon copies with a few baroque trimmings, the best examples of most cycles are surprisingly sophisticated mixes of imitation, pastiche, parody, deconstruction, reinterpretation and operatic inflation.

Freda’s *I vampiri* and Bava’s *La maschera del demonio*, for example, have recently gained cult status both domestically and internationally and have been recognised as offering a valid alternative to the Hollywood and British Hammer Film Productions in developing a certain degree of aesthetic and narrative autonomy (Brunetta 1993: 409). *I vampiri* is not a film about vampires in the Anglo-American cinematic and literary tradition (Paul 2005: 84; Bondanella 2009: 308). The story of a demented scientist draining the blood of young women to rejuvenate his evil lover moves away from the classic depiction of the vampire as shown in Tod Browning’s and Terence Fisher’s loosely-based adaptations of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897). Rather, Freda’s film contains some of the key elements of both plot and style that would become embedded in the Italian *Giallo* tradition inaugurated by Bava’s *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* (1962) and

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6 As far as Freda and Bava are concerned, there are a plethora of articles and a few volumes devoted to their lives and careers in specialised fanzines and literature. I will restrict myself to citing the most critically accomplished literature. For further information on Freda’s life and cinematic career, see Della Casa (1999). For further information on Bava’s life and cinematic career, see Lucas (2007).
Sei donne per l’assassino (1964), and re-elaborated into a more sophisticated formula by Argento in L’uccello dalle piume di cristallo (1970).

Firstly, I vampiri’s sub-plot anticipates the fictional element of the civilian amateur detective that became a typical narrative device of the Italian Gialli of the 1970s (Cfr. § 1.2.1). Freda’s film also centres on the figure of a journalist investigating the scientist’s crimes who eventually discovers the reason behind the disappearance of young women in contemporary Paris. Secondly, Freda’s depiction of the act of murder by the scientist, disguised with black gloves and black raincoat, paves the way for one of the major visual tropes of the 1970s Giallo tradition, namely the aestheticization of the act of murder by an elaborate use of camerawork, editing, and soundtrack (Cfr. § 1.2.1; 1.2.2). The violence in I vampiri is presented with near-medical attention by the medium of the fast zoom in and out, the persistent close-ups on female bodies, and a powerful interplay of expressionistic backlighting with a disquieting soundtrack. Such a depiction of the act of murder is radically different from the relatively realist and restrained Anglo-American style. Freda, in fact, manages to develop an extremely graphic representation of sex and violence, and privileges atmosphere over narrative progression and situation over character development (Jenks 1992: 153). Finally, the scientist’s psychological subjugation to his female lover to the extent of becoming her accomplice in the various crimes introduces another fundamental topic that will be further explored in Argento’s L’uccello dalle piume di cristallo, namely the castrating and mentally deranged female “monster” and the feminisation of the serial-killer (Cfr § 1.2.2; 2.3). As Gunsberg (2005: 133) has remarked, Italian Horror “centres on the female body and the threat femininity poses to masculinity”. It is to the central figure of women as femme fatale, vampire, victim, and witch that Mora (1978: 292) attributes the expressive autonomy and narrative unity of the whole Italian Classic Horror Cycle, rather than to the male “monster” of the Anglo-American tradition. While the American and British counterparts were strongly focused on male stardom, with iconic figures such as Boris Karloff portraying Frankenstein and Christopher Lee portraying Dracula, and their misogynist aspects were exclusively related to both a masochistic female victim-identification and a sadistic behaviour by men
toward them, Italian Horror’s most enduring cult figure throughout the 1960s was British actress Barbara Steele, an icon “who seemed to exist simply to torture and be tortured, to terrify and be terrified” (Hunt 2000: 325). In Bava’s *La maschera del demonio*, for example, Steele assumes the double role of a seductive vampire-witch and a virginal beauty who are both identical in appearance. Bava’s *La maschera del demonio* is also crucial in providing inspiration to the style of the Italian *Gialli* of the 1970s. As far as Bava’s style is concerned, it is especially in his persistent and prolonged use of the extreme close-ups combined with elaborate editing and different POVs, all in one single sequence, that the 1970s generation of domestic *Gialli* found inspiration in representing the effect of terror. According to Everson (1974: 207-208), Bava introduced a rather unhealthy tendency to dwell on the detailed unpleasantness of death and torture. In *La maschera del demonio*, Steele dies by having a spiky metal mask hammered onto her face before she is executed and buried. Throughout the sequence, Bava shoots the spiky mask from the executioner’s POV then suddenly reverses the perspective by moving the camera through the mask’s apertures and transferring the POV from that of the executioner to that of the victim. As soon as the mask is beaten into the victim’s face by the executioner’s hammer, blood explodes from the mask’s apertures for eyes, mouth and nose. This elaborate camerawork contributed to exalting the graphic scenes of violence with an almost clinical attention to the method by which they were achieved. In this regard, this sequence may be considered as the forerunner of Argento’s near-medical precision to the method by which death and torture are achieved in his 1970s and 1980s *Gialli* and horror movies.

Specifically, Bava’s filmic style in *La maschera del demonio* may be at the basis of Argento’s tendency to deploy a plethora of technical devices in his documentary

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7 With regard to Bava’s technical expertise in *La maschera del demonio*, this may originate from the director’s previous career as a cinematographer (Colombo and Tentori 1990: 25). Because of his talent in photography and his self-confidence with the camera, Bava was frequently asked by production teams to re-shoot scenes of particular difficulty or to finish a film due to the absence of the original director, as was the case with Freda’s *I vampiri* and *Caltiki: il mostro immortale* (1959) (Louis 2005: 84). During this period, Bava gained considerable technical experience in working to extremely low budgets and fast production schedules and developed a sophisticated high contrast photographic style (Bondanella 2009: 311). Working as cinematographer for Freda’s *I vampiri*, for example, Bava was able to age the scientist’s evil lover before the camera without cutting for changes in make-up via the use of special make-up that changed colour and aged the actress without recourse to any single cut between application (Bondanella 2009: 309).
exploration of the body’s responses to death and torture, such as in the case of the camera entering a female body during a stabbing and showing the beating of the heart as it is penetrated by a knife in *Suspiria* (1977). More significantly, Argento re-invents Bava’s elaborate editing, the prolonged use of the extreme close-ups, and the unusual POVs by the medium of sophisticated and updated medical equipments and technology thanks to a higher budget, such as the Pentazet camera in *Quattro mosche di velluto grigio* (1971) (Cfr. § 3.3) and the Snorkel camera in *Profondo rosso* (1975) (Cfr. § 3.3.1). Argento’s technical and visual achievement throughout the 1970s and 1980s eventually guaranteed the artistic autonomy of Italian Horror from its Anglo-American counterparts and a higher level of sophistication of the domestic genre that Freda and Bava had pioneered in the 1960s.


Bava’s *Operazione paura* and Mastrocinque’s *Un angelo per Satana* in 1966 virtually signalled the end of the Italian Classic Horror Cycle and the 1970s welcomed a new trend of horror-related films known as *Gialli*. As Gracey (2010: 14) has remarked:

> *Giallo* films notoriously combine sex and violence, hyper-stylised and elaborate murders, lavish camerawork and set design, displaced protagonists who unwittingly stumble into the ensuing mayhem, ineffectual or nonexistent police and copious gore […] Everything weaves together in a weak and often convoluted narrative, frequently interrupted by scenes of startling violence and bloodshed. More abstract modes of detection are utilised rather than the usual logical deduction of “whodunit”-style movies.

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8 Despite the apparent change in genre, the supernatural horror continued to be present in Italy throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Bava sporadically continued this cinematic trend until 1978. His 1970s movies include *Gli orrori del castello di Norimberga* (1972), *La casa dell’esorcismo* (1975), *Shock* (1977) in collaboration with his son Lamberto, and *La Venere d’Illi* (1978). Moreover, throughout the 1970s supernatural horror in Italy spawned two new sub-genres in the wake of two successful American films. While William Friedkin’s *The Exorcist* (1973) launched a new craze of possession films, such as Ovidio Assonitis’s *Chi sei?* (1974), Alberto De Martino’s *L’Anticristo* (1974), and *Holocaust 2000* (1977), the international success in Italy of *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) by American director George A. Romero generated a series of zombie-related films, such as Lucio Fulci’s *Zombi 2* (1979), *Paura nella città dei morti viventi* (1980), and *Zombi 3* (1988). For a historical contextualisation and a critical analysis of these two sub-genres, see Colombo and Tentori (1990: 139-147; 149-154); Slater (2002); and Bondanella (2009: 326-334). As far as the *Gialli* are concerned, the most accurate and reliable critical volumes that provide a historical and stylistic contextualisation of the sub-genre are Venturelli (1991); Bruschini and Tentori (1992); Koven (2006); and Met (2006: 195-215).
Gracey’s assertion demonstrates how the Italian Classic Horror Cycle and the Gialli are not necessarily and totally separate in narrative and style (Cfr. § 1.1.1). Specifically, many of the 1970s Gialli have frequently oscillated between mystery and horror because of the strict coexistence within them of detection in narrative and graphic violence in style (Bondanella 2009: 374). Because of their focus on the more exploitative aspects of crime fiction, namely the graphic depiction of murder and violence, the Italian Gialli offer a continuity with the Italian Classic Horror Cycle of the 1960s despite the absence of any supernatural agency, and the main reason of their division into two different sub-genres may come from the production company’s need to label or list these films for commercial purposes (Koven 2006: 9). Although the Giallo sub-genre was first pioneered by Bava’s La ragazza che sapeva troppo (1962) and Sei donne per l’assassino (1964), the period of the Italian Gialli officially started in 1970 with Argento’s box-office hit L’uccello dalle piume di cristallo and ended in 1982 with Lucio Fulci’s Lo squartatore di New York, with a peak in the period 1970-1975 (Hardy 1985: 294; Koven 2006: 8). Specifically, Argento’s extraordinary commercial success convinced the Italian production companies to invest in this new cinematic form (Gervasini 2003: 175). As a result, between January 1971 and December 1972 more than seventy films that strongly rely on Bava-Argento’s narrative and visual formulae were produced, most of them lacking the narrative and stylistic qualities of their precursors (Gervasini 2003: 179; Koven 2006: 6; De Sanctis 2008: 147).

As Wallman (2007: 4) has discussed, any Italian film prior or post the period 1970-1982 with similar narrative and stylistic traits to the Giallo immediately encourages one to consider whether or not it is a Giallo. While films such as Mario Mattoli’s Labbra serrate (1942), Luchino Visconti’s Ossessione (1942), Pietro Germi’s Un maledetto imbroglio (1959) and Giacomo Gentilomo’s Atto d’accusa (1960) tend to privilege a more realist and restrained style rather than focusing on the convoluted and hyper-stylised style typical of the sub-genre, an argument could be advanced that any Giallo post-1982 is either “revival Giallo” like Argento’s Non ho sonno (2001), widely acknowledged as a return to the director’s cinematic origins, or “neo-Giallo” like Michele Soavi’s Deliria (1987), which was closely inspired by American slasher-movies in the wake of John Carpenter’s Halloween (1978) and Sean S. Cunningham’s Friday the 13th (1980).

For a historical contextualisation and a critical analysis of the Giallo directors that were closely inspired by Argento’s box-office success, see Colombo and Tentori (1990: 113-137); Bruschini and Tentori (1992: 33-67); Rea (1999); Smith (1999); Barrera (2003: 181-189); De Sanctis (2008: 147-154); and Bondanella (2009: 387-403). Despite Argento’s commercial hegemony at the Italian box-office, a selected group of filmmakers were able to provide a sporadic but noteworthy narrative and stylistic alternative to the newly born craze. These few examples include Pupi Avati’s La casa dalle finestre che ridono (1976), Armando Crispino’s L’etrusco uccide ancora (1972), and Lucio Fulci’s Non si sevizia un paperino (1972). For a historical contextualisation and a critical analysis of these films, see Colombo and Tentori (1990: 159-192); and Bruschini and Tentori (1992: 87-110).
1.2.1. Central themes of the Bava-Argento formula

As far as the literary background is concerned, Needham (2002b), Wood (2005: 53), Koven (2006: 2; 17) and Bondanella (2009: 372) agree in tracing the etymology of the name Giallo to the American and British mystery and suspense serial volumes, known as whodunits, published in Italy by Mondadori from the late 1920s. The name Giallo alludes to the yellow colour of the covers of these volumes. However, while in the traditional narrative conventions of the whodunit the reader is provided with objective clues from which the identity of the perpetrator of the crime may be deduced before the solution is eventually revealed by a professional detective, the typical Giallo, as established by the Bava-Argento formula, is built on deceptive and fragmented narrative information rather than factual clues leading to a logical conclusion. As Needham (2002b) has discussed:

The typical Argento protagonist is the victim or witness of trauma who must keep returning to the scene of the crime, the Freudian Nachtraglücklichkeit or retranscription of memory popularly represented via flashback sequences, often committed by a killer who just cannot resist serial murder, the psychoanalytic compulsion to repeat.

The typical Giallo’s amateur detective is usually an eyewitness to a murder whose unreliable sight and subsequent inability to distance himself from the crime leads him to a misleading conclusion (Bondanella 2009: 375). Thus, the whole narrative is often based on the fragmented memory of the protagonist relative to what really happened, and the plot is sometimes impressively convoluted until the final denouement and the revelation of the killer’s identity. Bava’s La ragazza che sapeva troppo, for example, focuses on a young displaced American tourist who witnesses a mysterious murder in the city of Rome. Not certain she can recall a specific detail of the crime she witnessed or even recognise the killer, the woman is hounded by the feeling of something amiss and investigates on her own. In 1964, the director returned to the sub-genre

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11 As Koven (2006: 6-8) has pointed out, a similar source of inspiration is traceable in the German Krimi, a parallel movement in German crime cinema based on Edgar Wallace and his son Bryan Edgar Wallace detective stories, and produced by the German company Rialto Film between 1959 and 1972.
with Sei donne per l’assassino and introduced some of the visual tropes that had been pioneered in Freda’s I vampiri, such as the graphic violence of the murder act and the introduction of what was to become the archetypal Giallo killer’s disguise: black leather gloves and black raincoat (Met 2006: 202) (Cfr. § 1.1.1). Argento kept the basic story idea from La ragazza che sapeva troppo in his L’uccello dalle piume di cristallo, but changed the sex of the main protagonist and imbued the film with the graphic violence and the typical killer’s disguise from Sei donne per l’assassino (Gervasini 2003: 176-177; Menarini 2003: 30; Koven 2006: 4; Pezzotta 2008: 85). It is this combination of narrative and visual tropes that defines the typical Giallo format of the 1970s and 1980s (Koven 2006: 4). Argento’s plot revolves around Sam Dalmas, an American writer living in Rome with his girlfriend Julia. One night, while walking along a street, Sam’s attention is suddenly caught by the light spilling onto the street emanating from an art gallery with a glass-paneled façade. Sam crosses the street to get a better look. Glancing at the window, he sees a woman dressed in white and a figure in black gloves and raincoat fighting with a knife. Sam rushes in to help. The entrance to the art gallery is made of a double set of glass doors. He manages to get through the first set and they lock behind him. The inner set is locked as well and Sam realises he is trapped like an insect in amber. He can only watch in horror as the figure in black escapes and the woman, stabbed, lies on the floor among gigantic sculptures. Despite the fact that the gallery is brightly lit, Sam misrecognises the truth of what he saw and the subsequent plot is built on the man trying to reconstruct the event through his fragmented memory of it. At the end of the film, Sam discovers that the black clad figure was in reality defending himself from the aggression of the woman who is the film’s real serial killer. In this respect, what also relates Bava’s La ragazza che sapeva troppo to Argento’s L’uccello dalle piume di cristallo is the final denouement that implies the feminisation of the serial-killer. However, while the final denouement in Bava’s La ragazza che sapeva troppo still relies on the narrative conventions of the late

1920s *whodunits*, as it involves financial greed as the reason for the crimes, Argento is the first director of the *Giallo* sub-genre to explore a series of psychosexual issues behind the female killer’s motives in the wake of the American *film noir*’s depiction of excessively dysfunctional family behaviour and sexual motivations behind crimes (Wood 2005: 57). In *L’uccello dalle piume di cristallo*, the figure of the accomplice is identified with an effeminate husband who tries to cover up the crimes of his wife, Monica Ranieri, who had been sexually abused in the past and now derives her pleasure in killing from identifying with her male rapist. Although the majority of the serial-killers in the *Gialli* after *L’uccello dalle piume di cristallo* are men, their motives are usually of a psychosexual nature being linked to the killer’s experience of some event or trauma which occurred either in childhood or in a relatively recent past. This trauma is identified as the main reason behind the killer’s insanity (Koven 2006: 104). This suggests that the generation of *Giallo* filmmakers of the 1970s and 1980s tended to passively accept Argento’s introduction of psychological insights into the *Giallo* sub-genre, and that such final denouements were metabolised to such an extent as to become potentially identifiable with the sub-genre itself (Koven 2006: 109).

1.2.2. Visual tropes of the Bava-Argento formula

As Totaro (2003: 163) and Koven (2006: 123) have discussed, another crucial feature that separates the *Gialli* from the more traditional character-based, plot-driven, and attentive to verisimilitude *whodunits* of the late 1920s is their focus on set-pieces during the murder sequences, which are extremely

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13 In Argento’s *Suspiria* (1977) and *Inferno* (1980) although the director’s interest is focused on horror-related themes such as alchemy and witchcraft, female figures continue to represent a transmutation of the deranged women of both his *Gialli* of the early 1970s and of the narrative framework established by the Italian Classic Horror Cycle of the 1960s. Specifically, as Hunt (2000: 332) has pointed out, Argento’s *Suspiria* and *Inferno* emphasised the fact that the Italian Classic Horror Cycle and the *Giallo* sub-genre are not necessarily totally separate. The two films, in fact, show a combination of the horror themes typical of the Italian Classic Horror Cycle and the visual tropes typical of the *Gialli*, such as the depiction of alchemy and witchcraft together with black-gloved and black raincoated killers.

protracted in time and tend to create a flamboyant spectacle in themselves (Cfr. § 1.1.1). As Totaro (2003: 162) has remarked:

A set-piece is a choreographed scene that usually, though not exclusively, takes place in one location. By an “elaborate” set-piece, I mean a situation or set of actions where narrative function [...] gives way to “spectacle”. In other words, the scene plays on far longer than is strictly necessary for the narrative purposes.

The typical Bava-Arongo Giallo, in fact, “places equal (if not more) importance on the actual method of killing as well as solving the crime” (Guins 1996: 141).Grabbing the audience’s attention through a combination of aural and visual signs, both filmmakers create in the murder set-piece a kind of film within the film around which the whole plot is constructed. According to Wallman (2007: 11-13), a possible explanation of the introduction of murder set-pieces into the Giallo format may be found in the influence of the fumetto nero of the 1960s, an adult Italian comic-strip series featuring sadism, graphic sex, and protracted violence. Interestingly, the official birth of the Italian fumetto nero coincides with the birth of the Giallo in 1962 with Bava’s La ragazza che sapeva troppo, and both can thus be placed within the same cultural and thematic framework. Moreover, some of these fumetti neri were also made into films, such as in the cases of Umberto Lenzi’s Kriminal (1966), Piero Vivarelli’s Satanik (1967), and Bava’s Diabolik (1968), thus testifying to the mutual influences shared between both industries. As Guidotti (2000: 13) has remarked, the birth of both the Giallo and the fumetto nero coincides with a time of “hedonistic excess when Italian popular culture ventured to explore every dimly lit corner of the underworld and erotic, generously dwelling upon crime, violence, sadomasochism and fetishism”. Like the Giallo, the fumetto nero, rather than proposing themes of the supernatural, described the horror of the modern city and daily life in a very brutal and violent way. As a matter of fact, this blend of eroticism and violence are common ground in any given Giallo, where the violence itself is often sexualised and the set-pieces “attempt to grab the audience’s attention through the use of sex, violence and graphic gore” (Koven
As Freeland (2000: 256-257), Hunt (2000: 257) and Koven (2006: 127) have stated, these set-pieces in the Giallo sub-genre are designed to be appreciated in their own right within a larger filmic context and are included to make the audiences of graphic horror aware of the beauty the genre is able to impart both aesthetically and emotionally. Specifically, the Italian Gialli tend to establish their elaborate set-pieces, and to provide a certain aesthetic and emotional pleasure, by an effective use of editing, music, and soundtrack during these sequences. Specifically, the set-pieces during the key scenes of murder and violence represent the moment within Giallo cinema in which the various filmmakers tend to show their technical abilities, which are rarely demonstrated in the often flat and prosaic sequences of narrative progress. In this regard, Bava’s Sei donne per l’assassino is the seminal Giallo to introduce a radical split between its traditional whodunit narrative progress and its highly choreographed murders. Specifically, this is the first Giallo to mix a traditional blackmailing plot behind the killer’s motives and a series of murders during which the sheer variety of tools and weapons, such as medieval spiked armoured gloves, knives and razor blades, imparts a spectacle in itself and increases the levels of graphic gore and violence. Moreover, this is the first Giallo to make use of repeated extreme close-ups, fast zooms, both in and out, and POV shots in order to increase the suspense both emotionally and visually. Particularly, the shift to a handheld killer-cam perspective is the most common device in Bava’s Sei donne per l’assassino which creates a temporary subjective position within the psychotic mind of the serial-killer stalking the victim. The film avails itself of different kinds of subjective camera devices in order to reflect the emotional and psychological states of both the killer and the victim. Thus, this series of POVs, whether killer-cam or any of the other subjective camera devices, provide moments of cinematic virtuosity within the film, by effectively fusing together the character’s subjective mental states and the camera itself. In this regard, Bava’s experimentation with style within the murder set-pieces paved the way for Argento’s stylistic and technical virtuosity. Argento not only worked together with Bava to create the Giallo sub-genre, but also provided some of the most audio-visually sophisticated and technically accomplished murder set-pieces in
the Italian Giallo’s history by the medium of elaborate editing, music, and sound effects. Such sophistication was only possible with the higher budget he could command. In the process, Argento’s virtuosity in staging such murder set-pieces overshadowed other Italian practitioners in the field, leading to international acclaim and recognition for himself that remains to this day (Bertellini 2004: 6).

1.3. Conclusion

As McDonagh (2010: xxvii) has pointed out, “Argento did not invent the Giallo, but he helped define the form in all its stylish perversity”. When L’uccello dalle piume di cristallo was released in Italy in 1970, Italian Horror already had solid roots in a second-class cinematic context of low-budget films that had been relegated to a marginal role by the critics of the period (Gervasini 2003: 175; 177). Both Freda and Bava had earlier pioneered an all-Italian narrative and stylistic repertoire that Argento perfected and reworked film by film. Argento inherited a set of narrative, stylistic, and technical conventions; the figure of the amateur detectives from Freda’s I vampiri and Bava’s La ragazza che sapeva troppo; the visual trope of the killer’s disguise from Freda’s I vampiri and Bava’s Sei donne per l’assassino; the elaborate camerawork and the violent murder set-pieces from both filmmakers that featured gruesome gore and aimed at audience reaction rather than sophisticated character development. Argento eventually transposed the deranged women of Freda’s I vampiri and Bava’s La maschera del demonio into the Giallo format, and pioneered a narrative framework that concluded with a psychological explanation about the female killer’s motives that often strained credibility. However, as Pezzotta (2008: 86) has remarked:

Per Argento [...] lo stile è lo strumento per smarcarsi dalla tradizione e affermare la propria originalità al di sopra di un repertorio narrativo che saccheggia con disinvoltura.16

15 Argento’s audio-visually sophisticated and technically accomplished murder set-pieces will be explored in detail from Chapter 2. For more information on Argento’s murder set-pieces in a selected corpus of films, see Chapter 2 - Section 2.5; Chapter 3 - Section 3.3.2; Chapter 4 - Section 4.5; and Chapter 5 - Section 5.5.

16 [Style is the medium by which Argento distances himself from the tradition of Italian Horror and affirms his originality from a narrative repertoire he has used as a point of departure].
What distinguishes Argento’s cinema of the 1970s and 1980s from the cinematic works of Freda and Bava is not to be sought in the brutal murder set-pieces, the environment, and the unhealthy atmosphere charged with sexual symbolism, but rather in the director’s innovative camerawork, his use of avant-garde soundtracks and his new sophisticated technologies (Fazzini 2008: 179). Argento’s technical concern and visual sensibility go beyond the creative impulse of his preceding colleagues working in Italian Horror, and recent criticism has written about this interplay between art film and genre exploitation as the most characterising feature of the director. As Della Casa (2003: 73) has pointed out, Argento’s narrative coherence is never the most important element in the director’s cinema. Rather, it becomes the vehicle through which he is able to provide the highest aesthetic and visual mastery. Argento’s cinema, in fact,

Possiede in realtà molte caratteristiche del cosiddetto cinema d’autore. Di quest’ultimo non possiede forse la misura, l’equilibrio e il controllo viene spesso soppiantato dalla brama di stupire e provocare, ma viene comunque mantenuto il ripetersi di temi e situazioni, che lontani da un atteggiamento di scaltra complicità con gli spettatori segue un percorso stilistico personale e in piena evoluzione (Della Casa 2003: 73).17

This stylistic and technical accomplishment and evolution of the director’s skillful use of camerawork, cinematography, mise-en-scène, and soundtrack will lie at the heart of my whole thesis in which I will deal with Argento’s inspiration from artwork and his extensive use of an art-historical visual repertoire in a selected corpus of films.
Chapter 2

Associating States of Mind with Iconography in La Sindrome di Stendhal (1996)

“Mi piaceva l’idea di un’arte che provoca personalità multiple in una persona, come un vaso di Pandora della psiche”
Dario Argento (Tentori 1997: 29; 2000: 38)

“A splash quite unnoticed, this was Icarus drowning”
William Carlos Williams (1962: 4)

The reason for opening my analysis of Argento’s use of the art-historical repertoire within his cinema with a consideration of La sindrome di Stendhal resides in the centrality of artwork within the film, both in the narrative and in the mise-en-scène.1 The film takes its title from Stendhal Syndrome, a rare clinical pathology based on a temporary mental and physical malaise affecting an individual exposed to art. In this syndrome, the exposure of an individual to a specific piece of art can work as a catalyst and restore a trauma repressed beneath the conscious sphere of the self, and can generate a series of temporary emotional and physical disturbances, ranging from a paraconfusional state to more strictly psychotic behaviour. In the film, Stendhal Syndrome is the cause of the female protagonist’s collapse at the Uffizi Gallery in Florence. Before collapsing, however, the heroine is also presented with a series of diegetic tableaux that seem to contribute to her final crisis which occurs while she is staring at Brueghel’s Landscape with the Fall of Icarus. As Stendhal Syndrome is triggered by a strict association between the image itself and the emotional significance this image acquires in the patient’s unconscious, it is interesting to analyse how the iconography displayed in these tableaux symbolically contributes to the female protagonist’s final crisis. Specifically, the questions I shall answer are the following: Which pictorial repertoire functions as a catalyst for the female protagonist’s Stendhal Syndrome? Is there a symbolic association between the pictorial iconography displayed in the film and the female

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1 As already mentioned in my introduction, the other films will be analysed in chronological order to show a certain creative evolution in the director’s relationship with artistic imagery.
protagonist’s repressed memories and unconscious psychoses? To answer this last question, I will apply some of the psychoanalytical theories dealing with artistic fruition to prove how the heroine’s repressed memories and unconscious psychoses are symbolically conveyed in the tableaux that eventually determine her collapse.

However, Argento’s *La sindrome di Stendhal* is not limited to the clinical effects of *Stendhal Syndrome* on the female protagonist and how the artistic barrage of the Uffizi Gallery symbolically relates to her unconscious. After collapsing at the Uffizi Gallery, the heroine also becomes the victim of a serial rapist who abuses her sexually as soon as she comes back to her hotel room. This traumatic experience increases a series of past-related anxieties and latent psychoses that the contemplation of art had caused partially to resurface. This mixture of art-induced psychosis and physical violence creates a devastating effect on the female protagonist, leading to her loss of identity and her consequent self-identification with her torturer. This mixture of art and violence is also represented by pictorial symbolism. Thus, the final question I shall answer is the following: *Through which pictorial repertoire is the relationship between art and violence enacted?* In answering that question, I will show how the debilitating consequences deriving from this traumatic experience of rape and violence, and that are fully traceable in the protagonist’s body and mind, are eventually conveyed through the use of pictorial symbolism rather than through narrative devices. Both the emotional barrage provided by art at the Uffizi Gallery and the sexual abuse will irreparably affect the heroine’s psyche and will work as a powerful catalyst for the woman’s dramatic descent into self-annihilation and self-destruction.

### 2.1. Synopsis

*La sindrome di Stendhal* centres on Anna Manni, a young police officer attached to the rape-squad in Rome, who is sent to Florence on the trail of Alfredo Grossi, a dangerous serial killer and rapist of young women. During a visit to the Uffizi Gallery, Anna experiences an emotional malaise clinically known as
Stendhal Syndrome (Cfr. § 2.2) that causes her to faint while staring at Brueghel’s Landscape with the Fall of Icarus. Alfredo observes the episode and takes advantage of a psychologically confused and frightened Anna, raping her as soon as she comes back to her hotel room. This sexual abuse generates a feeling of guilt in Anna to such an extent that she desexualizes herself by cutting her hair and behaving like a man. On the advice of her psychiatrist, Anna decides to return to her home town of Viterbo to be close to her family and to prevent a nervous breakdown. In Viterbo, the audience discover that Anna’s relationship with her authoritarian father is deeply unstable and that her mother’s premature death has left an indelible mark on her psyche. Moreover, the return home causes a childhood memory to resurface which had been forgotten over time. In a flashback, Anna relives her first encounter with the unnerving power of art, when in the company of her mother she visited the local Etruscan Museum and fainted before the renowned sculpture Il sarcofago degli sposi. Anna’s mental and physical recovery is also compromised by Alfredo’s return. After kidnapping her, Alfredo takes Anna to a graffiti-covered hideout where she is repeatedly sexually abused. After getting rid of the electrical wires that hold her imprisoned, Anna eventually beats the man to death and disposes of the corpse by throwing it into a river. Back in Rome, Anna strives to recover from the debilitating experience by adopting a feminine look and by dating French art-restorer Marie Beyle. The idyll comes to an end as soon as Anna receives a phone threat from an unidentified voice telling her that Alfredo is still alive and is going to kill all those who are close to her, starting with Marie. When Marie is found dead, a terrifying truth is finally revealed. After killing her rapist, Anna becomes obsessed with the idea that Alfredo is now living inside her and compelling her to murder Marie. This persistent thought brings on Anna’s irreparable mental collapse leading to her self-identification with Alfredo himself. After killing Marie, Anna’s self-identification with Alfredo compels her to get rid of both her psychiatrist and a police colleague who have found out the truth and have tried to reason with her. In a final attempt to repress the thought of Alfredo, Anna is eventually tracked down by her fellow policemen who gently seek to reassure her of the nonexistent threat.
2.2. Stendhal Syndrome *from literature to psychoanalysis*

Graziella Magherini’s clinical studies on artistic fruition and Stendhal’s emotional disturbance during his visit to *Santa Croce* in Florence lie at the heart of Argento’s plot. As the director (Giusti 2010: 491) has stated:

> Io mi riferivo in particolare agli studi che erano stati fatti dai vari psicanalisti e che riguardavano l’influenza dell’opera d’arte sulla psiche umana. Mi riferisco soprattutto al saggio di Freud davanti al Partenone e ai più aggiornati studi della Dottoressa Magherini a Firenze. Ho letto con interesse anche gli scritti sui viaggi in Italia di Stendhal.\(^2\)

From a clinical perspective, the term *Stendhal Syndrome* is applied to a sudden and temporary emotional disturbance, lasting from a few hours to a few days, which can occur when an individual is exposed to art (Magherini 1989: 7; 2007: 169). It takes the name from Stendhal, the pen name of 19th century Parisian born writer Henry-Marie Beyle, who experienced this acute mental suffering on 22 January 1817 while visiting Florence, and eventually became the object of clinical studies in the 1980s by Italian Freudian psychoanalyst Graziella Magherini and her team working at the psychiatric department of the Santa Maria Nuova Hospital in Florence. In his *Rome, Naples et Florence en 1817*, Stendhal (1973: 479) writes:

> Avant-hier, en descendant l’Apennin pour arriver à Florence, mon cœur battait fort. Quel enfantillage! Enfin, à un détour de la route, mon œil a plongé dans la plaine, et j’ai aperçu de loin, comme une masse sombre, *Santa Maria del Fiore* et sa fameuse coupole, chef-d’œuvre de Brunelleschi. “C’est là qu’ont vécu le Dante, Michel-Ange, Léonard de Vinci!” me disais-je; voilà

\(^2\) I used as reference the studies that had been made by several psychoanalysts which concerned the influence of artwork on the human psyche. I specifically refer to Freud’s essay on the Parthenon, and the more recent studies of Dr Magherini in Florence. I read with interest the notes of Stendhal during his travels in Italy as well. As far as Sigmund Freud is concerned, Argento is specifically referring to the Austrian psychoanalyst’s incredulity that such places could be real while visiting the Parthenon in 1904, which incredulity Freud eventually described in an open letter to Swiss intellectual Romain Rolland in January 1936. According to Freud (1964a: 241-247):

> Now it would be easy to argue that this strange thought that occurred to me on the Acropolis only serves to emphasize the fact that seeing something with one’s own eyes is after all quite a different thing from hearing or reading about it. [...] By the evidence of my senses I am now standing on the Acropolis, but I cannot believe it. [...] It seemed to me beyond the realms of possibility that I should travel so far, that I should go such a long way.
cette noble ville, la reine du Moyen Âge [...] J’ai si souvent regardé des vues de Florence, que je la connaissais d’avance; j’ai pu y marcher sans guide.³

It was during a tour to Santa Croce that a sudden emotional disturbance affected the novelist. Firstly, he was impressed by the perfect shape of the church’s architectural style, and then he was overwhelmed by Volterrano’s Sibille in the cupola of the Cappella Niccolini. He described this experience as extremely traumatic and debilitating:

Mon émotion est si profonde, qu’elle va jusqu’à la piété. Le sombre religieux de cette église, son toit en simple charpente, sa façade non terminée, tout cela parle vivement à mon âme. Ah, si je pouvais oublier! [...] Là, assis sur le marchepied d’un priedieu, la tête renversée et appuyée sur le pupitre, pour pouvoir regarder au plafond, les Sibylles du Volterrano m’ont donné peut-être le plus vif plaisir que la peinture m’ait jamais fait. J’étais déjà dans une sorte d’extase, par l’idée d’être à Florence, et le voisinage des grands hommes dont je venais de voir les tombeaux. Absorbé dans la contemplation de la beauté sublime, je la voyais de près, je la touchais pour ainsi dire. J’étais arrivé à ce point d’émotion où se rencontrent les sensations célestes données par les beaux-arts et les sentiments passionnées. En sortant de Santa Croce, j’avais un battement de cœur, ce qu’on appelle des nerfs à Berlin; la vie était épuisée chez moi, je marchai avec la crainte de tomber”(1973: 479-480).⁴

In her volumes La Sindrome di Stendhal (1989) and Mi sono innamorato di una statua: oltre la sindrome di Stendhal (2007), Magherini provides a detailed clinical description of more than one hundred cases between 1977 and 1986 among foreign people visiting Florence and being hospitalised because of a

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³ [The day before yesterday, descending the Apennines toward Florence, my heart was beating fast. How childish. Finally, at a turn in the road, I looked down onto the plain and far off I saw a sort of dark mass, Santa Maria del Fiore and its famous dome, Brunelleschi’s masterpiece. I said to myself: there had lived Dante, Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci; there is the noble city, queen of the Middle Ages [...] I had seen so often so many views of Florence that I knew it already; I was able to walk about without a guide].

⁴ [My emotion is so profound that it verges on piety. The gloomy religiousness of this church, its simple wood ceiling, its unfinished façade, everything talked vividly to my soul! Ah! As if I could forget! [...] There, sitting on the kneeling stool, my head abandoned on the pulpit so that I could look up at the ceiling, Volterrano’s Sibille gave me what was perhaps the deepest pleasure that painting had ever given me. I was already in a sort of ecstasy at the very idea of being in Florence and the proximity of the great men whose tombs I had seen. Engrossed in contemplation of sublime beauty, I saw it near me, in a sense I was touching it. I had arrived at that point of emotion that is the meeting point between the heavenly sensations of the beaux arts and passionate feelings. Leaving Santa Croce, my heart pulsed, what is called nerves in Berlin, the life in me was exhausted; I walked with the fear of falling].
temporary confusion, dizziness, and tachycardia after the contemplation of art. The people affected had all been in good mental and physical health before leaving their countries of origin and starting on their journey to Italy, and only manifested their disturbance after coming into contact with the cultural and historical heritage of Florence. The city itself has witnessed the highest number of cases of Stendhal Syndrome because of the heavy concentration of art and the exceptionally intense and long sense of history which the place is able to evoke. This temporary discomfort also includes an interaction of crises that afflict both the mental and physical spheres of the senses, ranging from the fear of dying, fainting, suffocating, tachycardia and vertigo, to sudden depression with subsequent compulsion to return home and a longing for family. Magherini's task was to relieve these people of their temporary confusion while under observation and gently place them back into society (Magherini 1989: 75; 2007: 169).

Analysing these clinical cases, Magherini and her team were able to formulate a series of hypotheses on the normal operation of the mind under a particular set of circumstances, specifically those of artistic fruition. According to these hypotheses, the acute psychotic reaction exhibited can be classified as a “brief atypical form” that derives from a complex interplay of “extrinsic” factors, such as the voyage understood as the suspension and upsetting of habitual cultural and linguistic rules, and “intrinsic” factors, such as the particular sensitivity and personal history of the patient. The exposure to art works as a catalyst between extrinsic and intrinsic factors. Specifically, it manages to restore a trauma repressed beneath the conscious sphere of the subject affected and rapidly pulls the trauma to the surface causing a crisis of identity and of the cohesion of the Self. This crisis of identity and of the cohesion of the Self manifests itself on various levels, ranging from a paraconfusional state to more strictly psychotic behaviour and perceived depersonalisation associated with

\[5\] For a detailed description of some of the clinical cases Magherini and her team experienced and treated in Florence, see Magherini (1989: 50-98; 2007: 172-175).
panic attacks (Magherini 2007: 170-171). Fundamental within this experience of art fruition is the emergence of what Magherini identifies as a selected fact. As Magherini (2007: 249) has pointed out:

The term selected fact, as applied to the work of art and to its fruition, designates both a function of the mind of the viewer and a specific characteristic or quality of that work that, for that person and at that particular moment, becomes a powerful mental catalyst.

Specifically, among the elements that compose the works of art, one in particular emerges and becomes the focus of the viewer’s attention because of its powerful emotional significance which suddenly brings to light certain repressed or still unknown aspects of the person’s life. Finding the correct reading of the selected fact that has brought on the attack and associating this with the patient’s own mental history is crucial to exploring the reason for this temporary disturbance (Magherini 1989: 75-76).

2.3. Contextualising La Sindrome di Stendhal within Argento’s work

The original screenplay of La sindrome di Stendhal was written by Argento together with his long-established collaborator Franco Ferrini. As Daniel (2001: 232-233) and Balmain (2002) have discussed, the film provides a narrative and visual innovation in relation to the director’s Gialli of the 1970s and 1980s. There is no hidden killer to identify or necessity to focus on the investigative element of the plot, as the dangerous criminal is revealed in the character of

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6 For a complete outline of the research, see the tables in Magherini (1989: 155-163; 2007: 185-191; 249-258).
7 Among the many cases Magherini outlines, there is that of Franz, a tourist from Germany on a visit to Florence. While visiting the Uffizi Gallery, Franz began to suffer some sort of visual impairment. It was when he caught sight of Caravaggio’s Il Giovane Bacco (1596) that Franz was forced to leave the room with an identity crisis manifested in the guise of a heart attack. Magherini’s explanation of Franz’s crisis focuses on the patient’s repressed homosexuality due to his rigid and traditional upbringing. Faced with the delicate and effeminate figure of Caravaggio’s painting, Franz unconsciously associated his covert history of sexual ambiguity with the painting and this caused him great distress (Magherini 1989: 66-67; 2007: 173).
8 La sindrome di Stendhal is also available as a novel, La Sindrome, written by the director himself and published by Bompiani in 1996. Apart from the epilogue, in which Anna Manni decides to commit suicide, the plot and the characters’ names and roles are identical to the film. Ferrini’s collaboration with Argento started in 1985 with Phenomena and also includes Opera (1987), the segment Il gatto nero in the two-episode film Due occhi diabolici (1990), Trauma (1993), Non ho sonno (2001), Il cartaiolo (2004), and the TV film Ti piace Hitchcock? (2005).
Alfredo Grossi from the very opening of the film. At the same time, the visual tropes that are typical of the Italian Gialli are completely absent, as neither Alfredo nor Anna wear the distinguishing black gloves and leather raincoat during the murder scenes, and the highly choreographed murder set-pieces have been replaced by a less elaborate use of the camera (Cfr. § 1.2.1; 1.2.2). Both Daniel and Balmain provide a valuable starting-point to contextualise La sindrome di Stendhal outside of the typical Giallo’s narrative context. In my opinion, the film’s narrative context revolves more around the rape-revenge film rather than the traditional Giallo formula, as it was pioneered by Bava with La ragazza che sapeva troppo (1962) and re-elaborated by Argento himself with L’uccello dalle piume di cristallo (1970). In La Sindrome di Stendhal, the director’s major concern is to provide a detailed commentary on the complex relationship that is established between the torturer and his victim and the subsequent dramatic effects this traumatic experience provokes in the latter. Viewed from this perspective, the film can be associated with Argento’s previous cinema in which he experimented with a similar formula although maintaining the typical detection element of the Italian Gialli. In Quattro mosche di velluto grigio (1971), for example, the male protagonist Roberto Tobias is a young rock drummer in Rome who becomes the target of a mysterious masked torturer, whose identity is finally revealed in the figure of his wife Nina. Driven mad by a sadistic father who raised her as a boy, and unable to avenge herself because of the man’s premature death, Nina eventually married Roberto because of his physical resemblance to her father and took out her maniacal hatred on him instead. In Opera (1987), Betty is a young opera singer who, after debuting as Lady Macbeth, becomes the victim of a hooded psychopathic murderer who forces her to watch his crimes by binding her and holding her eyes open by the

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9 Rape-revenge films are a sub-genre of exploitation cinema that was particularly popular in the United States in the 1970s and generally follow the same three-act structure: 1) a woman is raped, tortured and left for dead; 2) the woman survives and rehabilitates herself; 3) the woman takes revenge for the crime by killing her torturer. For a historical contextualization and critical analysis of the major rape-revenge films, see Clover (1992); Creed (1993: 122-138); and Read (2000).

medium of needles. The killer is revealed to be Inspector Santini, the lover of Betty’s deceased mother, a former opera singer with whom he conducted a sadomasochistic affair. Betty’s mother, in fact, forced him to murder and torture other women while she was watching close by in a state of sexual arousal. When Inspector Santini saw Betty as Lady Macbeth for the first time, he hoped she would be like her mother and decided to start this perverse game in order to revive his past experience. Thus, in *Quattro mosche di velluto grigio* and *Opera* the series of crimes and torturings adhere to the *Giallo*’s traditional final denouement as they are motivated by a traumatic past event that irreparably affects the killer’s psyche (Cfr. § 1.2.1). By contrast, in *La Sindrome di Stendhal* Anna becomes Alfredo’s target primarily because of her suffering from *Stendhal Syndrome*, something he witnessed while secretly following her in the Uffizi Gallery. Moreover, both Roberto and Betty simply represent the unknowing object of desire of a sadistic mind, and try to maintain their lucidity despite the physical and psychological tortures to which they are subjected. By contrast, Anna’s reaction to Alfredo’s perpetrated violence determines her subsequent self-identification with her torturer. In this respect, *La Sindrome di Stendhal* can be associated with the director’s debut *L’Uccello dalle piume di cristallo*, another film that openly explores the theme of the self-identification of the victim with her torturer. In *L’uccello dalle piume di cristallo*, Monica Ranieri is an art gallery director who was brutally attacked by a rapist as a young woman and suffered a severe trauma. This painful event was totally repressed by Monica and she eventually recovered sufficiently to return to normal life. Monica’s trauma remained dormant for a ten-year-period until one day she came across a naïf painting depicting the scene of which she had been the unwilling protagonist. Faced with the scene of violence depicted in the painting, Monica unconsciously associated her history of sexual abuse with the painting and this caused the return of her repressed trauma. In the film’s final denouement, however, it is

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eventually explained that Monica’s propensity for paranoid tendencies led her to self-identify with the attacker. According to Tentori (1997: 14), as a woman Monica felt responsible for arousing the rapist’s desire and this obsession provoked her self-identification with the opposite sex. This mental self-identification with the opposite sex is totally reflected in Monica’s manipulating control over her submissive husband. The man, in fact, started suffering from induced psychosis to the point of becoming a homicidal psychotic himself in order to protect his wife (Cfr. § 1.2.1). However, my opinion is that while Monica’s self-identification is fully mental, as she tries to maintain a docile attitude and a feminine appearance on the outside, Anna’s response to Alfredo’s rapes causes a total annihilation of her feminine behaviour and sexuality as she desexualises herself by cutting her hair and by assuming a masculine attitude. As Daniel (2001: 236) and Balmain (2002) have suggested, in La sindrome di Stendhal Argento identifies sexual abuse more as an issue of power rather than a representation of mental deviance. A typical example is provided by the sequence in which Alfredo rapes Anna for the first time at the hotel Porta Rossa. He menaces the woman by introducing a gun into her mouth and by standing over her in an extreme act of power and submission. Daniel’s and Balmain’s consideration can also be applied to Anna’s subsequent masculine behaviour. Following the violence perpetrated by Alfredo, Anna’s reaction is to reassert her own self by humiliating her boyfriend Marco in the same way Alfredo had humiliated her. In a desperate effort to switch the traditional sex roles, Anna roughly takes her boyfriend from behind, mimicking sexual intercourse between a master and her slave, until the man finally collapses to the floor upset by the shocking experience. Anna’s symbolic cry for help, however, is clearly discernible in the disturbing tableaux she paints after being raped by Alfredo which depict a hyperbolically wide-open screaming mouth (Cfr. § 2.5). Thus, art becomes an instrument through which Anna tries to symbolically project her human emotion into the physical world. After killing Alfredo, Anna also tries to restore her sexual identity by adopting an extremely feminine look with a blonde wig and white dress that make her resemble American actress Veronica Lake in George Marshall’s The Blue Dahlia (1946), and by dating French art restorer Marie Beyle.
The agonised possibility of self-affirmation in the woman’s relationship is negated, however, when Marie is eventually killed by Anna in her movement towards her own self-destruction. Similarly, Anna’s attempt at catharsis through creating art becomes futile when she transforms her own body into the canvas, spreading her face and body with black oil paint and lying on a black floor in the foetal position (Cfr. § 2.5). This final gesture symbolises Anna’s complete emotional and physical surrender to the power of art, which had previously subjugated her during the visit to the Uffizi Gallery. The role of art within the filmic context will form the basis of my next analysis.

2.4. The symbolic association of Anna’s states of mind with art

According to Gallant (2001a: 70), Rolet (2004: 6), and Thoret (2008: 126), in La sindrome di Stendhal the mesmerising power of the artistic creation is symbolically enacted starting from the credit sequence in which a series of forty-two tableaux scroll up the right side of the frame and the square images are tied together in such a way that they resemble a strip of film running through a projector (Figures 1 and 2). As Argento (Giusti 2010: 492) has pointed out, this credit sequence is aimed at bombarding the audience with the most perturbing canvases which Magherini’s clinical studies have identified. These studies also enumerate a series of tableaux that appear to be responsible for the most frequent emotional disturbances leading to Stendhal Syndrome in the samples of hospitalised people analysed. Moreover, as Rolet (2004: 7) has noticed, this relentless scroll of artistic images creates an overwhelming barrage of visual information that prefigures the director’s intention to conceive the whole film as an incisive combination of the pictorial with the filmic domain. Nine out of the forty-two tableaux displayed in the credit sequence depict scenes of explicit crime and violence, ranging from the dramatic execution in Francisco Goya’s Los fusilamientos del tres de mayo (1814) to the act of murder in Jacques-Louis David’s La mort de Marat (1793). According to Rolet, this association of art with

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12 See footnotes 5 and 6.
13 According to Rolet (2004: 7), the other tableaux that explicitly or implicitly evoke crime and violence include a scene of murder with a sword in painting 4, a detail of Eugène Delacroix’s La Mort de Sardanapale (1827) in painting 11, a detail of Hieronymus Bosch’s Christ Carrying the Cross (1490) in painting 18, a detail
crime and violence is a subtle - yet incisive - way of persuading the audience to approach empathically Anna’s devastating and intoxicating relationship with art, and to anticipate the gruesome scenes of murder and rape within the film through iconography. Rolet’s assertion can also be applied to the credit sequence of Argento’s *La terza madre* (2007), the third instalment of the so-called *Three Mothers Trilogy*, together with *Suspiria* (1977) and *Inferno* (1980). Both *La sindrome di Stendhal* and *La terza madre* show a credit sequence in which the iconography displayed is charged with a narrative as well as a symbolic role.¹⁴ As Argento (Maiello 2007: 252-253) has remarked concerning the credit sequence of *La terza madre*:

> Ho voluto dare una referenza all’iconografia che mi ha ispirato. Ho messo tutto ciò che può servire per capire il film. Sia da un punto di vista puramente visivo, sia per dare anche dei riferimenti di tipo religioso [...] Ho raccolto tutte le immagini che ho trovato e che ho studiato prima di scrivere il film e le ho inserite nei titoli di testa e coda. È come se fosse un promemoria per lo spettatore.¹⁵

*La terza madre* is the story of an extremely powerful witch, *Mater Lacrimarum*, who has been hibernating for centuries in a cemetery near Rome and is eventually awakened when the female protagonist, Sarah Mandy, manages to open the urn containing the witch’s ashes (Cfr. § 4.2). This awakening generates a series of misfortunes in the city of Rome on such a global scale that they are compared to the Last Judgement by the film’s protagonist. This idea of global destruction and suffering is already traceable in the opening sequence through iconography, in which alternate a number of pictorial references from Michelangelo’s *Giudizio Universale* (1535-1541) to Hans Memling’s *The Last Judgement* (1467-1471) and the *Triptych of Earthly Vanity* of Michelangelo’s *Giudizio Universale* (1535-1541) in painting 31, a detail of El Greco’s *Laocoön* (1608-14) in painting 36, a detail of Peter Paul Rubens’s *The Rape of the Daughter of Leucippus* (1618) in painting 37, and a detail of Sandro Botticelli’s *La Columna di Apelle* (1494-5) in painting 41.


¹⁵ [I intended to provide some references of the iconography that had inspired me in the film. I put everything that could be useful to understand the film both from a religious and a purely visual standpoint. I collected all the iconography I had found and studied before writing the film and I placed it in the credits as if it were a reminder to the viewers].
and Divine Salvation (c.1495) (Figures 3-6). Although fully applicable to *La terza madre*’s credit sequence, Rolet’s symbolic association of art with crime and violence in *La sindrome di Stendhal*’s credit sequence is somehow reductive. In my opinion, the credit sequence of *La sindrome di Stendhal* is not just aimed at anticipating the violent content of the film through iconography, but it also acts as a preamble to the aesthetic and narrative circularity of the whole film through a combination of artwork and soundtrack. The credit sequence is exacerbated by Ennio Morricone’s haunting and repetitive *passacaglia*. Like the melodic pattern of the credit sequence, the name Anna is a palindrome itself. Moreover, throughout the film the character of Anna Manni undertakes a circular mental and physical transformation that symbolically manages to lead back to the overwhelming barrage of iconography displayed in the credit sequence. As *La Sindrome di Stendhal* progresses, the audience experience an increasing dominance of art within the film, both by *diegesis* and by *plan-tableaux*, as if Anna’s emotional disturbance has contaminated the whole reality around her. First, Anna becomes a victim of art because of *Stendhal Syndrome* while staring at Brueghel’s *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* in the Uffizi Gallery (Cfr. § 2.4.4). Then, she becomes proactive and creates art in order to vent her repressed rage following the sexual abuse perpetrated by Alfredo (Cfr. § 2.3; 2.5). Finally, she mentally and physically transforms into an *objet d’art* herself. Specifically, I refer to the sequence which takes place in the graffiti-covered hideout in which Anna is represented as a *plan-tableau* of Andrea Mantegna’s *Cristo morto*, and to the epilogue where she is eventually portrayed as in Caravaggio’s *Deposizione* (Cfr. § 2.5). This increasing dominance of art within the filmic context is present right from Anna’s visit to the Uffizi Gallery when she is still hunting Alfredo. As soon as the credit sequence fades out, the film opens up with a medium shot of Anna who blends in with the crowd of Florence on her way to the Uffizi Gallery. The

16 Composer Ennio Morricone also worked on the director’s *Gialli* of the 1970s *L’uccello dalle piume di cristallo*, *Il gatto a nove code*, *Quattro mosche di velluto grigio*, and on the 1998 film adaptation *Il fantasma dell’Opera*. The *passacaglia* is a short, usually rapid and often grave musical form that originated in early 17th-century Spain and whose character is usually based on a bass-ostinato and written in triple-meter. The melodic pattern, usually four, six or eight bars long, is repeated without change through the duration of the piece, while the upper lines are varied freely, over the bass pattern serving as a harmonic anchor. For more information on how the *passacaglia* has been used by Morricone in *La sindrome di Stendhal* see Villani (2000: 62-68); Maiello (2003: 167-168; 2007: 210-11); and Lucantonio (2008a: 220-221).
camera, then, meticulously focuses on Anna’s face in medium close-up as she progresses, and often alternates Anna’s POV with a series of frames at different distances, showing the crowded streets of Florence. As Rolet (2004: 14) has remarked, Anna’s route to the Uffizi Gallery is not as direct as it should be, as it commences on the Ponte Vecchio that is near the museum, but suddenly swerves to Santa Croce and eventually arrives at the Palazzo Vecchio. According to Magherini (2007: 171), Florence’s heavy concentration of art within the relatively narrow confines of the centre may enable the visitor to visually store a considerable amount of art in a very short time and may be responsible for causing a temporary displacement of the senses ending up in the final collapse of the individual in front of a specific painting or sculpture. This factor has been fully accepted by Argento (Giusti 2010: 491-492):

Non è solamente il quadro singolo che turba, ma è anche l’avvicinamento al quadro stesso. Sia i quadri che si vedono prima e il percorso di palazzi e strade che si fa per arrivare ad ammirarli influiscono sulla psiche umana. È tutta questa moltitudine di emozioni che crea il turbamento fortissimo finale.¹⁷

As a result, Anna’s route to the Uffizi Gallery may be seen as responsible for her final collapse while contemplating Brueghel’s Landscape with the Fall of Icarus, as it provides a huge amount of art - the statues of 13th century poet Dante Alighieri in Santa Croce, Baccio Bandinelli’s Ercole e Caco (1534), a copy of Michelangelo’s David (1501-1504) in Piazza della Signoria - as well as various churches and palaces, in little more than one minute of sequence. However, as Magherini has demonstrated, the final collapse explodes in conjunction with the so-called selected fact, which is the vision of a specific detail in a painting or a sculpture that brings to the surface repressed memories and phobias in the viewer (Cfr. § 2.2). In light of this statement, I shall focus on the group of tableaux in the gallery that capture Anna’s attention in order to give an

¹⁷ [It is not just the single painting that can be perturbing, but also the several buildings and roads on your way to the painting can affect your psyche. It is, in fact, this multitude of emotions that creates the final disturbance].
interpretation of the possible selected fact behind the woman’s Stendhal Syndrome.

2.4.1. Art and the unheimlich

The first painting that captures Anna’s attention at the Uffizi Gallery is Paolo Uccello’s Disarcionamento di Bernardino della Ciarda (1435-1455), which is part of a triptych representing the victory of the Florentine army over the Sienese at the battle of San Romano in 1432.\(^{18}\) It portrays the two armies, Florence on the left and Siena on the right, while the figures of Bernardino della Ciarda and his white horse are in the middle (Figures 7 and 8). The director first takes a medium shot of the entire tableau and the image suddenly switches to a reverse shot of Anna standing between Piero della Francesca’s double portrait of Battista Sforza and Federico da Montefeltro. The camera progresses by zooming in on the unsaddled knight and his white horse in the middle of the painting and by showing the extreme close-up of the sharp arrows and pikes of both the armies. Argento’s attention on both the unsaddled knight and the soldiers’ weapons can be read in terms of Magherini’s selected fact in Anna’s disturbance. Their significance is implied by the change in Anna’s expression on seeing them. In light of this statement, it would be useful to focus on Sigmund Freud’s definition of unheimlich in order to interpret such selected facts. In his 1919 essay The Uncanny, Freud (1964b: 219) has explained the term as follows:

The German word unheimlich is obviously the opposite of heimlich [homely, comfortable, tranquil], heimisch [homely, domestic], the opposite of what is familiar; and we are tempted to conclude that what is uncanny is frightening precisely because it is not known and familiar. Of course not everything that is new and unfamiliar is frightening; the equation is not wholly reversible. We can only say that what is novel can easily become frightening and uncanny. Some, but by no means all, new

\(^{18}\) The other two tableaux that are part of the triptych are Niccolò Tolentino alla testa dei fiorentini (1438-1440) at the National Gallery in London and Intervento decisivo di Michele Attendolo a fianco dei fiorentini (1455) at the Musée du Louvre in Paris. The Uffizi panel was probably designed to be the central painting of the triptych and is the only one signed by the artist. The sequence most widely agreed in art history is that the triptych may represent different times of day: dawn (London), mid-day (Paris) and dusk (Uffizi), as the battle lasted eight hours. For more information, see Berti and Petrioli Tofani (1993: 34-35).
things are frightening. Something must be added to what is novel and unfamiliar in order to make it uncanny.

In the course of his examination of the word, Freud (1964b: 219) quotes Schelling’s definition: “unheimlich is the name for everything that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light” as the most appropriate to apply to his psychoanalytical studies. Specifically, Freud’s use of unheimlich comes to mean a conflict previously repressed originating in the personal history of an individual, which is suddenly brought to conscious memory. In this respect, art may work as a catalyst by drawing this forgotten conflict into the limelight of an already emotionally stricken consciousness by the distinctive and intrinsic qualities of the aesthetic object. That is the reason why the encounter with a work of art in a particular moment in the life of an individual may stimulate an emotional experience that can be perceived as disturbing and perturbing. As Gallant (2001a: 70) has discussed, the penetrating and sharp arrows and pikes in Uccello’s painting may be interpreted as symbols of phallic machismo and superiority as expressed by both the armies. Thus, Anna’s distress may be caused by her perception of such images of an entirely male-centred society as disturbing and threatening. This consideration of Anna’s anxiety towards a male-centred society is a useful starting-point for the identification of my selected fact. Specifically, the knight at the centre of the painting may represent a partially repressed childhood anxiety and symbolise Anna’s father who has been metaphorically unsaddled from the woman’s life and memory. Throughout the film, in fact, the audience learn that Anna’s relationship with her family, specifically with her father, is deeply unstable, and her mother’s premature death contributed to the heightening of the woman’s anxiety and uncertainty over her position in the all-male household. Thus, the woman’s decision to join the police force in Rome was mainly dictated by a personal need to escape and forget her father’s patriarchal oppression in her hometown Viterbo.

A related interpretation of personal conflict linked to a family traumatic background may also reside in Sandro Botticelli’s La nascita di Venere (1482-1486), the second tableau that captures Anna’s attention in the gallery (Figures 9
The painting depicts the classical goddess Venus who emerges from the water on a sea shell and is blown towards the shore by Zephyr and Aura, the goddess of the breeze, and is eventually joined by one of the Horae who is handing her a flowered mantle (Lightbown 1989: 152-163). Argento first takes a close-up on the double figure of Zephyr and Aura and the camera slowly progresses following the movement of their breath until it reaches Venus’s face. As Rolet (2004: 8) has noticed, Botticelli conceives a Venus pudica, standing upright in the gentle act of hiding her intimacy and swaying in the wind before being covered by one of the Horae. Similarly, Anna’s fair complexion and long black hair resemble those of Venus and seem to lay an emphasis on her feminine fragility. Specifically, Venus may symbolically represent Anna’s fragility toward Zephyr and Aura that become expressions of the woman’s unstable relationship with both the maternal, as represented by Aura, and paternal, as represented by Zephyr, figures in her traumatic past. However, it is my opinion that Argento’s persistent attention on the embracing figures of Zephyr and Aura may also be interpreted according to a different perspective. The two mythological figures seem to merge into a single androgynous one in such a way it becomes hard to decipher the distinctive features of each. This element may be responsible for Anna’s unconscious self-identification with them while contemplating the painting. Throughout the film, the audience discover that Anna is a very androgynous character in her attitude despite the fact that she maintains a feminine appearance. Both Anna’s upbringing in an all-male environment and her job in the police have contributed to an unconscious internalisation of her masculine side; this internalised masculinity is fully manifested in the daily activity of her family and professional sphere. During Anna’s visit to Viterbo, for example, the audience find out that she used to box with her older brother. Despite this, she is offended by her relative’s insinuation that she is becoming a boy. This hitherto hidden masculinisation eventually becomes physically externalised following the sexual abuse perpetrated by Alfredo. If, on the one hand, Anna expressively blames her feminine sexuality for having aroused the desires of a monster, on the other hand, this episode of rape also serves as a powerful catalyst for an already latent masculine attitude.
2.4.2. Art and the sublime

As Anna progresses through the Uffizi Gallery, the third painting that is diegetically represented by Argento is Botticelli’s *Primavera* (1482) (Figures 11 and 12). From left to right, the painting is commonly believed to depict Mercury, stirring the ether with a wand, the Three Graces, Venus with Cupid hovering above her, Primavera, the goddess of Spring, the nymph Cloris, who is being transformed into Flora, and Zephyr on the far right in the act of swooping down to catch hold of Cloris (Lightbown 1989: 114-145). Argento introduces Botticelli’s *Primavera* by taking in the entire painting on a wide-shot, then cutting to a close-up of the various figures with a long pan until it reaches Zephyr embracing Cloris. It is this last detail that increases Anna’s anxiety. As Magherini (Gallant 2001a: 71) has discussed, the nymph Cloris is being seduced by Zephyr and the rose in her mouth symbolises the actual moment of “deflowering”.

Magherini’s statement leads me to attribute a symbolical double meaning within the film to the image of Zephyr embracing and “deflowering” Cloris. On the one hand, the figure may be perceived as an omen of what is going to happen in the near future when Anna is brutally raped by Alfredo. On the other hand, it may be an allegory of the ravaging power of art that is able to capture Anna’s attention and “rape” her psyche. Just as Cloris is eventually transformed into Flora by the physical act of “deflowering”, Anna’s personality is irreparably affected by the contemplation of such a figure. From this perspective, it is particularly suggestive that when Anna eventually touches the painting, her finger reaches for the hellebore, a poisonous flower that is said to provoke madness (Rolet 2004: 9). The focus on the flower may provide the ultimate metaphor of the poisonous effect of art on Anna’s psyche.

It is, however, with Caravaggio’s shield of *Medusa* (1597) that Anna’s anxiety becomes more evident and profound (Figures 13 and 14). As Thoret (2003: 96-97) has argued, in Argento’s film Caravaggio’s head of Medusa symbolises the disturbing and intoxicating combination of beauty, the painting,

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19 Magherini was interviewed during a documentary entitled *Botticelli’s Primavera: Myths or Fingerprints?*, which was commissioned for British Channel 4. Her comments on the painting are cited from that programme in Gallant (2001a: 65-73).
and violence, the monster’s gaze, and the subsequent mixture of attraction and repulsion that derives from the contemplation of the *sublime* in art. If one takes into consideration Burke’s definition of *sublime* in art and nature, the contemplation of what is perceived as such generates a contrasting mixture of astonishment and terror in the viewer. Specifically:

Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible [...] or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime* [...] the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. [...] The passion caused by the great and sublime in *nature*, when those causes operate most powerfully, is *astonishment*; and *astonishment* is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of *horror*. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it. Hence arises the great power of the *sublime* (Burke 1958 Part I Section VII: 39; Part II Section I: 57).

If one applies Burke’s theory of the *sublime* to the mythological figure of Medusa, we could argue that any men or women who looked upon the Medusa’s face were immediately turned to stone as a consequence of their astonishment and terror. In the same way, Anna’s contemplation of the painting results in the symbolic petrification of her rationality as she stands “astonished” by the painting’s beauty and “terrified” by the horrific monster it portrays.

2.4.3. *Art and the psychotic perturbing*

As well as astonishment and terror, the contemplation of Caravaggio’s painting also generates in Anna a kind of anxiety that could be clinically explained as *psychotic perturbing*. According to Magherini (2007: 247), *psychotic perturbing* is understood as “the return of very remote emotional experiences deposited in the deepest and most unconscious strata of the mind”. While Freud’s use of *unheimlich* is identified as the return of a repressed memory that the patient is aware of having experienced in the past as soon as it resurfaces, *psychotic perturbing* is a kind of mental experience of which the patient is

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20 For more information on Burke’s theory of the *sublime*, see also Crowther (1996: 115-133).
completely unaware. The selected fact, however, is fundamental in both cases. Deploying this form of clinical discourse, I shall try to analyse Anna’s anxiety while staring at the Medusa’s head as an effect of psychotic perturbing upon the woman, which eventually activates a deeply submerged aspect of her Self that had remained dormant until that moment of contemplation. Because of her huge mouth, her head covered with poisonous snakes, and her lolling tongue, the figure of Medusa has been regarded by myth historicism as a symbolical representation of “the mother goddess in her devouring aspect” (Neumann 1972: 169). Specifically, as Creed (1993: 105-106; 111) has suggested, the head of Medusa in classical mythology may be symbolically associated with the image of woman with castrating and devouring genitalia, whose phallic snakes in her head and sharp teeth in her mouth point to the males’ main concern about the female genitalia as a trap, a black hole swallowing them up and cutting them into pieces. According to Creed, Caravaggio’s painting focuses on such a devouring aspect by depicting the Gorgon’s gaping mouth as a huge black orifice with pointed teeth. Creed’s symbolic association of the Medusa’s gaze with the femme castratrice may be a useful starting-point to identify the possible selected fact that eventually rouses Anna’s anxiety while contemplating the painting. Specifically, the Medusa’s gaze may work as a catalyst for a deeply unconscious aspect of Anna’s personality, the psychotic perturbing, which will be later reflected in the woman’s propensity for murder and her consequent transformation into a femme castratrice. After beating Alfredo to death in the graffiti-covered hideout near Viterbo, Anna assumes the appearance of a femme fatale. Despite that, the woman is unable to reaffirm her femininity from inside and this aspect leads to her mental self-identification with her torturer and to a sudden transformation into a “castrator” according to Creed’s metaphorical reading of Medusa’s head. This becomes particularly evident in the sequence of Marie’s murder in the restoration room. Driven by the conviction that Alfredo is ordering her to commit the crime, Anna decides to kill her lover by shooting him in the face thus depriving the man of his identity. The correlation between Anna and the myth of Medusa is symbolically conveyed by Argento’s focus on a copy of Benvenuto Cellini’s Perseo con la testa di Medusa (1545-1554) in the restoration room,
which is shot from different angles before the act of murder is enacted. In this context, it is my opinion that Marie’s murder symbolically equates Perseus’s murder with the inevitable restoring of Anna - Medusa as dominating castrating figure and the subsequent turnover of the classical myth. In this respect, the figure of Anna as \textit{femme castratrice} is related to the female murderer in the director’s film \textit{Trauma}. In this 1993 \textit{Giallo}, Adriana Petrescu is a woman who has been deprived of her motherhood and sexuality by a medical team who has inadvertently decapitated her newborn son because of a power cut in the delivery room. In retaliation, the woman decapitates the members of medical staff responsible for her son’s death and also assumes a dominating masculine control over her anorexic daughter Aura and submissive husband.\footnote{For an analysis of the narrative structure and visual tropes of \textit{Trauma}, see Tentori (1997: 107-112; 2000: 36-38); Luther-Smith (2001: 219-229); Badley (2002); Jones (2004: 215-223); Maiello (2007: 192-199); Curti (2008: 311-313); Gracey (2010: 116-123); McDonagh (2010: 223-230); and Pugliese (2011: 89-94).} While in \textit{La sindrome di Stendhal} the correlation between Anna and Medusa is symbolically established through art, in \textit{Trauma} it is conveyed through Adriana’s final death by decapitation.\footnote{This is the third case in Argento’s cinema where a \textit{femme castratrice} and murderer dies by decapitation like Medusa. The previous examples include Nina Tobias’s death in \textit{Quattro mosche di velluto grigio} and Carlo’s mother’s death in \textit{Profondo rosso}.} Moreover, what is particularly suggestive in \textit{Trauma} is that the representation of Adriana as \textit{femme castratrice} struggles with the symbolical representation of her anorexic daughter Aura as Sir Everett Millais’s \textit{Ophelia} (1853). Just as Hamlet’s fiancée represents the ultimate symbol of submissive behaviour, Aura is a character formed by her mental instability and vulnerability. Argento’s diegetic reference to Millais’s \textit{Ophelia} is eventually conveyed when the male protagonist, David, glances at a copy of the painting in the window of a gallery in Minneapolis after the apparent suicide of Aura. Here, Argento makes a direct reference, inviting the audience to associate the painting with the memory of Aura whom David believes has drowned herself in a lake.\footnote{According to Gallant (2001a: 68-69; 2001i: 81), another of Argento’s films which explores this concept is \textit{Il gatto nero} segment in \textit{Due occhi diabolici} (1990), the two-episode film made in collaboration with American director George A. Romero. In \textit{Il gatto nero}, the insane search for the perfect form of art transforms the protagonist, photographer Rod Usher, into a torturer and killer. In the sequence of the murder of Rod’s girlfriend, Argento recreates Sir John Everett Millais’s \textit{Ophelia} (1852) through the use of \textit{plan-tableau}. Argento’s reference to \textit{Ophelia} is made directly when the female victim, having been murdered by Rod, is left to sink in the bath of diluted blood, the image composition roughly mimicking that of Millais’s painting.} In \textit{La Sindrome di Stendhal}, Anna is both the victimised Ophelia and the castrating Medusa. While the woman’s family background has contributed to the development of a
submissive insecurity over her own body and femininity, Alfredo’s sexual abuses trigger Anna’s inner ferocity, transforming her into a *femme castatrice* in a total denial of such submission.

2.4.4. *Losing oneself in a work of art*

Anna’s emotional disturbance leading to *Stendhal Syndrome* reaches its climax as she stands in front of Brueghel’s *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* (1558) (*Figure 15*).24 The choice to represent diegetically Brueghel’s painting in the Uffizi Gallery, thus moving it from its original location in Brussels, has been explained by the director (Giusti 2010: 492) as follows:

> *La Caduta di Icaro* è uno dei quadri più perturbanti che esistano, e allora, d’acCORDO con la Dottoressa Magherini, decisi di rappresentarlo. Nel film, io non ero interessato a raccontare i veri Uffizi, piuttosto ero più intenzionato a raccontare il percorso mentale di Anna Manni, quindi mi piaceva che tale percorso terminasse davanti al capolavoro di Brueghel.25

In Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (1977: 417-423), Icarus is the son of Daedalus, a talented craftsman, who attempted to escape from his exile in Crete, where he and his son were imprisoned by Minos, the king for whom he had built the Labyrinth. Daedalus fashioned two pairs of wings made of wax for himself and for Icarus and, before they took off from the island, he warned his son not to fly too close to the sun. Overcome by the feeling of flight, Icarus joyfully soared through the sky. His trajectory, however, took him too close to the sun, which melted the wax of his wings causing him to fall. While the reference is to Greek mythology, Brueghel places the episode within a 16\textsuperscript{th} century landscape as is clear from the costumes of both the ploughman and the shepherd observing the tragedy at the centre of the canvas, and the decorative features of the galleon.

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24 As Rolet (2004: 17) has pointed out, there are two versions of the painting portraying the fall of Icarus. In the first, the figure of Daedalus is seen flying in the middle of the sky and in the other, the one shown in Argento’s film, the figure of Daedalus is absent. While for the first version there is some doubt as to the identity of the artist, the second version is commonly attributed to Brueghel and is housed in the Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique in Brussels.

25 *The Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* is one of the most disturbing *tableaux* that exist, and so, Dr Magherini and I decided to represent it in Florence. In the film, in fact, I was not interested in presenting the real Uffizi Gallery, rather I wanted to tell Anna Manni’s mental struggle, and so I liked the idea that her journey ended in front of Brueghel’s masterpiece.
sailing the sea on the right (Hamilton 2007: 394). Argento first takes in the entire *tableau* on a wide-shot, then focuses on the detail of Icarus’s legs in close-up, before Anna self-identifies with the detail (*Figures 16-18*). According to Segal’s psychoanalytical approach to the study of creation and fruition in art (1955: 388), every creative effort of the artist is consciously or unconsciously directed not toward a faithful reproduction of the external world but toward the artist’s own mental re-creation of it. Consequently, every re-creation of the artist’s mind becomes evident in the work of art and may be interiorised by the sensitive viewer in the act of contemplation, who self-identifies with the author of the painting while the latter is expressing and facing his interpretation of reality. Specifically:

The aesthetic pleasure proper, that is, the pleasure derived from a work of art, is due to an identification of ourselves with the work of art as a whole and with the whole internal world of the artist as represented by his work. [...] We find in Dilthey’s philosophy a concept called by him *Nach-erleben*. This means to him that we can understand other people from their behaviour and expression, we intuitively reconstruct their mental and emotional state, we live after them, we re-live them. [...] His concept, I think, is equivalent to unconscious identification, I assume that this kind of unconscious reliving of the creator’s state of mind is the foundation of all aesthetic pleasure (Segal 1955: 399).

Anna’s self-identification with Icarus, however, draws attention to the other intrinsic aspect of Segal’s concept of aesthetic pleasure, aesthetic pain. While Segal’s definition of aesthetic pleasure is a positive experience, as the viewer will eventually feel enriched and re-integrated after overcoming his own early depressive anxieties through self-identifying with the artist’s state of mind, from Anna’s perspective the same experience is totally debilitating and destructive, as it resides in her failure to work through the psychologically debilitated position which the painting has caused violently to resurface. In this respect, Anna’s self-identification with Icarus may bring to mind the principle of *Empathy* or *Einfühlung*, as summarised by German psychologist Lipps in 1903. According to Lipps (1903: 247 quoted in Gordon 1987: 140),
In *Empathy* I am not the real I, but I am inwardly liberated from the latter. I am liberated from everything that I am apart from the contemplation of artistic form.

At the basis of the aesthetic and psychological implication of this definition is the aspect of identity loss. This comprises both the self-identification by the artist with the fiction of his art and the self-identification by the audience with the view of the artist communicated by that fiction. However, Lipps’s *Empathy* involves not only self-affirmation but also self-alienation by the viewer who is absorbed into an external form with the risk of losing himself in the artwork. Therefore, this is an extreme aesthetic and ecstatic experience that is able to confer a total sense of dissolution and immersion within an “other” state. With this in mind, it is interesting to examine Argento’s first draft of *La sindrome di Stendhal*, in which a policewoman from Chicago was to suffer from the rare disturbance after viewing a painting by Bosch at an exhibition in Arizona. As the director (Gallant 2001a: 72-73) has stated:

She’ll view a Bosch painting and become like the painter himself. She’ll dress like him, wear this enormous scarf, become self-destructive, mutilate her face and start thinking of herself as a monster. Through her self-discovery, she skirts madness and turns assassin after seeing one particular landscape.

In *La Sindrome di Stendhal*, the process of “losing oneself” in the artwork is both a threatening and liberating experience for Anna, who eventually translates the discovery of a hidden self into the aesthetic experience of becoming a painter first, and only subsequently a murderer. After becoming a painter as a way to externalise her anger onto the blank canvas at the behest of her psychologist, Anna decides to kill her torturer and to replace him in a series of liberating crimes up until the tragic epilogue. Thus, while self-alienation derives from Anna’s powerlessness before the sublime of the artistic creation, self-affirmation is the consequence of the woman’s discovering of her latent propensity for murder through the simple act of contemplation.
2.4.5. *Water as the recurrent symbolical motif in Anna’s disturbance*

Immediately after Anna collapses while staring at Brueghel’s painting, the audience are shown an overwhelming expanse of water that is created by computer generated imagery (CGI). Anna suddenly passes out and experiences a hallucination in which she self-identifies with Icarus diving into the sea. There, she is confronted with a Bosch-inspired anthropomorphic creature, half fish and half human, which she approaches and kisses in close-up before she comes back to the surface in a low angle shot (*Figures 19-24*). As Gibson (1973: 35) has remarked:

Bosch’s paintings, full of images of animals with human features, or vice versa, may be interpreted as schizophrenic visions of dismantled bodies. These bodies, therefore, represent disunity and confusion over the human body and the fragmentation of identity.

Gibson’s psychoanalytical interpretation of Bosch’s anthropomorphic creatures may be applied to the sequence. As Argento (Maiello 2007: 209) has stated, this underwater nightmarish fantasy is intended to symbolically announce Anna’s first encounter with her torturer Alfredo as well as representing the woman’s first encounter with her still unconscious evil side, both of which are metaphorically expressed by the deformed fish. Thus, the dark abyss of the ocean bed becomes the metaphorical malignant womb from which Anna’s new murderous identity is born. According to Joisten (2007: 106), this sequence can be associated with the very opening of Argento’s *Inferno* (1980), in which Rose Elliott, in search of a mysterious set of keys, immerses herself in a bottomless pool of water located in the basement of a crumbling building. Beneath the silent surface of the water is a womb-like submerged ballroom whose front wall is covered with the writing *Mater Tenebrarum*. Rose has just entered the realms of the mother of darkness, whose presence is directly testified by a series of rotten corpses from which the woman barely manages to escape. Thus, in both *Inferno* and *La sindrome di Stendhal* the recurrent presence of stagnant and still water can be perceived as an instrument of circulation and generation of evil forces that are incapable of generating life. In *La sindrome di*
Stendhal, such images are juxtaposed with those of running water as well; combined, these establish a recurrent symbolical motif throughout the film. Running water, for example, is present during Anna’s third Stendhal Syndrome crisis in the police headquarters after the experience of Alfredo’s sexual abuse, and again in the sequence in which Alfredo is killed by Anna. In the first example, the police headquarters closely resembles an art gallery because of the preponderance of tableaux on every wall (Samocki 2003: 158). This time Anna imagines entering a big modern canvas depicting a rocky waterfall. Argento makes a quick zoom in on the wall with the canvas, passing from the long shot of the whole wall to the close-up of the waterfall in the painting. In long shot, the audience witness Anna entering the painting by stepping over the frame. After approaching the waterfall, Anna manages to turn around and the director focuses on the close-up of her face while she is walking backwards until she plunges her head into the running water. The sequence closes by quickly zooming back from the close-up of the waterfall to the long shot of the painting (Figures 25-34). This symbolic gesture of dipping Anna’s head into running water may metaphorically recall the Christian rite of baptism. While baptism in Christianity is the sacramental act of cleansing in water to remove the original sin, Anna’s gesture symbolizes her need to wash away the terrible violence perpetrated by Alfredo. Similarly, Alfredo’s watery death in the rocky hideout near Viterbo reinforces the statement. The simple fact that Anna blames a blood-covered and dying Alfredo for being a “dirty man” before dumping him in a river in order to clean him is testament of the woman’s desire to wipe away what she perceives as a pollution of both her body and her soul. The identification of dirt with crime and Anna’s desire to wash away every sin after she has committed a murder are re-presented in the final sequence of the film when Anna, stricken by madness, promises herself to clean everything up after brutally slaying both her psychologist and her colleague Marco. Moreover, the image of the running water is in clear opposition to the image of blood that dominates both the sequence following Anna’s disturbance at the Uffizi Gallery and the various scenes of rape and torture perpetrated on her by Alfredo. From a connotative and symbolic perspective, red is the colour of lust and violence. After Anna collapses while
staring at Brueghel’s *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, she immediately cuts her lower lip by hitting it against a marble table. As soon as the woman comes round, her white shirt is stained with blood representing the indelible mark that the contemplation of art has violently impressed on her psyche. Soon after the art-induced hallucination, Anna will be sexually abused and her mind will become even more irreparably affected.

2.4.6. *Art and the reconstruction of narrative coherence*

Still shocked by her collapse at the Uffizi Gallery, Anna takes a taxi and returns to the hotel *Porta Rossa*, another place which closely resembles an art gallery because of the preponderance of *tableaux* in every corner, ranging from a reproduction of Michelangelo’s bas-relief *Madonna della scala* (1491) in the lift, to a copy of Michelangelo’s *David* in a snow globe on the table of Anna’s room. The audience soon realise that the woman has temporarily lost her memory due to her suffering from *Stendhal Syndrome* as she struggles to find some clues as to her identity in the contents of her handbag. As the attempt is unsuccessful, Anna decides to relax on the bed having taken a sleeping-pill. There, she is struck by another painting, a wall print of Rembrandt’s *De Nachtwacht* (1642), a military portrait of the company led by Captain Frans Banning Cocq and his lieutenant Willem van Ruytenburgh, and she is suddenly subject to another hallucination.

Argento first takes in the entire *tableau* on a wide-shot and the camera progresses by zooming in until finally showing the figures chattering loudly in a foreign language. Anna approaches the painting and, after an unsuccessful attempt to remove it from the wall, she decides to cover it with a large white towel. As soon as she takes off the towel, the audience see a reverse shot of the woman, whose face is illuminated by a light coming from the painting. From this moment on, through parallel editing, Argento alternates close-ups of Rembrandt’s painting with others coming from a different sequence which took place in the film’s “real life” narrative. The detail of the lieutenant’s left boot is replaced with a man’s trainer in the parallel sequence, the rifle of a soldier with a

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26 A detailed description and analysis of the painting are provided in Havrkamp-Begemann (1982).
modern handgun, and the faces in medium close-up of the painting are replaced by the faces of modern policemen. Then, the tableau literally liquefies and is turned into an imaginary door leading to a location in Rome in which a female corpse has been discovered. Anna has eventually stepped into one of her temporarily repressed memories, recalling Inspector Manetti’s order to travel from Rome to Florence and investigate an anonymous phone call claiming the killer will strike at the Uffizi Gallery (Figures 35-50). As Balmain (2002) has suggested, the sequence underlines the presence of both a spatial and temporal disjunction “which is central to the breakdown of the epistemological system of knowledge, as the past (Rome) and the present (Florence) inhabit the same painterly, hallucinatory and cinematic frame”. Specifically, after twenty minutes of stalling of narrative through the exacerbating visual barrage at the Uffizi Gallery, Argento recreates the backbone of the story in a challenging and creative way. In my opinion, the sequence of the hotel room is also interesting for another reason. This time, a temporarily repressed memory is reanimated through art because of the similarity in the painting’s events to Anna’s real life experiences. Both the painting and Anna’s temporarily repressed memory take place at night and depict a military company. There is even a close resemblance between Captain Frans Banning Cocq and Inspector Chief Manetti, as they both have moustaches. When Anna’s hallucination eventually fades away, the audience see the image of Alfredo reflected in the glass of the painting and are consequently tempted to label it as another hallucination. As soon as Alfredo manages to assault and rape Anna, however, the audience realize that the criminal is in the room and the disquieting ambiguity of Anna’s hallucination is eventually replaced by an actual scene of gory sex and violence. Therefore, by the medium of pictorial iconography Argento has managed to provide the audience with essential information regarding Anna’s private life and the reason behind her visit to Florence. By diegetically representing a copy of Rembrandt’s painting, Argento closes a circle of information about the woman and from then on the film gives more and more space to a linear narrative structure. For that reason, the experience in Florence could be labeled as Argento’s ultimate attempt to symbolically map Anna’s mind through pictorial iconography and to
provide the gateway of the woman’s final breakdown through the combined act of contemplation and sexual abuse.

2.5. *Murder as an act of artistic creation and the victim as objet d’art*

In the epilogue of Argento’s novel *La Sindrome* (1996), which was eventually modified in the film script, a desperate and madness-stricken Anna decides to commit suicide by shooting herself in the vagina. Before surrendering to this extreme act of self-annihilation and in absolute denial of her sexuality, the woman says to herself (Maiello 2007: 201-202):


As this quote suggests, in the novel Argento equates murder with an extremely macabre act of artistic creation. Specifically, Anna identifies Alfredo as the *alter ego* of the artist, following his own psychotic impulses and freeing his repressed anger through homicide in the same way the painter expresses his creative mind through the work of art. In the film, this equation is symbolically and visually achieved through Argento’s extensive use of pictorial devices and plan-tableaux in his murder set-pieces and rape sequences. In this context, the director conceives his victim as a macabre *objet d’art* and his depiction of death and torture takes the form of a beautiful and inspiring painting. The film’s murder set-pieces and rape sequences are represented in an extremely definitive and detailed rendering by Giuseppe Rotunno’s stark photography. In the two sequences of rape and murder committed by Alfredo, Argento makes use of both computer-generated imagery (CGI) and slow motion to give a deep sense of brutality to the images and a strong emotional weight to the sequences. In the

27 [Listen! Can you hear that? Can’t you hear that? Can’t you hear Alfredo scratching inside of me? I can feel him scraping inside of me. Why is he doing that? I’ll tell you why. He’s using a spatula, yes, a spatula. He’s painting inside of me, a fresco, a massive portrait: he’s trying to make me in his own image. But I won’t let him do it! Now that he’s inside of me, he won’t run away. You’ll see what I’ll do to him!].
first murder sequence, Argento focuses on a close-up of an unconscious Anna while a desperate shout is heard off the camera. As soon as Anna comes round, she realises she has been kidnapped by the man and placed in the back seat of an anonymous car in the middle of a narrow alley in Florence. In the meantime, Alfredo is brutally beating and raping another female victim and the sequence alternates between different POVs, starting from Anna’s and progressing to Alfredo’s and the victim’s. The act of murder is eventually rendered by showing an extreme close-up of an exploding bullet as it travels through the victim’s cheeks in slow motion and the blood profusely splashes Anna’s face. In the second murder sequence, the technique of slow motion achieves an even more stylised effect. Although the killer has already been exposed as Alfredo Grossi from the opening of the film, Argento manages to play with the stylistic and thematic tropes of the Giallo, as the scene is entirely shot from the murderer’s POV and the victim-to-be addresses directly to the camera (Cfr. § 1.2.2). The only testimony of Alfredo’s presence is rendered by a distorted and undistinguishable sound that reproduces his voice and by a long shot of his shadow that is projected on the wall of an abandoned warehouse. The audience then hear a series of moans and screams off camera before the shot switches to a close-up on the victim while she is brutally beaten in the face. Then, a detail shot of the bullet moves from the right to the left of the screen in slow motion so that Alfredo’s face is perfectly reflected by the bullet in re-cadrage. By showing the detail shot of the bullet, the sequence expresses a break with the canon of proportionality and verisimilitude of the real object and, in doing that, it creates a hyperrealist effect in the image.28 Moreover, in both set-pieces, slow motion manages to impart a dimension of abstract temporality to the sequences of murder and, in doing that, it provides a hyperbolic effect of tension and brutality.29 In the case of Anna’s murder of the psychologist, this effect of tension

28 The same technique was used by Argento in a murder sequence in Opera (1987), in which the victim is shot through the eye at point-blank range. Both the close-up of the bullet and the slow motion of the sequence provide an effect of brutality and tension which is much closer to that shown in La sindrome di Stendhal. The hyperrealist rendering of reality through the act of murder will be further analysed in the next chapter dealing with Profondo rosso in Section 3.3.2.

29 For more information on how the technique of slow motion is used in cinema, see Costa (1991: 147; 2002: 299-300).
and brutality is achieved in more implicit and subtle ways, as the audience do not witness the criminal act in progress but face the disturbing consequences of it. As soon as Marco, Anna’s colleague, reaches the woman’s living room, the audience realise that the psychologist has been murdered from the amount of blood dribbled, smeared, and splashed in such an unnatural composition, roughly mimicking Jackson Pollock’s action painting. A copy of the painter’s Alchemy (1947) is also hanging on the wall as a diegetic hint towards a connection between this act of murder and this work of art.

Similarly, the character of Anna is dramatically turned into an objet d’art when she eventually becomes part of the artwork she creates by covering herself in black oil paint and lying on the black floor in the foetal position (Figures 51-54). As Villani (2008: 173) has noticed, following Alfredo’s sexual abuse, Anna tries to vent her repressed anger through a range of naïve and terrible canvasses that are dominated by black and red and that obsessively represent a series of vagina-like crying faces covered with blood. The fact of revealing her anger through a bleeding mouth-vagina as a metaphor of her raped soul testifies to the woman’s desire to ask for help. This attempt at communication which Anna can only do through the expedient of art is not understood. Both her police colleagues and her family seem not to realise the seriousness of Anna’s mental state and her struggle to cope with it, and the only feeble help comes from her psychologist Dr Cavanna who is eventually slaughtered as a result of Anna’s psychosis. Because no one is able to aid her in the reconstruction of her identity, Anna is therefore absorbed into the artwork she creates and is driven to perceive herself as a construct of the artistic creation. Specifically, as the film progresses Anna’s body becomes a sort of canvas as the testimony to the woman’s physical and mental trauma through pictorial iconography. A typical example is traceable in the sequence in which Anna is raped by Alfredo for the second time in a claustrophobic graffiti-covered hideout near Viterbo. The woman is bound to a filthy and rotting mattress by electrical wires that lacerate both her ankles and her wrists as she tries to free herself. While doing so, Anna imagines that the graffiti on the wall come to life, as a hypodermic syringe flies through the air and a childishly drawn monster with a gigantic phallus pulls itself off the wall and
advances towards her. According to Balmain (2002), Anna’s fear and suffering in the sequence are transcribed into visual signifiers through the lines and poses of her traumatised body. In my opinion, the sequence proposes the signifiers of Pietistic Art to emphasise the final and extended violation of Anna’s flesh, as she struggles on the floor of a cave with her limbs positioned to mimic those of Christ on the cross. Both Anna’s position and the rich contrast of light and shadow in the cave strongly resemble those of the *Cristo morto* (1480-1490) by the Italian Renaissance artist Andrea Mantegna (*Figures 55 and 56*). In both the sequence and the *tableau*, the pathos and tragedy of the moment are dramatized and enhanced by the violent perspective of foreshortening; this stresses the anatomical detail of both Christ’s and Anna’s sweaty thorax by angling the figures in such a way as to create the visual effect of a shorter distance towards the audience. Particularly suggestive is also the final sequence of the film. After the police discover Alfredo’s corpse in a river and identify Anna as the person responsible for the murder, they decide to track her down. In the meantime, Anna has already killed both her psychiatrist and her colleague Marco who have found out the truth. Covered with blood, the woman leaves her flat and plays around in the street talking nonsense. When the police arrive and surround her, Anna flops down in an extreme act of surrender, crying and shouting. She is gently lifted from the ground and carried through the street and the camera progresses from a medium long shot to a medium shot as the closing credits start rolling. Her face is sorrowful and resigned despite the reassurances of her colleagues, whose arms are draped across her. The composition of the final shot and the placement of the figures are also suggestive of Pietistic Art, the most celebrated of which is Caravaggio’s *Deposizione* (1602-1603) (*Figures 57 and 58*). Commissioned for the chapel in the church of Santa Maria in Vallicella, Caravaggio’s painting portrays Christ being carried by his disciples and the Marys from the cross to his tomb. His hanging right arm is intended to evoke pathos and to describe a limp and vulnerable man (Wright 1978: 35-42). Thus, Anna’s

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30 The painting, which portrays the dead Christ supine on a marble slab while he is flanked by the Virgin Mary and St. John who are weeping for his death, is located at the *Pinacoteca di Brera* in Milan. For more information, see Baldini, Curzi and Prete (1997: 248-249).
physical collapse and psychological suffering visually remind of the martyrdom of Christ from his crucifixion to his entombment. In Argento’s final sequence, the woman occupies the position that is typically reserved for the tortured body of Christ in Pietistic Art, and she is surrounded by her male colleagues who caress her body and seem to participate in her sorrow by comforting her. By physically transforming the female protagonist into an objet d’art, Argento closes a circle of information about Anna’s physical and mental trasformation through pictorial iconography rather than through narrative progress. This physical and mental transformation started with Anna’s first encounter with the unnerving power of art during her visit to the Uffizi Gallery on the trail of Alfredo Grossi. Therefore, by eventually showing an explicit reference to Caravaggio’s painting through Anna’s broken and limp body, the sequence provides a final meditation on the woman’s anguish and vulnerability, on the eternal dilemma of artistic creation, and on the power of its transference over the human body and mind.

2.6. Conclusion

In the sequence which takes place in the Uffizi Gallery, Argento makes use of a consolidated and renowned artistic repertoire as the emotional catalyst behind Anna’s temporary disturbance leading to Stendhal Syndrome. The sequence is aimed at bombarding the audience with a variety of tableaux, each one carrying a symbolic significance when associated to Anna’s psychological states. On the one hand, the encounter with some of the tableaux displayed in the gallery activates a deeply submerged feeling in Anna’s tormented psyche, the Freudian unheimlich, which is the return of a temporarily repressed memory of family conflict that eventually resurfaces through the act of contemplation. On the other hand, some of the tableaux are able to stir to life latent psychoses in the woman that only reside in the deepest unconscious of her self and eventually reveal themselves through Anna’s self-identification with the perturbing and unnerving power of the artistic creation. Moreover, the diegetic use of Rembrandt’s Die Nachtwacht in the hotel Porta Rossa serves to bring back the story to a narrative level through pictorial iconography. In this case, pictorial
iconography does not work as a catalyst for Anna’s repressed conflicts and latent psychoses. Rather, the symbolic association is between pictorial iconography and an episode that took place in Anna’s real life and not involving her psyche.

La sindrome di Stendhal also explores the symbolic association of art with murder and violence at a double level. On the one hand, the link is conveyed by equating murder with the artistic experience. This statement is demonstrated by Argento’s technical skills in defining his murder set-pieces and sequences of rape. In this context, the act of murder and torture is conceived as an act of artistic creation in the way it is highly choreographed and aimed at providing a strong visual impact on the audience. However, the blend of art and violence is also determined in another way through pictorial iconography. Anna’s descent into self-annihilation after she is raped is also represented by a specific symbolic repertoire that goes back to the Pietistic Art of Mantegna and Caravaggio. So, through these pictorial references it is possible to make a parallel between Anna’s physical and mental suffering to that of Christ before and after his crucifixion, and the eventual transformation of the woman into an objet d’art. In this respect, the narrative construction of La sindrome di Stendhal centres on the concept of the power of the artistic creation and the consequent emotional self-identification and mental transference that may derive from the simple act of contemplation.
Chapter 2 - Figures

Figures 1-6: The credit sequence in La sindrome di Stendhal (1 and 2) and diegetic references from Michelangelo’s Giudizio universale (1538-1541) (3 and 4), Hans Memling’s Last Judgement (1467-1471) (5) and Tryptich of Earthly Vanity and Divine Salvation (c.1495) (6) in La terza madre.

Figures 7-10
Figures 7-14: The diegetic tableaux in the Uffizi Gallery.
Figures 15-24: Anna Manni’s hallucination in the Uffizi Gallery.
Figures 25-34: Anna Manni’s hallucination in the police headquarters.
Figures 35-50: Anna Manni’s hallucination in the hotel Porta rossa.
Figures 51-54: Anna Manni’s immersion in the artwork.
Figures 55-58: Anna Manni as objet d’art: plan-tableaux of Andrea Mantegna’s Cristo morto (1480-1490) (55 and 56) and Caravaggio’s Deposizione (1602-1603) (57 and 58).
Chapter 3

The Interplay of Imagery, Camerawork, and Soundtrack in Profondo rosso (1975)

“Un’ape filmata in dettaglio somiglia a un cucciolo di leopardo”

Dario Argento (Pugliese 2011: 5)

“Nihil quod vides est, quod non vides veritas”

La terza madre (2007)

I had never seen anything like Deep Red. It wasn’t the story that stuck with me months, and then years [...] It was the overwhelming experience of it, equal parts visual-vivid colours and bizarre camera angles, dizzying pans and flamboyant tracking shots, disorientating framing and composition, fetishistic close-ups of quivering eyes and weird objects (knives, dolls, marbles, braided scraps of wool) and aural. Deep Red’s throbbing progressive-rock score was almost hypnotic, and alternated with a singsong lullaby whose “la la la la” lyrics grew more gratingly ominous with each repetition.

(Maitland McDonagh 2010: vii)

McDonagh’s consideration is a useful starting-point for broadly contextualising Profondo rosso within Argento’s body of work. As far as Profondo rosso’s plot is concerned, Argento still relies on the narrative formula of his directorial debut L’uccello dalle piume di cristallo (1970). This includes the story of an eyewitness of a murder who decides to investigate and whose fragmented memory of what really happened leads him to an initial misleading conclusion, until the truth is eventually revealed in an unexpected coup de théâtre. What differentiates Profondo rosso from L’uccello dalle piume di cristallo is Argento’s persistent use of complex and disorientating camerawork and a hypnotic and unsettling soundtrack throughout the film. This distinguishing pairing of the acoustic and the iconic has become the trademark of Argento’s mature work up
to the mid-1980s. In this respect, artistic imagery assumes an essential role within *Profondo rosso*. In the film, artistic imagery does not function in counterpoint to the excessiveness of images and sound, but combines with them into an integral element to convey Argento’s stylistic and technical achievement. Moreover, artistic imagery also becomes crucial in the narrative progress of the story. It manages to contain the clue to the mystery but, in addition to this, pictorial devices are used symbolically to communicate the male protagonist’s emotional and physical inability to interact with the people surrounding him. In order to demonstrate this, the question I shall answer is the following: *How and to what extent does the art-historical repertoire contribute to Profondo rosso’s stylistic and narrative effectiveness?* By answering this question, I will evidence that in *Profondo rosso* Argento manages to develop his story through the medium of complex camerawork, disturbing soundtrack, evocative imaginary and symbolic repertoire, which in some sequences completely replace the dialogues and the narrative devices.

### 3.1. *Synopsis*

After sensing the presence of a killer among the audience during a congress on parapsychology, psychic Helga Ullmann is murdered in her apartment in Rome. British pianist Marc Daly witnesses the murder from the adjacent piazza. Marc rushes to Helga’s apartment to give assistance and passes through a hallway lined with a series of canvasses. When Marc comes back to the apartment with the police, he assumes that the killer has removed one of the canvasses because it may contain the crucial clues to identify him. Marc confides his suspicion to his friend Carlo and decides to investigate together with Gianna Brezzi, a local journalist on the lookout for a scoop. While visiting Carlo’s apartment, Marc is acquainted with his friend’s mother, a once-successful actress who retired at Carlo’s birth. One night, the killer manages to burst into Marc’s apartment, but the pianist closes the inner door that separates him from the aggressor at the very last moment. Before being attacked, Marc can hear the killer playing a children’s tune on a hand-held tape recorder. Marc convinces
himself that the children’s tune is crucial in identifying the killer’s identity. Aided by one of Helga’s associates, Professor Giordani, Marc traces the children’s tune back to a recently published book about local folklore. The volume describes an abandoned villa where this children’s tune was frequently heard in the past. Marc decides to talk to Amanda Righetti, the author of the book, but the woman is found murdered when the pianist arrives at her house. Shortly after, also Professor Giordani is brutally killed at home. Marc locates the abandoned villa and decides to visit it. While visiting the villa, Marc notices a childish drawing beneath a layer of crumbling plaster of a man being murdered in front of a child. During his second visit to the place, Marc manages to find the drawing’s three-dimensional equivalent in a sealed room of the villa, also hidden behind a plaster façade. It is the mummified corpse of a man seated near a Christmas tree. Someone strikes Marc’s head and he comes round while a fire is destroying the villa. While Marc telephones the authorities from the caretaker’s house, he notices a similar painting in the bedroom of the caretaker’s little daughter. The girl confesses she copied her drawing from one she saw at her primary school while cleaning the archive as a punishment. At a deserted school at night, Marc and Gianna eventually find that the drawing was Carlo’s. The man manages to break in with a gun and is about to kill Marc when the police burst in. Carlo escapes, but is eventually killed by a van while fleeing the police. Marc realises that there must be more to the story, as Carlo was with him when Helga was killed. Going back to Helga’s apartment, Marc tries to recall the painting seen the night of the first murder. Finally, he realises that what he saw that night was not a painting, but it was the reflected face of Carlo’s mother in a framed mirror. The woman had followed Marc to Helga’s apartment. She confesses that the real motive behind her crimes was to cover a past traumatic experience. One Christmas Eve, while little Carlo was listening to a children’s tune, Carlo’s mother stabbed her husband because he had tried to send her back to a mental institution against her will. Witnessing this event traumatised Carlo for life. Carlo’s mother tries to kill Marc but her heavy necklace wedges into the elevator shaft. As soon as Marc activates the elevator, the thick chain decapitates the woman.
3.2. Contextualising Profondo rosso within Argento’s work

Profondo rosso is Argento’s return to the classic Giallo formula after the experience of Le cinque giornate (1973), a comic venture set during a historical revolution that took place in Milan in 1848.¹ Profondo rosso was co-written with screenwriter Bernardino Zapponi, whose contribution to the horror genre was made working on Federico Fellini’s segment Toby Dammit in Histoires extraordinaires (1967), a three-episode film inspired by the tales of Edgar Allan Poe (Jones 2004: 63). Profondo rosso was originally entitled La tigre dai denti a sciabola to give a sense of continuity with the previous Animal Trilogy. Argento eventually opted for a different title because of the several Gialli that had come out between 1971 and 1972 in the wake of L’uccello dalle piume di cristallo’s box-office success which had an animal in their title (Maiello 2007: 90) (Cfr. § 1.2). Profondo rosso’s plot strongly relies on some of the central narrative themes of Argento’s directorial debut L’uccello dalle piume di cristallo. Both films focus on the figure of the eyewitness of a murder whose unreliable memory of what really happened leads him to an initial misleading conclusion. While Sam Dalmas in L’uccello dalle piume di cristallo did not realise that the black-gloved man in the art gallery was not the attacker but was actually defending himself from his psychotic wife (Cfr. § 1.2.1), Marc Daly in Profondo rosso saw the face of the female killer reflected in a mirror without realising it. More significantly, both films explore the theme of two relatives united by an indissoluble bond of blood, and that of a male character trying to protect, and thence becoming accomplice of, a female psychopath. In L’uccello dalle piume di cristallo, Alberto Ranieri tries to cover up for his psychotic wife Monica who had been sexually abused in the past and had come to self-identify with her rapist (Cfr. § 1.2.1; 2.3). In Profondo rosso, homosexual Carlo manages to protect his mother from a murder she committed in the past to avoid being placed in a mental institution. From

¹ As McDonagh (1994: 95-97) has pointed out, Argento opted for a comic venture because he feared that audiences might be getting tired of his previous successful Gialli, such as L’uccello dalle piume di cristallo, Il gatto a nove code (1971), and Quattro mosche di velluto grigio (1971). Le cinque giornate ended up as a box-office and critical disaster. Thus, Argento returned to the genre with which he had been successful. For an analysis of the narrative structure and visual tropes of Le cinque giornate, see McDonagh (1994: 95-97); Tentori (1997: 57-58; 2000: 17-18); Gallant (2001b: 111-114); Jones (2004: 55-58); Maiello (2007: 78-87); Starace (2008: 284-286); Gracey (2010: 52-57); and Pugliese (2011: 47-52).
Quattro mosche di velluto grigio (1971) Argento returns to and further develops the theme of the paranormal. In Quattro mosche di velluto grigio, the male protagonist’s sleep is troubled by a recurrent nightmare in which he is witness to a Middle Eastern ritual execution by decapitation. This obsessive dream eventually acquires an explanation when the protagonist’s wife Nina, the killer in the film, is beheaded in a car accident while trying to escape. In Profondo rosso, this paranormal theme becomes of primary importance, as it provides fundamental clues to the investigation. As Argento (Giusti 2010: 493) has stated:

Con il tempo c’è stato un progredire del mio interesse cinematografico. Altri interessi si sono sovrapposti e altri campi d’esplorazione si sono aperti. Per questo mi sono lanciato in una specie di contaminazione dei generi, in bilico tra il Giallo tradizionale e l’Horror. Forse non è preciso chiamarla contaminazione, ma un vero e proprio mutamento di stile, dove si mischiano il razionale, l’irrazionale, l’incredibile, il magico. È stato un cambiamento neanche voluto. Così è stato e così l’ho rappresentato.²

The opening sequence at the conference on parapsychology focuses on the apparent ability of all living creatures to communicate by telepathy, from the animal kingdom through to people, which latter eventually lose their skill as soon as they learn to express themselves verbally. Soon, Helga’s telepathic abilities allow her to get in touch with the perverted mind of the killer among the conference audience. Immediately, the psychic’s skill invades the narrative sphere, as Helga manages to turn up some concrete information on the murderer’s past while in her psychic trance and this is the reason for her subsequent death. After Helga’s murder, Marc will rely on some of her information, such as the childish tune and the haunted villa, to solve the case.

Despite the aforementioned narrative similarities with L’uccello dalle piume di cristallo and Quattro mosche di velluto grigio, Profondo rosso constitutes a turning point within Argento’s career in style and technique. Starting from

² [With time, there has been a progression of my interest in cinema. Other areas of interest have overlapped and other areas of exploration have opened. That is why I launched into a kind of contamination of genres, in the balance between the traditional Giallo and Horror. Perhaps, it is not accurate to call it contamination, but a real change of style, in which I tend to mix the rational, the irrational, the incredible, and the magic. It has been an unplanned change, so it was so I represented it].
Profondo rosso, Argento experienced a growing interest in the exploration of new professional devices. This allowed him to develop his mature cinematic language and technical ability, which became the trademark of the director’s mature work up to the mid-1980s. Specifically, Profondo rosso’s combination of complex and disorientating camerawork with a progressive rock soundtrack paves the way for Argento’s Giallo production of the 1980s, such as Tenebre (1982), Phenomena (1985), and Opera (1987). As Crispino (2008: 195) has argued, in the Animal Trilogy Argento still differentiates the technique of the POV according to the holder of the gaze. In L’uccello dalle piume di cristallo, for example, the director alternates the serial killer’s POV while striking, represented with long focal length lenses, to that of the eyewitness while investigating, represented with standard lenses, and that of the victim being chased, represented with wide angles. In addition, Argento’s omniscient gaze emerges in the final sequence of the film. After the alleged killer has committed suicide, Sam Dalmas goes in search of his fiancée Julia, who has disappeared from the scene of the crime. Julia has been kidnapped by the real murderess and is held captive in another place. The camera follows Sam in high angle shot and slowly manages to zoom out from the long shot to the extreme long shot of the man standing near a building. Then, the camera progresses with a tilt movement from bottom to top that is followed by a pan movement from right to left on the rooftops along the Lungotevere Flaminio in Rome, until it eventually makes a zoom in to reveal the not-yet-discovered place where Julia is held prisoner. By contrast, from Profondo rosso onwards Argento decides to opt for a definitely more challenging and unsettling solution. In Profondo rosso, the unconventional use of the camera constantly disorientates the audience by moving back and forth and by alternating an omniscient shot with a specific POV without discernible pattern (McDonagh 1994: 113). This use of disorientating and elaborate camerawork embodies a violation of the classical narrative form typical of the director’s previous Animal Trilogy with a subsequent failure to motivate cinematic space and time by cause-effect logic (Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson 1985: 374). In the opening sequence, in which Helga addresses the audience and provides a demonstration of her telepathic gift before sensing the presence of a killer
among the public of the conference on parapsychology, Argento manages to disrupt the perception of the viewers through camerawork. As Gallant (2001g: 15) has stated:

Accustomed to playing the part of the passive spectator, we suddenly find ourselves occupying the position of the object of our scopophilic desire […] disrupting our comfortable one-way relationship with the screen.

As soon as the sequence commences, the camera identifies with the audience’s gazes who look out at the theatre and can interact with it. While the congress is taking place, the camera behaves as if it is a person, “walking into the building, through an anteroom and past a hat check guy and a ticket attendant” (Grainger 2001: 116). The peculiarity of this sequence is that the two men at the conference’s entrance door do not seem aware that anyone is walking past them. As the big red theatre drapes leading into the conference hall violently open, the camera-audience passes through. As the sequence progresses, this apparent POV shot is disrupted by a variety of angles taken from all over the theatre and ranging from a series of extreme long shots from the various balconies to the high angle shot of Helga and her two colleagues on the stage, although no single individual is in all these places. Then, the camera moves from one spectator to another in close-up, focuses on the back of Helga’s head, comes back to the stage and makes an extreme close-up of Helga’s mouth as she is drinking a glass of water. It resumes diegetic POV status when Helga addresses the killer, who eventually rises from a seat and eases out of the row (Figures 1-8).

In *Profondo rosso*, this unconventional use of the camera is matched with an innovative use of the soundtrack, especially in the sequences preceding and accompanying the murder set-pieces. In *L’uccello dalle piume di cristallo*, Ennio Morricone’s soundtrack consisted of a mixture of orchestral tunes in the wake of Bernard Herrmann’s work for Alfred Hitchcock’s *Vertigo* (1958) and *Psycho* (1960). In addition, there were some jazz tunes in the wake of the French *Nouvelle Vague*, such as Miles Davis’s work for Louis Malle’s *Ascenseur pour l’échafaud* (1958) and Martial Solal’s work for Jean-Luc Godard’s *A bout de
souffle (1960) (Lucantonio 2008a: 215-216). In Quattro mosche di velluto grigio, Morricone worked on a more challenging association, mixing some of the orchestral tunes similar to those in L’uccello dalle piume di cristallo with a beat, rhythm and blues component. In Profondo rosso, the soundtrack is entrusted to Giorgio Gaslini, a jazz musician who had already composed the music for Le cinque giornate, but it is added to by some instrumental pieces from the progressive rock band The Goblin. The completed soundtrack includes both the orchestral pieces by Gaslini and three rock tunes by The Goblin. In certain extended passages, such as Marc’s visit to the abandoned villa, the soundtrack completely replaces the dialogues as the aural component of the imagery (Cfr. § 4.4).

3.3. Association-provocation of hyperrealist imagery and soundtrack

In the sequence taking place at the conference on parapsychology, as soon as Helga provides some of the clues to identify the killer among the audience, there is a cut to the murderer’s POV from the audience and the camera rises and eases out of the seat row toward the exit. The sequence takes the viewers into the bathroom, where there is a sound of hollow shoes on the floor and the sound of someone retching. The camera moves from a close-up of the water as it is pouring into the sink, round the basin and down the plughole, to a close-up of a discoloured mirror above that makes the person’s reflection indecipherable and metonymically evidences the killer’s presence in the place (Figures 9-16). In my opinion, such a complex and disorientating camerawork encourages the audience to pay full attention to the aesthetic and intrinsic qualities of the object represented rather than to the narrative progress through the techniques of the close-up and extreme close-up. As Argento (Giusti 2010: 494) has remarked:

Il dettaglio è il microcosmo [...] Questa stanza può essere immaginata in campo lungo ed ha una sua espressività. Ma anche un piccolo oggetto ripreso da vicino ha la sua espressività, in quanto ha le sue forme che prendono spessore a seconda di come lo riprendi con la macchina da

3 For more information on Profondo rosso’s soundtrack, see also Maiello (2003: 151-156).
presa. Tutto ha una sua espressività e suscita interesse, per cui io mi affidò molto ai dettagli perché a volte sono molto evocativi, molto perturbanti, molto potenti.  

The obsessive accuracy through which Argento focuses on such surfaces is fully conveyed through the photographic-type accuracy and sharpness of images that is typical of photo-realist painting of the late 1960s and early 1970s. As Argento (Giusti 2010: 493-494) has stated:

Nel film, mi sono principalmente ispirato a Edward Hopper e alle sue atmosfere gelide [...] In particolare, mi piaceva l’idea di rappresentare i miei personaggi, a volte molto pieni di vita e d’interessi, giocosi e scherzosi, posti in situazioni congelate e iperrealiste, fredde, gelide, congelate come in un quadro.

Photo-Realism in art consisted of the accurate and detailed exploration of the physical and verifiable properties of the object depicted through the medium of photographic sources. This depiction of contemporary subject matter was not only based on photographic sources but was also blatantly and unapologetically photographic in style (Meisel 2002: 11). Specifically, the techniques of the art movement were aimed at gathering a series of images with a camera. Once the photo was developed, usually onto a photographic slide, the artist systematically transferred the image from the photographic slide onto canvasses. The resulting images were often direct copies of the original photo, although they were usually larger and sharper than the original reference (Meisel 1980: 12-24). Thus, photo-

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4 [The detail is the microcosm [...] We can imagine any place in long shot and it would have its expressiveness. However, even a small object in close-up has its own expressiveness, as it has its forms depending on how you shoot it. Everything has its own expressiveness and deserves attention. I am highly interested in details. They are extremely evocative, powerful, and disturbing].

5 The word Photo-Realism, also known as Hyper-Realism, New Realism, Photographic Realism, Realism Now, Sharp Focus Realism, and Super-Realism, was coined by Louis K. Meisel in 1968 and appeared in print for the first time in 1970 in a Whitney Museum catalogue. It is referred to the art movement that developed from Pop Art and as a counter to Abstract Expressionism between the late 1960s and the early 1970s in the United States and that developed throughout Europe from the early 1980s (Battcock 1975: xvii-xxx; Meisel 1980: 12; 2002: 14-15). For more information on the birth and development of Photo-Realism, see Battcock (1975); Chase (1975: 7-13); Lucie-Smith (1979); Lindey (1980); and Meisel (1980: 12-24; 1993: 6-16; 2002: 7-22).

6 [The film was mainly inspired by Edward Hopper and his icy atmospheres [...] I was particularly interested in representing my humorous and playful characters in hyper-realistic situations, as if they were frozen in a picture].
realist images were maximised to provide the most detailed perception of reality through the ubiquity of the photographic image (Lucie-Smith 1979: 7). In *Quattro mosche di velluto grigio*’s final sequence, Argento had already adopted a hyperrealist effect through a technologically advanced high-speed camera to show the murderer’s death in a car accident. This is the *Pentazet*, a German camera that consumes 30,000 frames per second, but when run at normal theatrical speed shows the image in a wholly different temporal register (Lucantonio 2003a: 13; Grimaldi 2008: 262; Pugliese 2011: 17). Yet, it is not slow motion as the image does not drag or shudder. Thus, an accident that normally would last a few seconds manages to turn into a hyperbolic sequence of death in which, every single detail, from the killer’s face to the glass shimmering, is explored to the extremes (Needham 2002a). In the sequence, this technical focus on the subject depicted creates the illusion of a frozen and suspended reality whose subtleties cannot be perceived by the human eye in a shot taken at regular speed. While in *Quattro mosche di velluto grigio*, this sequence of violence is a specific case of elaborate camerawork within the film’s more conventional visual tropes, in *Profondo rosso* Argento manages to develop his use of technology on a regular basis. Moreover, the film’s hyperrealist images are associated with a sort of downtown jazz crossed with a funk-jam component that is typical of the soundtrack. As a result, *Profondo rosso* strongly relies on a remarkable association-provocation of the acoustic and the iconic (Crispino 2008: 197-198). Although the film’s association-provocation of the acoustic and the iconic may partly derive from the director’s adherence to the tradition of the Italian *Gialli*, which tended to impart a certain aesthetic pleasure by an effective use of editing, music and sound during their various murder set-pieces (Cfr. § 1.2.2), in *Profondo rosso* such a technique achieves the highest and most sophisticated aesthetic impact.

3.3.1. *Endoscopic images and the snorkel camera*

A typical example of association-provocation of hyperrealist images and compelling soundtrack is traceable in the sequence following the congress on
parapsychology and anticipating Helga’s gruesome murder. Helga and her associate Professor Giordani are speaking in an empty theatre. The psychic concludes she will write all she sensed about the presence of a killer among the audience that afternoon and confesses she is now able to decipher the name of that person. Simultaneously, the camera crouches behind a pillar as someone is spying on them, and the viewers find themselves within the murderer’s mind. Indeed, they become culpable in the stalking itself by approaching the victim-to-be through the camera as a surrogate of their own gaze. After the long shot of Helga and her associate Giordani, Argento introduces the viewers to the killer’s childish and macabre ritual of death. The sequence begins with the extreme close-up of a marble which causes a dollhouse cradle to tip over. The pressing progressive rock Goblin soundtrack of the credit sequence resumes and Argento displays a number of child’s toys belonging to the murderer in extreme close-up. The camera makes a swirling and uninterrupted pan over the killer’s childish and macabre collection, all given sinister significance by the camera’s relentless gaze. The camera passes over a red yarn doll with her belly stuck with needles, a childish drawing of a woman being stabbed by a huge knife, a metal warrior, a wool plait, a naked baby doll that is taken by the black-gloved hand of the killer, a red clay demon, a series of marbles, and two slender switchblade knives (Figures 17-26).\footnote{A similar ritual of death is repeated before the murder of Amanda Righetti, this time showing a ball slamming other marbles, a creepy doll with a braid of wool twisting around her neck, and the black leather gloves of the killer.} There is eventually a cut to the extreme close-up of an eye gazing blankly into the camera, ringed with black eye make-up which closely evokes Chuck Close’s Linda, Eye Series I-V (1977) (Figures 30-32).\footnote{For more information on Chuck Close’s subject matter and techniques, see Meisel (1980: 109-144; 1993: 95-122); Close (1979; 1983; 1987; 1995; 2000; 2007); Lyons and Friedman (1980); Lyons and Storr (1987); Storr (1998); and Friedman (2005).} Such a strategy is also detectable in the opening sequence of Trauma, where the sound of Ça ira accompanies the close-up of a series of figurines witnessing an execution by decapitation during the French Revolution and the Reign of Terror and a miniature guillotine is operated while the image fades out. According to Smuts (2002), Profondo rosso’s sequence is intended to give the audience some insight into the childish and psychotic mind of the killer. In my opinion, this assertion is
more valid for *Trauma* than for *Profondo rosso*. While in *Trauma* the ritual of death is directly linked to the murderer’s past, in *Profondo rosso* the connection between iconography and the serial killer’s traumatic past is less evident. In *Trauma*, the execution by decapitation as displayed in the figurines is symbolically linked to the film’s killer Adriana, a woman whose son was beheaded at birth due to an error of the medical staff. This traumatic event has turned her into a ruthless killer decapitating those responsible for her child’s death by the medium of an electric device of her own invention. By contrast, in *Profondo rosso* the iconography depicted in the murderer’s ritual of death is more aimed at symbolically creating a spectacle of violence through a series of suspended childish images and the aesthetic impact they are able to impart, rather than providing significant clues to the serial killer’s traumatic past. In *Profondo rosso*, these significant clues are instead provided by the traumatic memories of another character, Carlo, who witnessed the murder of his father by his mother when he was a child, and not by the person who is really responsible for the crimes. Carlo’s traumatic memories are also conveyed through the association-provocation of hyperrealist iconography and soundtrack rather than narrative progress in a couple of sequences. During the credit sequence, Argento is interrupting what is on-screen in order to provide essential clues about Carlo’s memories to the audience and to get them emotionally wrapped up in the story being told. Under the diegetic sound of a children’s tune, the director creates a distinctly disturbing tableau by manipulating a series of images that inflect the film as a whole (McDonagh 1994: 108). The major credit sequence begins with a white type against a black background on which first the actors’ then the writers’ names are shown. The soundtrack performed by The Goblin fades out and is replaced by the diegetic sound of a voice singing a childish wordless tune. The song has a repetitive rhythm that strongly clashes with the dynamism of the previous Goblin’s tune and is accompanied by a child’s feminine voice that makes it frightening. The picture fades in to show from floor level in a medium shot a 1950s-style living room with a Christmas tree. In the back wall, the viewers perceive the shadow of a figure stabbing another, while the sticky-sweet tune is interrupted by a horrendous scream. As soon as the
shadow completes its work, a bloodied knife is dropped on the floor, right in front of the camera, and two feet that belong to a child walk up to the knife. The picture fades out and there is a rapid music cross-fade back to the Goblin score as the rest of the credits unroll (Figures 33-36). This traumatic event re-emerges through iconography as soon as Marc eventually manages to find a valuable clue while investigating in the abandoned villa. Marc scratches a crumbling wall and exhumes a childish mural drawing made by toddler Carlo that essentially reproduces the image presented in the opening sequence of the film: a screaming man splashed with red and a child clutching a knife, all frozen before a Christmas tree. After Marc has already gone, another slab of plaster crumbles showing a third figure, this time a woman, which leads to the correct solution to the puzzle. In the case of the killer’s ritual of death, Argento’s concern has nothing to do with narrative progress through iconography. In this context, what becomes fundamental is the process through which the effect of tension and terror is created. Specifically, Argento relies on hyperrealist images to create a sensorial effect, both by exploring the evocative power of details through the telescope and by revealing beneath the surface of every single object a new cosmic, dreamlike, and fantastic dimension. In order to achieve such a high definition of images, Argento was inspired by endoscopy, which is a minimally invasive diagnostic medical procedure used to assess the interior surfaces of an organ by inserting a tube into the body (Pugliese 2011: 17). He used the Snorkel, a thirty centimetres flexible tube that was directly applied to the camera. At the top of the Snorkel, the director placed a mirror reflecting the framed object that was instantaneously reflected inside the tube by a series of prisms that were placed in an oblique position in order to be easily exposed in the film (Maiello 2007: 95; Grimaldi 2008: 262). Moreover, because of their subject matter and the technical level of sophistication with which they are represented on the screen, the killer’s gadgets show close resemblance to Charles Bell’s hyperrealist canvasses of marbles and gumball machines (Figures 27-29). The most significant step in Bell’s pictorial evolution was the manipulation of size through the camera. With the camera, he could light and set up a still life on a small platform in any way he desired, photograph it in many different focuses and exposures, and
eventually project it to any size and scale before deciding how the final painting would look. He decided that the effective scale would be between six and twelve times life size. Thus, by regularly increasing the size of any object, Bell was able to involve himself in the intrinsic reality of the object itself, including colour and the potentialities of light, such as light distorted by diffusion, light as reflection, and light as transparency (Geldzahler 1991: 34; Meisel 1991: 35-36).

Similarly, Argento’s sequence is more focused on showing a camera-mediated gaze rather than what the human eye can perceive in the same circumstances. As Lucie-Smith (1979: 12) has pointed out, the camera has monocular vision while our own vision is binocular. The monocular way of seeing produces many of the aberrations we notice when we look at a photograph, although these vary in turn with the actual choice of lens. The human eye operates more flexibly than the camera, but Argento does nothing to compensate such distortions. Indeed, he chooses to emphasize them to make the viewers aware of the exact nature of his source material.

3.3.2. Reflected images: the murder set-pieces

Other examples relying on the association-provocation of hyperrealist images and disquieting soundtrack are traceable in the sequences regarding the elaborated and gruesome murder set-pieces. As Argento (Maiello 2007: 92) has stated:

The first effective characteristic of *Profondo rosso*'s *fête sanguinaire* is represented by the diegetic and non-diegetic musical accompaniment, which serves as a powerful transition device that both anticipates and accompanies every gruesome act of bodily violence (Smuts 2002). The disquieting children’s song played on a hand-held tape recorder before every act of murder, for example, alerts the audience to the fact that another homicide is going to occur. In the attempted murder of Marc and the murder of Amanda Righetti, the hand-held tape recorder is displayed in a hyperrealist extreme close-up, so that the viewers can see the tape running slowly and be hypnotised by the creepy sound. The object itself becomes the bearer of death and the way it is shot makes it even more disturbing and threatening (*Figures 37 and 38*). During the film, Professor Giordani intervenes by explaining the murderer’s motivation for playing the song in question prior to each attack. According to Giordani, the killer must have suffered from some traumatic episode in the past and must recreate a certain aspect of the original event. Thus, by playing this song before any act of murder, Argento tries to place the viewers in a similar position to the killer via the repetition of the same tune (Smuts 2002). While the use of the diegetic ominous lullaby can be motivated by narrative necessity, the use of the macabre toys that precede both Amanda Righetti’s and Professor Giordani’s death cannot be interpreted from this perspective (*Figures 39-42*). Carlo’s mother is a sadist who loves to terrify her victim-to-be in a tense game of cat and mouse. Before Giordani is killed, for example, a cackling mechanical doll is set loose in his study, walking towards him. This interference clashes with the logic of the story. As Grossa Ciponte (2007) has noticed, the obvious consequence of this procedure is a weak type of writing, which in some cases is completely lacking in a real connection between cause and effect. The doll comes from the door on the right, while the murderer is already in the room waiting for his victim from behind. Although there is no particular logic to the action, the image of the broken doll, arms flailing, skull fractured, and mechanical laugh still echoing, is profoundly humorous acting. It is a film containing some personal ideas which are very different from the traditional *Gialli*. I have conceived of geometric murders, seeking an unsustainable "growth". I have spectacularized and enriched them with highly improbable details that derive more from dreams than from reality.
unnerving and imparts tension to the sequence as a preamble to the murder. In my opinion, this strategy is part of the Giallo’s typical way to depict murder set-pieces. In the Gialli, the sequences of death are conceived as heightened spectacles within the film that manage to interrupt the plot and to stop the action by producing aural and visual moments of beauty and evocative power. Similarly, Argento’s murder set-pieces in Profondo rosso are prepared and structured with such precision that makes them resemble an ancient ritual of human sacrifice. As Argento (Lucantonio 2003a: 19) has stated:

Non è tanto per fare paura, ma piuttosto per stupire. È un po’ come nei riti aztechi, dove sacrificavano vite umane. Costringevano a corse incredibili i sacrificati facendoli salire in cima alla piramide, dove sarebbero stati uccisi. Li incalzavano fino a farli arrivare sopra. Il cuore pompava, così appena gli davano una coltellata, usciva una fontana di sangue. Da sotto potevi vederlo. Era spettacolarizzare la morte. Sono dei grandi momenti selvaggi, un rapporto molto intenso tra la vittima e il carnefice.11

In this context, Profondo rosso’s technically accomplished murder set-pieces also draw back to a more literary-based horror tradition. Specifically, the way these murder scenes are choreographed and organised is very close to the ones staged in the Grand-Guignol, the French red-light district theatre of the erotic, the horrific, and the morally dubious. (Hand and Wilson 2002: 4).12 As Paul (2005: 10) has discussed, the Grand-Guignol did not work on the tradition of supernatural horror, but rather explored the horror of contemporary cities in

11 [It is not just to scare, but rather to impress. It is like in the Aztec rituals, where they sacrificed human lives. They forced these people to do amazing things by making them climb to the top of the pyramid, where they were killed. They urged them to get to the top. The heart was pumping, so at the first stab there was a fountain of blood. From below, everyone could see it. It was a spectacle of death. These were savage moments. There was a very intense relationship between the victim and the executioner].

12 The Grand-Guignol or the Théâtre de la Terreur developed in France in 1897 and became extremely popular in the early decades of the 20th century until it closed permanently in 1962. According to Paul (2005: 19), it inspired a controversial imitator with a similar troupe based in Rome, which survived from 1908 through to 1928, and both the Giallo and the Horror tradition in Italy may have developed as a stylish cinematic interpretation of it. As Hand and Wilson (2002: 26-29) have argued, very important was also the location of the theatre. In addition to the association with the bas-fond and the sex industry, Montmartre in Paris was an area traditionally linked with radical thought and action. The 1871 Paris Commune, for example, started in that area of the city. Montmartre was also known as a district where a separate tradition of live entertainment co-existed, so it was the natural location to set up avant-garde theatres well away from the cultural mainstream in the centre of the city of Paris. For more information, see also Pierron (1995; 2002).
such gloriously graphic detail and unbelievable cruelty. Particularly interesting was the modality of representing and staging the act of murder as a highly choreographed and sensational moment, in which violence was played longer than was strictly necessary “in order to squeeze every ounce of tension out of the scene” (Hand and Wilson 2002: 38). Every act of violence had to be dilated to the extreme and performed slowly, with care and precision. In 1931, a French journalist argued that the Grand-Guignol author had to calibrate every single scene in order to create a well-crafted timing device, where second by second the mechanism was going to turn until the bomb finally exploded (Hand and Wilson 2002: 47-48). In the Grand Guignol, the melodramatic technique of addressing the audience directly was another typical way of slowing down the action. A consequence of the exaggeration of the act of violence was the way every Grand-Guignol actor tended to perform any scene with a series of gestures heightened to the extreme. Specifically, every single actor, either murderer or victim, tended to fix his/her gaze on the audience in any violent moment as a strategy in performance practice to manipulate time and increase the viewers’ tension. Another method included the interruption of the act of violence in order to move away from the focus and then return to it later, as the pauses and silences were an indispensable element to make the viewers’ imagination flow. In Profondo rosso, the same technique is achieved through camerawork. As Gallant (2001g: 13) has argued, as far back as L’uccello dalle piume di cristallo, the psychopath’s POV had become a staple element in Argento’s work, initially using both a hand-held tracking shot and a steady cam. In Il gatto a nove code (1971), the director improved this technique by delivering an unsettling variation of the same formula. In the film, for example, the killer’s POV is sometimes interrupted by a close-up of his eyes looking directly at the audience. This interference provokes a note of ambiguity in the relationship between the film and the viewers. While the latter take the position of the killer, at the same time, they are watched by him. In Profondo rosso, Argento explores a more challenging instance of threatened spectatorship. During Amanda Righetti’s

murder, while the victim is walking through the corridor of her house, an eye stares out from the darkness of an open closet first scrutinising the surrounding area and then staring directly at the camera with a penetrating gaze (Gallant 2001i: 80; Pugliese 2011: 40).

As far as the murder set-pieces are concerned, Smuts (2002) identifies Argento’s originality in his way of transforming typical household tools into extreme objects of danger and violence. Unlike L’uccello dalle piume di cristallo and Il gatto a nove code, Profondo rosso’s instruments of death and torture are rarely typical tools of violence, such as a knife or a noose. While Amanda Righetti is burnt to death in a giant tub filled with scalding hot water, Professor Giordani’s face is repeatedly slammed against the edge of a piece of furniture in startle effect. Thus, horror is lurking everywhere and anything can be a source of danger. In my opinion, what really distinguishes Profondo rosso’s murder set-pieces from the aforementioned Gialli is the director’s ability to portray the act of murder as a work of art. In Profondo rosso, Argento manages to immortalise his victims in a hyperrealist picture of death by employing a variety of reflecting surfaces, such as glass, metal, and mirror, to explore all potentialities of their impressive lighting effects. Reality and reflection of reality become indistinguishable from one another, and the focus on the latter generates a kind of nightmarish fantasy in spite of rigidly explicit factual detail. All murder set-pieces, in fact, end up with the frozen image of the corpse reflected in harsh reflective surfaces, such as the glass of a window in the case of Helga, a reflecting wall in the case of Amanda, and a reflecting desk in the case of Professor Giordani. Specifically, in these sequences Argento focuses on the close-up of the martyred corpses and their reflections, creating an optical alignment of both images (Figures 43-48). This optical illusion generated by the alignment of reflecting surfaces lies at the heart of Richard Estes’ hyperrealist reflection series of the 1960s.\textsuperscript{14} In this series of canvasses depicting some downtown areas of New York, Estes did not work on the direct depiction of the objects. Rather, he used to focus on the effects of

light and shadow that were generated by their reflections on shining surfaces, such as a car’s bonnet, a large-windowed building, a shop window, a telephone booth, or a pool of water in the street. These clean surfaces were the only subject of the canvasses and Estes’ realities appeared distorted, fragmented, and inverted according to their alignment to the shining surfaces. In some examples, a wall divided two scenes, such as the inside and the outside of a bus or of a shop window, causing a juxtaposition of real and reflected images and of images reflected in the reflections of other images. To compose such canvasses, Estes used to stand between two and ten feet from a storefront, which was usually made of glass. Then, he aimed his camera straight up the street to create a single centred vanishing point. Approximately half of the resultant photograph and the subsequent painting was a reflection of the other half (Meisel 1986: 57). Similarly, Argento manages to employ the same effect in Profondo rosso’s final shot of the murderer’s death. As soon as Carlo’s mother tries to kill Marc, her heavy necklace wedges into the elevator shaft decapitating her. The act of decapitation is shot in gruesome detail with the extreme close-up of the woman’s chain slowly splitting her throat and her mouth secreting a yellowish substance as a result of the process of beheading. Then, Argento makes a cut to a close-up of Marc’s distorted and inverted image reflected in the pool of blood, creating an illusionist effect (Toffetti 2008: 158) (Figures 49 and 50). The shot’s richness of visual information is comparable to Estes’ canvasses, as the dynamic interplay between the figure, the reflected visual elements, and the dispassionate perfection of the execution enhance each other to create a synergistic balance and tension that give this sequence a hyperrealist evocative power.

3.3.3. Reflected images: the invisibility of the visible through the artwork

The optical alignment of images and their reflections also assumes a crucial role in terms of narrative as it contributes to the final denouement of the story in which the killer’s identity is eventually revealed. As Bazou (2009) has pointed out:
Entrer dans un film d’Argento c’est entrer avec inquiétude dans un univers de signes à déchiffrer [...] Le spectateur est à la fois maître du jeu et totalement manipulé, libre de surinterpréter tous les signes et les symboles qui se présentent à lui ou, au contraire, libre de se laisser guider dans un train fantôme.15

Bazou’s statement suggests a cinema centred on the importance of sight, in which both the story and the visual composition of the film are conceived as a unique blend that is able to challenge and stimulate the viewers’ ingenuity. This is the case of Profondo rosso, in which every single detail, every object, becomes an indispensable piece that contributes to the whole structure of the film’s narrative and visual impact. A typical example is provided in the sequence in which Marc witnesses Helga’s murder from the adjacent piazza and rushes to the woman’s apartment to try to help. While walking through a corridor lined with paintings, Marc does not realise that the killer’s face is reflected in a mirror together with three other ghostly faces from an Edvard Munch style painting. Marc mistakes the mirror for a painting and does not realize the importance of what he saw (Figures 51 and 52). Similarly, the audience are driven to the same misleading conclusion. Throughout the sequence, the whole of the mirror is visible but for a single frame and the fast dolly shot makes it very difficult to focus on the relevant part of the screen in time to take in the vital detail. At the film’s climax, however, Argento gives a clue to the mystery. When Marc returns to Helga’s apartment in order to remember what happened, the director zooms in to a close-up on the serial killer’s face, which becomes visible in the mirror together with the painting (Figures 53 and 54). In Profondo rosso, therefore, Argento explicates a paradox: the invisibility of the visible through the artwork. Specifically, art confuses Marc and at the same time denies full understanding to the audience following the sequence employing the medium of trompe-l’œil.16

15 [To enter one of Argento’s films is to enter a disquieting universe full of signs to decipher [...] The viewers are at once masters of the game and totally manipulated by it, free to interpret all the signs and symbols presented to them or, on the contrary, free to let themselves be driven along in a ghost train].

16 [For more information on how the pictorial technique of the trompe-l’œil is achieved in the sequence mentioned above, see also Chauvin (1998); Villa (2003: 129-136); and Tentori (2008: 133-137). A similar procedure is present in the final sequence of Suspiria, which provides the key to the mystery. Following the notes written by Sarah, a previously murdered friend, Suzy Banyon enters a highly ornamental hall where
The *trompe-l’œil* is a pictorial technique that aims to trick the eye by making the viewers think they are seeing an actual object and not a painted one.¹⁷ In *Profondo rosso*, Argento produces the opposite effect in that a tree-dimensional object is perceived as two-dimensional. More significantly, in the sequence, Argento manages to convey the narrative trope typical of the *Giallo* formula, which is the fragmented and misleading sight of the eyewitness regarding the true situation, through the medium of a pictorial technique. The theme of the short-circuiting of sight that is typical of the *Giallo* formula is also achieved through a technically sophisticated combination of complex camerawork and unsettling soundtrack, which seems designed to mobilise the audience’s attention and eventually manages to mask the essential detail from sight. As Thoret (2003: 83-84) has suggested, the tracking shot in the corridor has the function of directing the viewers’ gaze towards the bottom of the frame and does not allow them to make the difference necessary to discover the right sign.

If the viewers go back to Helga’s murder, they will discover that Carlo’s mother is reflected in the mirror, but it is almost impossible to see her without using the still frame facility. Moreover, the mirror is positioned at the edge of the frame, so the audience watching the film in a pan-and-scanned version would have even less chance of spotting this pivotal moment. Quite simply, the audience could not possibly be expected to see Carlo’s mother and solve the puzzle, as they have not been introduced to the character at this point of the story. On the contrary, the murderer’s reflection in the mirror acquires the function of isolating the detail from a general context by freezing it in a *tableau* of watching. As Argento (Giusti 2010: 494) has stated:

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¹⁷ For a definition of the term *trompe-l’œil* in art and the techniques through which this three-dimensional effect is achieved in painting, see Battersby (1974); Ostrange-Mastai (1975); Dars (1979); Milman (1982); and Chambers (1991).
Thus, the reflection in the mirror focuses all the audience’s attention on what Needham (2002a) has identified as the *punctum*, which is a consequential detail that punctures the eye, adding something that the *mise-en-scène* and narrative cannot contain and foretell. A vision of the whole can deceive and mislead both the protagonist and the viewer, but any single detail that is projected into a mirror can be spotted more easily. In *Profondo rosso*, the simple act of seeing is not sufficient to full understanding. Reality as it is revealed to the audience is a riddle that must be constantly analyzed and broken down to the smallest detail to ensure a solution.

### 3.4. *The creation of spaces through artistic imagery and camerawork*

As Grosso Ciponte (2007) has argued, Argento loves transforming the setting of his films both by an unconventional use of the camera and by a scrupulous combination and selection of existing architectures and styles to create a horrific and surreal atmosphere. As Argento (Giusti 2010: 494) has stated:

> In generale, non sono interessato a dare una collocazione precisa alla storia che racconto. Piuttosto, io narro di follie e voglio rappresentare tali follie attraverso immagini evocative che colpiscono lo spettatore. Molte

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18 [The mirror fascinates me because of its power to isolate the detail from its general context. A vision of the whole is sometimes deceiving and misleading for both the character in the film and the audience. The detail shown in the mirror can be distinguished more easily].

19 Only in *Tenebre* (1982) and in *Il cartaio* (2004), has Argento expressly represented a precise and uniform architectural environment. Mainly shot in the EUR district, the most important fascist site in Rome, much of *Tenebre*’s imaginary geography emphasizes a geometrical intersection of contemporary and high-tech landscapes with anonymous and vast unpopulated piazzas and parking garages. In an interview with Jones (2004: 121), Argento has stated that the film’s location was intended as a near-science fiction “imaginary” city. Thus, *Tenebre* is set in a Rome that has no past and where there is not a single reference to the historical architecture that made it famous worldwide. Although the underlying futuristic effect and the vaguely science fiction concept are only apparent in Argento’s intention, the result of the experiment is a strange architectural space that results in an extremely fake looking environment (McDonagh 1994: 166; 170; Jones 2004: 121). *Il cartaio* is entirely set in the squalid and vast Roman *banlieue*. The result, in both films, is that the city of Rome becomes an anonymous and immense place that is architecturally designed the same way.
volte, infatti, mi piace raccontare la mia città fantastica, una città che
invento io, dove faccio un collage di strade, una a Milano e l’altra a
Perugia. Così me la giostro, me la invento.20

Although Profondo rosso’s story is fictionally set in Rome, the film was
mainly filmed on location in Turin from early September 1974, with the addition
of some places taken from other cities, such as Milan, Perugia, and Rome
(Zagarrio 2008a: 38).21 The city itself becomes a place built for imaginary
purposes, which responds to creative needs more than to existent urban
planning. In my opinion, Profondo rosso’s city is specifically conceived as a
labyrinthine space, which is constantly deconstructed by the multiplication of
POVs and represented as a creative stratification of different architectural styles,
ranging from the baroque set design of the central piazzas to the elaborate Art
Nouveau of some suburban villas. All these places are mostly depicted at night in
a rigorous contrast of black and grey and with a series of long perspectives which
tend to exaggerate the sense of distance between the camera, the subject, and
the viewers. This creation of spaces through camerawork displaces the apparent
structural calm of the place and provides an increase in the feeling of phase
displacement of the senses in the audience.

3.4.1. **Metaphysical spaces as phase displacement of the senses**

According to Bazou (2009), Argento’s creation of spaces through
camerawork in Profondo rosso is closely related to Giorgio De Chirico’s pictorial
use of perspectives in his Ariadne series.22 Bazou, however, does not provide any

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20 [In general, I am not interested in giving a precise location to the story. My main purpose is to represent
madness through evocative images that affect the viewers. Thus, I enjoy recreating my personal setting,
which derives from a collage of different cities and places].

21 Argento has filmed six films out of eighteen in Turin. The city was also the setting for the earlier films Il
gatto a nove code and Quattro mosche di velluto grigio, in which the director already tries to identify the
city as an anonymous and unrecognizable place. In the early 2000s, Argento came back to shoot three other
Gialli: Non ho sonno (2001), Ti piace Hitchcock? (2005), and Giallo (2009). This time the city is perfectly
recognizable, as these films are mainly set in renowned and touristic places. A different case is represented
by La terza madre (2007), the third chapter of the Three-Mothers-Trilogy, in which Turin occupies a
dreamlike and nightmarish role through the evocation of its baroque architecture. For more information on
the close relationship between Argento and the city of Turin, see Taricano (2008: 93-98).

22 The Ariadne series is a group of eight tableaux that Giorgio De Chirico painted in Paris between 1912 and
1913. The theme of the abandoned princess of Greek mythology, betrayed by her lover and left alone in a
foreign place, is a personal symbol of loneliness, melancholy and mystery for the artist. The eight tableaux
include Melanconia (1912), The Melancholy of a Beautiful Day (1913), The Lassitude of the Infinite (1913),
further explanation behind his comparison. Such a comparison is worth further attention. At the basis of De Chirico’s *Ariadne* series is a deep interest in Turin as the major source of inspiration, which resides in what the painter identified as *Stimmung* (Taylor 2002: 85):

This novelty is a strange and profound poetry, infinitely mysterious and solitary, which is based on the *Stimmung* (I use this very effective German word which could be translated as *atmosphere* in the moral sense). [...] This extraordinary sensation can be found in Italian cities and in Mediterranean cities like Genoa or Nice, but the Italian city *par excellence* [...] is Turin.23

According to De Chirico (Baldacci 1997: 127-128), Turin’s evocation of the *Stimmung* was mainly due to the geometric precision of the city’s central historical piazzas, whose mathematically repetitive white marble arcades provide a unique feeling of formal and harmonious balance and generate an impression of precarious peace and suspended time. In his *Ariadne* series, De Chirico succeeded in generating an impression of precarious peace and suspended time by rejecting the abstract geometry of linear perspective and traditional representational devices, and was able to offer a new conception of pictorial space that resulted in a cinematic, chopped-up perspective and in a schematic delineation of depth (Taylor 2002: 33).24 As Sylvestor (1997: 209) has pointed out:

*Chirico’s eye invariably gravitates [...] toward the spectacular, picturesque, vertiginous viewpoint. A Chirico composition is a kind of collage in which every element has been seen from a different position and each position*

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23 De Chirico visited Turin twice. He stopped there once when he was moving from Florence to Paris with his mother in July 1911, and then spent precisely ten days there in March 1912 (Baldacci 1997: 125-126; Crosland 1999: 36; Schmied 2002: 38). The impact of the vast open architectural spaces of the city, such as *Piazza Vittorio Emanuele, Piazza Carignano, Piazza Carlo Alberto*, in fact, can be discerned in the eight *Ariadne tableaux*, with their long shadows and perspectives (Taylor 2002: 85).

24 For more information on De Chirico’s techniques to create perspectives, see also De Sanna (1998: 14-26).
provides an “interesting” angle: a steep, high or low angle, or an acutely oblique angle, or an extreme close-up or extreme long-shot.

In *Melanconia* (1912), *The Lassitude of the Infinite* (1913), and *The Joys and Enigmas of a Strange Hour* (1913), De Chirico achieves the contrast between the close-up and the extreme long shot by placing the Ariadne statue at the foot of a steeply rising and sun-drenched piazza. The square is flanked by colonnaded arcades that close in on the figure from both sides, while two men appear in the far distance along the horizon (Figures 59-61). This contrast establishes the condition of an encrypted and transfigured reality, as reality itself is perceived from a distorted perspective and multiple viewpoints. In this context, in *Profondo rosso* Argento shares with De Chirico the same ability to produce an impression of precarious peace and suspended time on the viewer through an innovative use of perspectives. During the sequence in which Marc and Carlo witness Helga’s murder from the adjacent fascist-style piazza, Argento alternates the fixed camera and the wide angles to reject spatial verisimilitude in favour of a distorted and exaggerated perspective of the square (Figures 55 and 56). This distorted and exaggerated perspective gives the impression of crushing the two men onto the background in a manner that reproduces the artificial nature of painting as a two-dimensional illusion of three-dimensional space. The nocturnal piazza provides an overall impression of a pictorial and theatrical set also because of the fixed camera that accentuates the perspective recession. The placement of the viewers’ point of view creates the dual effect of making the central plane rush away into the distance while at the same time oppressively charging towards them. Moreover, in Argento’s sequence the conversation between Marc and Carlo partially takes place with the two characters standing either side of Umberto Baglioni’s gigantic statue representing the river Po (1937), giving the sculpture a commanding presence in the centre of the colonnaded

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25 The sequence is set in *Piazza CLN*, a historical square in Turin that is located between *Piazza San Carlo* and *Piazza Carlo Felice*. In it, sculptor Umberto Baglioni (1893-1965) built two gigantic statues. While the one representing the river Po is set against the back wall of the San Carlo Church on the left, the one representing the river Dora is set against the back wall of the Santa Cristina Church on the right. In both sculptures there is a fountain whose cascade of water is collected in a tub of mixed-line shape. In *Profondo rosso*, Argento filmed the left side of the piazza and ignored the right part.
piazza (Figures 57 and 58). This fact accentuates the disproportion between the size of the two men and the surrounding area as if they were crushed by the massive architecture of the place; in the same way De Chirico’s statues of Ariadne dominate the frame in relation to the two small figures in the horizon.\(^{26}\)

3.4.2. *Edward Hopper’s imagery as the symbol of incommunicability*

In the aforementioned sequence in which Marc and Carlo converse in the empty nocturnal piazza before Helga is murdered, the only sign of life is perceivable in the presence of the Blue Bar in the background. In this context, Argento re-creates the *plan-tableau* of Edward Hopper’s *Nighthawks* (1942) (Figures 63-66). In Hopper’s painting three people are depicted sitting at the counter of an all-night diner. Two are a couple and the third man is sitting alone, with his back to the viewers. The diner’s sole attendant, looking up from his work, is peering out of the window. The corner of the diner is made of curved glass, and a large expanse of glass is also visible on the two sides (Figure 62). As Hobbs (1987: 131) has discussed, Hopper began painting *Nighthawks* immediately after the attack on Pearl Harbour in 1941 and the United States entry into World War II. This was a time when young men were sent off to the armed services and the entire country was caught up in the war effort. After this event, a feeling of gloom spread over the country. According to Goodrich (1976: 83), Renner (2002: 77) and Wagstaff (2004: 43), this idea of gloominess is symbolically represented

\(^{26}\) De Chirico’s use of colour and light in his *Ariadne* series has also provided inspiration for Argento’s disquieting portrayal of Rome in *Tenebre*. *Tenebre* is a complex, high-tech contemporary nightmare about an American writer visiting Rome in order to publicize his new novel. Very soon he realises that he is the target of a dangerous serial killer whose homicides are a perfect carbon copy of the ones described in the writer’s book. Although *Tenebre* is an Italian word meaning "darkness", Argento instructed his cinematographer Luciano Tovoli to film the movie with as much bright light as possible. Specifically, Argento explained that he was adopting a modern style of photography, deliberately breaking with the legacy of German Expressionism, and both the camerawork and the colour palette used in Andrzej Żuławski’s *Possession* (1981) greatly influenced his decision to shoot the film with such stark lighting (McDonagh 1994: 170-171; Jones 2004: 120). In order to achieve such a clear definition of image and such a sharpness of focus, cinematographer Luciano Tovoli used a Kodak 300 ASA film stock with the result that every single scene of the film is bathed in white light (Jones 2004: 120). Except for the finale and some night scenes, the entire film is shot with clear, cold light permeating the surrounding. This is typical of De Chirico’s canvasses and generates a sense of apparent calm and disquieting atmosphere at the same time. For an analysis of the narrative structure and visual tropes of *Tenebre*, see McDonagh (1994: 163-187); Tentori (1997: 82-89; 2000: 25-28); Mendik (2000; 2002); Barber and Thrower (2001: 173-185); Jones (2004: 119-125); Maiello (2007: 141-151); Monetti (2008: 299-301); Lenzi (2009); Gracey (2010: 85-92); and Pugliese (2011: 69-73).
by the architectural shape of the diner. The bar’s bubble of glass is an enclosure in space, hermetically sealing off the people from the city, and it is notable that the diner has no visible door leading to the outside. The building is thus uncommunicative and illustrates the idea of confinement and entrapment. The light from the restaurant is flooding out onto the street outside, so that the lunch counter resembles an oasis of light in the midnight city that separates the four people from the outside world. Part of the painting is empty and there is no sign of human life in it, apart from the diner’s harsh electric light. Argento’s *plan-tableau* is slightly different from the pictorial reference. Although the architecture of the Blue Bar is identical to that presented by Hopper, the change imposed by Argento is about the people inside it. In *Profondo rosso*, there are five people inside the bar. Two of them seem to be a couple and are located on the left corner of the room. The other two are male and appear to be speaking with the bartender. What is really striking in the whole composition is that the couple on the left are dressed in typical 1940s-gangster style, with black hat and suit. On the contrary, the two men on the right are dressed in 1970s-style. This gives the impression of an image that is suspended in space and time. The pictorial effect of the *plan-tableau* is eventually provided by the fact that these people are stuck in their position, the actors remaining frozen throughout the sequence. Although the two couples coexist in the same place, the spatial distance that separates them, as well as the fact that they do not move throughout the whole sequence, provides the idea of lack of communication and interaction among these people. In this respect, the reference to Hopper’s painting acquires a symbolic significance of a surrounding world perceived as increasingly hostile and unfriendly. Thus, Argento’s composition provides a hyperrealist still picture as the metaphor for human disinterest and the difficulty of interaction, which results in emotional as well as physical loneliness. The image of urban loneliness depicted in Hopper’s *tableau* is distressing and painful, as is Argento’s depressed inactivity of the nocturnal piazza. This melancholy mood is also evoked by the symbolic paralysis provided by the historic sculptures.

in the metaphysical and rationalist architecture of the square, emphasised by high angles shots and huge distances. Similarly, Marc and Carlo are talking to each other from a distance which recalls Hopper’s painting. The two men are placed at opposite sides of the fountain and the gigantic statue of the River Po in the middle dominates the frame. They shout to each other, although they seem not to understand what each other is actually saying. More significantly, the spatial distances between the people in the Blue Bar and between Marc and Carlo on either side of the gigantic statue seem to convey *Profondo rosso*’s narrative structure through pictorial symbolism; the idea of failed communication which the film seeks to convey is built not only into the narrative but into the spatial layout of the image itself. In *Profondo rosso*, the prevailing theme of communication breakdown is also brought into relief through the character of the foreigner who is catapulted into a different reality and becomes the unwilling witness and the potential victim of the murderer. Marc is a musician who is completely lost in his own world, looking without seeing and hearing without listening. He manages to look right at the murderer’s face in Helga’s apartment but does not realise the importance of what he saw. When both Carlo and Gianna tell him that he must know the killer’s identity, Marc does not understand what they mean until much later in the film. In addition, Marc’s credibility is constantly doubted and menaced by the police. The police themselves are not only useless as far as the investigation is concerned, but they are also constantly mocked by Argento. As Grainger (2001: 118-119) has noticed, in *Profondo rosso* Argento chooses to lampoon the police through the curious medium of food. The audience first see Inspector Calabrini stuffing his face with a sandwich while trying unsuccessfully to remember the word “violin”, while most of his colleagues have been deliberately cast because they are overweight. It is almost as if Argento is suggesting that the police’s overwhelming need to take in food renders them useless in seeing what is going on around and outside of them. As a result, neither Calabrini nor his men come up with anything of significance in the investigation, and are soon dropped from the plot of the film. Similarly, when Marc tries to contact his friend Gianna on the public phone of a bar to have some information on the address of Amanda Righetti, the clumsy
bartender purposely does not pay attention to the conversation and makes a
terrible noise with the coffee machine. Fundamental to the solution of the case is
Carlo, as he manages to act as a powerful catalyst between Marc’s illusion of
reality and the objective truth. Carlo’s intervention at a certain point of the
narrative is revealing in this respect. According to Grainger (2001: 122), during an
exchange between Marc and Carlo that takes place soon after Helga’s murder,
there is the impression that the director himself is speaking to the audience
through Carlo. After Marc expresses his doubts that he might have missed an
essential detail during the night Helga was murdered, Carlo replies:

Magari hai visto un qualcosa di talmente importante che non te ne rendi
conto [...] Sai, certe volte quello che vedi realmente e quello che immagini
si mischiano nella memoria come un cocktail del quale tu non riesci più a
distinguere i sapori [...] Tu credi di dire la verità e invece dici soltanto la
tua versione della verità.\textsuperscript{28}

Carlo’s overall point is strongly related to the narrative context of
\textit{Profondo rosso} as a whole, as Marc may have seen more than expected by the
audience, but this retrospective clue has already become so obscure as to be
virtually impossible to comprehend.

3.5. \textbf{Conclusion}

\textit{Profondo rosso} is the first example in Argento’s body of work to show a
highly evocative and visually sophisticated interplay of artistic imagery, complex
camerawork, and unsettling soundtrack. \textit{Profondo rosso}’s plot still relies on the
basic narrative structure of Argento’s directorial debut \textit{L’uccello dalle piume di
cristallo}. Like Sam Dalmas in \textit{L’uccello dalle piume di cristallo}, Marc Daly
witnesses a murder and turns amateur detective in order to find the killer.
Marc’s unreliable memory of what really happened leads him to an initial
misleading conclusion until the truth is eventually revealed in an unexpected

\textsuperscript{28}[Maybe you don’t realise the importance of what you saw [...] Sometimes what you really see and what
you imagine get mixed in your memory like a cocktail, and you can’t distinguish the flavours anymore
[...]You think you speak the truth and instead you are just speaking your version of truth].
coup de théâtre. *Profondo rosso*, however, distances itself from *L’uccello dalle piume di cristallo* due to the primary importance it gives to stylistic and technical achievement. In this respect, artistic imagery assumes an essential role within the film. On the one hand, artistic imagery reinforces *Profondo rosso*’s stylistic and technical innovation through the medium of a consolidated pictorial repertoire. Specifically, Argento combines the techniques of the close-up and extreme close-up and the progressive rock soundtrack with an artistic subject matter that is typical of photo-realism painting of the late 1960s and early 1970s. While Charles Bell’s hyperrealist endoscopic detail and manipulation of size in the depiction of his marbles series and gumball machines is traceable in the director’s portrayal of the serial killer’s ritual of death, Richard Estes’ work on light and reflection is at the basis of the film’s gruesome murder set-pieces. The photographic-type accuracy with which Argento focuses on surfaces encourages the audience to pay full attention to the aesthetic and intrinsic qualities of the object represented rather than to the narrative progress of the sequence. Moreover, *Profondo rosso* constitutes a turning point in Argento’s career due to its highly innovative creation of spaces through camerawork that is close to Giorgio De Chirico’s pictorial use of perspectives in his metaphysical canvasses. In a key sequence of the film, Argento applies a break from the linear perspective in favour of a distorted and exaggerated one. In the sequence of Marc and Carlo’s meeting in the empty nocturnal piazza, Argento makes use of the alternation of fixed camera and wide angles. This technique provides a distorted and exaggerated perception of spaces that, in my opinion, leads to the viewers’ disquieting unease while watching such dislocated images.

Apart from the aesthetic and symbolic values of artistic imagery in defining Argento’s stylistic and technical changes, the art-historical repertoire also assumes an essential role in terms of narrative. Argento utilises the pictorial device of the trompe-l’œil in order to mislead both the film’s protagonist and the audience from the crucial detail that would lead to the resolution of the case. Thus, the Giallo theme of the amateur detective’s misleading sight while witnessing a crime is symbolically reiterated by the effect of the trompe-l’œil in painting. Finally, the combination of narrative elements and pictorial symbolism
is also present at another level. Marc is a foreigner who is catapulted into a hostile reality, and becomes the witness and the potential victim of the murderer. Marc tries to communicate his anxiety and unease about the situation he is living through, but his credibility is constantly doubted and menaced by the people surrounding him. Marc’s emotional and physical inability to communicate with the people surrounding him is symbolically achieved through Argento’s *plan-tableau* of Edward Hopper’s *Nighthawks* in the real location of *Piazza CLN* in Turin. The spatial distance between people provided by Hopper’s painting symbolically matches the idea of incommunicability that permeates *Profondo rosso*’s whole narrative. For all these qualities, *Profondo rosso* is the first of Argento’s films in which artistic imagery, narrative, and style come together in a powerful evocative blend.
Chapter 3 - Figures

Figures 1-16: The sequence of the conference on parapsychology.
Figures 17-26: The sequence with the snorkel camera.

Figures 27-29: Charles Bell’s marbles series.
Figures 30-32: A hyperrealist painting by Chuck Close (30) and the killer’s gaze in Profondo rosso (31 and 32).

Figures 33-36: Profondo rosso’s credit sequence.

Figures 37-42: The killer’s ritual of death: the hand-held tape recorder (37 and 38) and the macabre gadgets (39-42).
Figures 43-50: The martyred bodies and their reflections.

Figures 51-54: Art of deception: the trompe-l'oeil through the mirror.

Figures 55-58: Piazza CLN in Turin from different angles and perspectives.
Figures 59-61: De Chirico’s Ariadne series. From left to right: L’Enigma dell’ora (1910) (59), Melanconia (1912) (60), and Ariadne (1913) (61).

Figure 62: Edward Hopper’s Nighthawks (1942).

Figures 63-66: The plan-tableau of Hopper’s Nighthawks in Profondo rosso.
Chapter 4


“At l’architettura diventa un oggetto filmico [...] quando la sua presenza corrisponde a una certa intenzionalità”

“No macchina da presa [...] A ogni suo movimento doveva corrispondere una giustificazione psicologica”
Dario Argento (McDonagh 1994: 129)

At the time of Suspiria’s release in the United States in 1978, the Soho Weekly News critic Rob Baker (McDonagh 1994: 129) identified Argento’s new cinematic experience as a “horror film (The Cabinet of Dr Caligari) laden with [... the self-conscious convoluted fairy tale Alice in Wonderland”. Baker’s statement introduces two fundamental issues regarding the film itself. Suspiria constitutes a step forward in Argento’s career both in terms of narrative and style. Firstly, the film is the director’s first foray into the realms of the wholly supernatural horror of occultism and witchcraft. Particularly, Argento chooses the narrative trope of the fairy tale to narrate the negative effects of black magic on people and the dramatic and horrific consequences that may derive from opposing the occult power of witches. Secondly, the film was inspired by the visual tropes of German Expressionism of the 1920s, such as Robert Wiene’s Das Kabinett Des Dr. Caligari (1920). Baker’s analysis, however, allows ample space to Suspiria’s fairy tale component by referencing Lewis Carroll’s novel but does not explore how and to what extent Suspiria may have been influenced by Wiene’s film.

As Argento (Zagarrio 2008a: 31-32) has stated, “il cinema espressionista tedesco [...] penso sia molto presente nei miei film, in molte inquadrature. In Suspiria c’è molto espressionismo”. According to Scheffauer (1920: 77), Manvell and Fraenkel (1971: 18), and Vidler (2000: 103), German Expressionist Cinema of the 1920s tended to show the characters’ states of the body and the soul through cinematography, set design, and representation of spaces, rather than through narrative progress. If we adopt this definition of the term

11 [German Expressionist Cinema is very present in my films and Suspiria provides an example].
“expressionist” for *Suspiria*, it proves useful to analyse the use of cinematography, set design, and representation of spaces in some of the expressionist cinema of the 1920s and to analyse whether and to what extent this use is applicable to Argento’s *Suspiria*. Thus, my main purpose in this chapter is to answer the following question: *In what way and to what extent does Argento’s use of colour palette, set design, and representation of spaces contribute to identifying *Suspiria* as his expressionist film par excellence?* By answering the question, I shall demonstrate how *Suspiria* is Argento’s “expressionist” film par excellence. On the one hand, the director’s artificial use of colour palette, set design, and representation of spaces is aimed at symbolically evoking or visually reinforcing the supernatural theme of black magic and occultism. On the other hand, this use achieves a dramatic status, as it functions as the projection of the characters’ bodily and mental states to such an extent as to determine both the development and the several nuances of the story itself.

### 4.1. Synopsis

*Suspiria* revolves around Suzy Banyon, a young ballet student who has just relocated from New York in order to attend the *Tanz Akademie* of Freiburg.\(^2\) As soon as Suzy reaches the ballet school, she witnesses a student, Pat Hingle, first speaking with someone over the entry phone and then fleeing the building panic-stricken. The raging wind and the terrible storm make Pat’s conversation indecipherable. Unable to gain access to the building herself, Suzy stays in town for the night. Meanwhile, Pat makes her way to a friend’s apartment, where they are both brutally murdered by a mysterious assailant. On her arrival at the academy the next morning, Suzy is introduced to Madame Blanc, the assistant director, and Miss Tanner, the leading ballet teacher. While visiting the changing room, Suzy makes friends with fellow student Sarah. Following a series of horrific events, which include an infestation of maggots within the academy and the

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\(^2\) In the original version of the script which Argento worked on, Suzy’s surname is Banner. In the present chapter, I have chosen to use the English version, Banyon, in keeping with the majority of the secondary literature.
murder of blind pianist Daniel by his guide dog in a nocturnal piazza of Freiburg, Sarah becomes suspicious that the key to the mysteries is to be traced to the building itself and starts investigating. One night, while hearing the teachers walking down the corridors of the school, Sarah tries to find out where they are going by counting their footsteps from her dormitory room and noting them down. The next day, Suzy decides to inform Madame Blanc that she heard Pat saying something over the entry phone and that, despite the deafening noise of the storm, she was able to decipher the word “secret” followed by the word “iris”. Immediately after, Sarah confesses to Suzy that she was close to Pat and she was the person on the other end of the intercom on the night of the murder. The same night, Sarah realises she is no longer secure inside the building and decides to run away. The attempt to escape is unsuccessful, as the girl is eventually attacked in the attic and finally murdered after becoming trapped in a room full of razor wire. Finding Sarah’s room empty the following day, Suzy goes to meet the girl’s family friend Dr Frank Mendel to try and find out where she might be. Although Frank does not know anything about Sarah’s departure, he provides Suzy with some information about the Tanz Akademie. He retraces the history of the ballet school by explaining that it had been founded by Helena Markos, also known as the Black Queen, a Greek immigrant who was believed to be a witch. Then, Suzy is introduced to Professor Milius, an expert in occultism, who gives the woman essential information about witchcraft and how to destroy the evil power it generates. Back at school, Suzy realises that all the ballerinas have gone to the theatre and left her alone. Suspicious of what is happening, she relies on Sarah’s notes and starts following the noise of the teachers’ footsteps, eventually finding herself in Madame Blanc’s office. There, Suzy notices three irises painted on the wall, one of which is in relief. This fact enables her to decipher Pat’s words the night she was murdered and to trace a hidden door in the wall by turning the blue iris which is in relief. Beyond, she sees a secret lair where a coven of witches is gathered, apparently directed by Madame Blanc and comprising of most of the staff. Unnoticed, Suzy identifies Sarah's corpse lying in a coffin. Afraid of being discovered, she hides in an adjacent room without knowing it is Helena Markos’s hidden lair. The old witch is lying on a bed and is
invisible to Suzy. However, the girl takes advantage of a series of flashes coming from outside which illuminate Markos’s outline, and fatally stabs her with the tail feather from a glass peacock. She then flees the school while a fire engulfs the entire coven.

4.2. **Contextualising Suspiria within Argento’s work**

*Suspiria* was co-written with actress and screenwriter Daria Nicolodi. Specifically, the story of Suzy Banyon travelling from home and joining an all-girl academy presided over by a coven of evil witches came from a story allegedly told by Nicolodi’s maternal grandmother. At the age of fifteen, Nicolodi’s maternal grandmother decided to perfect her piano studies at a prestigious school of music in France. Over time, she realised that the staff was also devoted to black magic and esotericism. She escaped from the institution and returned to Italy (McDonagh 1994: 137; Maiello 2007: 120). Moreover, as Argento (Maiello 2007: 109) has stated:

Dopo *Profondo rosso* volevo raccontare qualcosa di più incantato, assolutamente non reale. Volevo sconfinare nei miti delle favole e trasportarli nel presente. Fra i tanti a disposizione ho scelto quello della stregoneria, un tema che mi ha sempre affascinato e che ho sempre seguito tra letteratura e cinema.4

*Suspiria*’s title is a tribute to Thomas De Quincey’s *Suspiria de Profundis* (1845) (McDonagh 1994: 134-137; Gentilhomme 1997: 277; Tentori 1997: 68; Lenzi 2007: 239; Maiello 2007: 125). In De Quincey’s book, there is a brief section entitled *Levana and Our Ladies of Sorrow*, in which the 19th century British writer describes three mythical female creatures, *Mater Lacrimarum*, *Mater Suspiriorum*, and *Mater Tenebrarum*, who rule the world with blood, pain, and

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1 Daria Nicolodi (born June 19, 1949) was romantically involved with Dario Argento from 1974 to 1985. Actress and director Asia Argento was born from their union on September 20, 1975. As an actress, Nicolodi played in several of Argento’s films, such as *Profondo rosso* (1975), *Inferno* (1980), *Tenebre* (1982), *Phenomena* (1985), *Opera* (1987), and *La terza madre* (2007). Although Nicolodi is not mentioned in the credit sequence, she also collaborated on the script of *Inferno* (Maiello 2007: 139).

4 [After *Profondo rosso*, I wanted to tell the story of something absolutely unreal. I wanted to approach the myth of fairy tales and to transport it to the present. Among the many themes available, witchcraft has always fascinated me both in literature and in cinema].
Although mentioning these murderous and vengeful figures, De Quincey did not explain in detail what their malefic power consisted of. This is the reason behind Argento’s decision to conceive a full trilogy dedicated to these creatures, starting with Suspiria. As a result, Suspiria is the first instalment of the so-called Three Mothers Trilogy, together with Inferno (1980) and La terza madre (2007). Argento’s trilogy takes inspiration from De Quincey’s names in order to narrate the story of a triumvirate of evil witches living in three different cities, Freiburg, New York, and Rome, whose powerful magic manipulates human lives on an individual and global scale. Argento cross-references Suspiria in the opening sequence of the second instalment, Inferno, during which Rose Elliott focuses on an extremely upsetting passage from an ancient book that describes the three creatures’ power:


Therefore, *Mater Suspiriorum* is eventually identified with Helena Markos, the founder of the Tanz Akademie in Freiburg. Markos’s story is also resumed in a sequence of *La terza madre*, when Father Johannes narrates the story of Elisa Mandy, a white witch who sought to challenge Markos’s evil might. The two battled in Freiburg. Although Elisa was eventually killed in the fight, she was able to weaken the black witch into a hag-like state. This fact contributed to her final defeat by American student Suzy Banyon. In *La terza madre*, Elisa’s daughter Sarah Mandy eventually defeats *Mater Lacrimarum* in Rome. While in *Inferno* the only information provided is that *Mater Tenebrarum* masquerades as a nurse in

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5 For more information, see De Quincey (1871: 25-31).


7 [*Mater Suspiriorum*, the Mother of Sighs and the oldest of the three, lives in Freiburg. *Mater Lacrimarum*, the Mother of Tears and the most beautiful of the sisters, holds rule in Rome. *Mater Tenebrarum*, the Mother of Darkness, who is the youngest and cruellest of the three, controls New York].
an old neo-gothic building in New York, in La terza madre, Mater Lacrimarum has been hibernating for centuries in Rome and is eventually awakened when Sarah Mandy manages to open the urn in which her most powerful relic, a red tunic, is stored. By contrast, Mater Suspiriorum is the only mother in the trilogy with a given name and with a detailed historical background. Helena Markos is a 19th century Greek immigrant who was expelled from many European countries and had written several volumes on a variety of arcane sciences and esotericism. Among the initiates she was know as the “Black Queen”, and the local people believed her to be a witch. After she settled down in Freiburgh, she became the subject of a lot of gossip. In 1895, she founded the Tanz Akademie, a ballet school in the Black Forest, which was also devoted to esotericism and occultism. As the woman’s wealth grew, so did suspicion about her true nature. To avert this unwanted scrutiny, she faked her own death during a fire in 1905, and control of the Tanz Akademie was taken over by Markos’s favourite pupil.

As Gentilhomme (1997: 276-277) has pointed out, behind Markos’s detailed background lies Argento’s will to pay homage to the life and work of 19th century Russian-born occultist Helena Blavatsky. Like Markos, Blavatsky spent most of her life travelling the world and impressed people with her professed psychic abilities, including clairvoyance, levitation, and telepathy (Cranston 1993: 113-118). In 1873, Blavatsky settled down in New York and co-founded the Theosophical Society with Colonel Henry Steel Olcott (Cranston 1993: xviii; 143-148). Throughout much of Blavatsky’s public life, her interest in esotericism and occultism drew harsh criticism from some of the learned authorities, who accused her of being a fraud (Cranston 1993: 65-69). However, while Blavatsky’s interest in the occult through the Theosophical Society was part of her personal quest for spiritual truth and wisdom, at the basis of Markos’s practices resides her will to do evil. Specifically, Argento retraces the purpose of black magic and the dramatic and horrific consequences that may derive from opposing the

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8 As Cranston (1993: xvi-xxiii) has summarised, the objects of the Theosophical Society were: 1) to form the nucleus of a universal brotherhood of humanity, without distinctions of caste, colour, creed, race, and sex; 2) to study the ancient and modern philosophies and sciences and to demonstrate the importance of such study; 3) to investigate the unexplained law of nature and the physical power latent in men. Blavatsky’s thought connecting esoteric spiritual knowledge with new science may be considered to be the first instance of what is now called New Age thinking.
occult power of witches through the character of Professor Milius. As Professor Milius states to Suzy, magic “quoddam ubique, quoddam semper, quoddam ab obnibus creditum est”, as it has never submitted to the light of modern science and scepticism.\(^9\) Moreover, according to Milius:

Le streghe fanno il male, nient’altro al di fuori di quello. Conoscono e praticano segreti occulti che danno loro il potere di agire sulla realtà e sulle persone, ma solo [...] in senso maligno [...] il loro scopo è ottenere vantaggi materiali e personali, ma possono raggiungerli esclusivamente con il male degli altri, con la malattia, con la sofferenza, il dolore e non di rado con la morte di coloro i quali prendono di mira per una qualsiasi ragione.\(^{10}\)

In Suspiria, the omnipresence of witchcraft and the dramatic and horrific consequences that may derive from opposing the occult power of witches is symbolically conveyed by the use of a totally artificial cinematography and setting. In my opinion, this use perfectly reflects the supernatural theme of the film and catapults the audience into a nightmarish and surreal atmosphere, where the comforting security of rationality is no longer applicable and the creative power of everything resides in evil. As far as cinematography is concerned, Argento instructed cinematographer Luciano Tovoli to film with an outmoded IB stock, a choice inspired by the vivid psychedelic quality of Walt Disney’s animation classic Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937) and that had already been used in Victor Fleming’s Gone with the Wind (1939) and The Wizard of Oz (1939) (McDonagh 1994: 142; Gentilhomme 1997: 276; Schulte-Sasse 2002; Lucantonio 2003a: 17; Jones 2004: 83; Lenzi 2007: 71; Maiello 2007: 109). The result is an unnatural colour palette made of a saturated blue-red-yellow scale, whose artificiality is aimed at symbolising black magic itself. As far as location and set design are concerned, after visiting different places between Austria, Northern Italy, and Switzerland, Argento eventually opted for the Black Forest in

\(^{9}\) [Magic is everywhere and all over the world it is a recognised factor].
\(^{10}\) [Witches are malefic, negative and destructive. Their knowledge of the art of the occult gives them tremendous powers. They can change the course of events and people’s lives, but only to do harm [...] Their goal is to accumulate great personal wealth, but that can only be achieved by injury to others. They can cause suffering, sickness, and even the death of those who, for whatever reason, have offended them].
Baden-Württemberg, south-western Germany, as the ideal place for his cinematic tale. Moreover, the director instructed designer Giuseppe Bassan to take inspiration from the Art Deco and Art Nouveau styles in the area. The artificiality of their décor, in fact, was the most suitable to visually embody the nightmarish and surreal atmosphere of the film (Lucantonio 2003a: 16; Maiello 2007: 113). By combining such cinematography and use of setting, however, it is my opinion that Suspiria also constitutes a step forward with regard to the role of artistic imagery within Argento’s cinema. Indeed, the artificial colour palette made of a saturated blue-red-yellow scale, as well as the elaborate Art Deco and Art Nouveau styles in the setting, not only symbolically match the supernatural theme of the film but also achieve a dramatic status by becoming full projections of the characters’ bodily and mental states and by functioning as effective characters in themselves. For this reason, Suspiria constitutes the first and only case in Argento’s cinema in which artistic imagery assumes a total “expressionist” role.

4.3. The expressionist use of colour palette

Profondo rosso is the first of Argento’s films that strongly relies on the effective association-provocation of hyperrealist iconography and compelling soundtrack to impart aesthetic pleasure to some of the highly choreographed and gruesome key sequences (Cfr. § 3.3; 3.3.1; 3.3.2). Such a powerful match between the acoustic and the iconic is also traceable in Suspiria’s opening sequence depicting Suzy’s arrival in Freiburg, in which an unsettling soundtrack is paired with a saturated blue-red-yellow colour mixture. Suzy’s arrival in Freiburg is announced in the credit sequence by a long drum roll, which becomes more and more powerful until it is abruptly interrupted. Then, the viewers’ attention is focused on what Argento’s voice-over says:

11 As Maiello (2007: 109) has argued, Argento’s final decision was influenced by his reading of Grimm’s Hänsel und Gretel and Schneewittchen. Better known to the English-speaking readers as Hansel and Gretel and Snow White, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm’s folktales are included in the definitive edition of Kinder-und Hausmärchen (1857). For more information, see Dégh (1988: 66-90).
Suzy Banner decided to perfezionare i suoi studi di balletto nella più famosa scuola europea di danza. Scelse la celebre accademia di Friburgo. Partì un giorno alle nove di mattina dall’aeroporto di New York e giunse in Germania alle 10.45 ora locale.¹²

Argento’s voice-over immediately places Suzy in a traditional fairy tale context, as it combines essential information for the understanding of the film with the tone of “once upon a time”.¹³ The director’s voice-over in the credit sequence is followed by The Goblin’s sophisticated soundtrack. In order to re-create the dreamlike and surreal atmosphere of the credit sequence, The Goblin used the buzuki, a traditional stringed instrument from Greece, together with the church organ and the oriental tabla, and added the whispered phrase “there are three witches sitting on the tree” with clear reference to the evil triad, Mater Lacrimarum, Mater Suspiriorum, and Mater Tenebrarum (Cfr § 4.2).¹⁴ In my opinion, The Goblin’s soundtrack also assumes a symbolic connotation as soon as the credit sequence fades out. When Suzy arrives at the airport, there is no soundtrack and the viewers’ attention is directed towards the exit door from the girl’s POV. As soon as a woman dressed in red passes through the automatic door, the music of the credit sequence resumes. When the door closes, the music is interrupted as if it was coming from the outside. When it is Suzy’s turn to go out, the camera focuses on the extreme close-up of the door’s automatic mechanism as if indicating a transition from the world of the rational to the world of the supernatural. At the same moment, the soundtrack explodes in all its evocative power as if symbolising that the magical evil forces are outside and willing to reveal themselves.

¹² [Suzy Banyon decided to perfect her ballet studies in the most famous school of dance in Europe. She chose the celebrated academy of Freiburg. One day, at nine in the morning, she left Kennedy Airport, New York, and arrived in Germany at 10.45 PM local time].
¹³ The traditionally fairy tale context has been delineated by Propp’s study on Russian folklore contained in the collection Naródnye rússie skázki (1855-64) by A.N. Afanas’ev. In his analysis, Propp (1968: 25-65) identifies the morphological foundation of traditional fairy tales and examines individual categories of action comprising such stories in a variety of ways. As McDonagh (1994: 131-133; 138-141) has suggested, ten categories out of the thirty-one described by Propp can be equally applied to Suspiria, specifically the story of the hero travelling far away (category I), fighting the villain’s control (categories II-III-VI-VII-VIII), and eventually restoring peace (categories XVI-XVIII-XIX-XX).
¹⁴ For more information on Suspiria’s soundtrack, see Thrower (2001: 129-132); Maiello (2003: 155-156); and Lucantonio (2008a: 218).
Suzy’s transition from the rational world, as represented by the airport, to the supernatural world, as represented by the outside, is also marked by an abrupt change in colour palette that persists throughout the entire film. After crossing the automatic door, Suzy is adrift in a psychedelic world of swirling blue, red, and yellow, which drench her figure and the outside, at times alternating their presence and at others mixing in a single shot (Figures 1-6). In order to achieve such an artificial effect, Argento used an outmoded IB stock with a high layer of gel that was provided by Kodak and was at 30/40 ASA against the 500 that can be found today (Jones 2004: 9; Lenzi 2007: 71; Maiello 2007: 114). Moreover, cinematographer Luciano Tovoli used a big arc light and placed some frames made of tissue and velour paper extremely close to the actors’ faces (Maiello 2007: 121). The light emerged from them in a different way than when using normal gel frames. As far as the surrounding background is concerned, Tovoli managed to bounce the light onto a mirror with the result of sharpening the images more than if they were directly illuminated. Finally, the negative print of the film was given to Technicolor who split the colour negative into three separate black and white negatives, one for red, one for blue, and one for green. Then, Technicolor printed one colour on top of the others to give the film a shimmering look. The final result emphasizes a deliberately unrealistic setting that is much more vivid in colour definition than emulsion-based release print (Grimaldi 2008: 262). According to Luscher (1977: 152-153), the use of light in cinema manages to act on the scenic volumes becoming a spatial element itself according to the degree of hue, intensity, and lightness. The statement is applicable to Suspiria’s outmoded IB stock, whose saturated blue-red-yellow scale is purposefully designed to reinforce the film’s action and character types. Specifically, the film’s colour palette acquires the function of consolidating the supernatural theme of the film through artificiality (Craig 1995: 54; 56). As Gallant (2001a: 68) has argued:

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15 For an analysis of the different colour techniques in cinema, see Micheli (2000: 75-107); and Venzi (2006).
16 For an outline of the traditional symbolism of blue, red, and yellow in black magic and the occult sciences, see Cavendish (1967).
Scenes in daylight present us with an environment of logic and security, [...] but the lustreless, pastel-coloured equilibrium is drastically altered as darkness brings an outpouring of anguish, horror, and the supernatural.

In this regard, *Suspiria* provides two types of spaces in relation to the colour palette, one realistic and the other *Gothic* (Schulte-Sasse 2002). While the realistic spaces, such as the airport and the convention centre where Suzy and Dr Frank Mendel meet (Cfr. § 4.1), are shot in naturalistic light, the *Gothic* spaces are the ones dealing with black magic and showing the abundance of diegetic and non-diegetic use of the IB stock with the result of identifying such stock with the presence of some kind of danger. Schulte-Sasse’s assertion is confirmed by the fact that whenever Argento identifies an imminent danger, the transition immediately takes place. Similarly, as Horrocks (2001: 36-41) has discussed, *Suspiria*’s spaces in relation to colour palette may be divided into three main categories: the magical, the daylight, and the monochrome. The first two categories are highlighted by the presence of a blue-red-yellow scale, sometimes alternated and sometimes all present in a single shot. While the magical spaces are the ones taking place at night, in which the supernatural is perceived by the medium of the IB stock, the daylight are the ones taking place during the day, although the presence of the supernatural is still evident. In this case, the coexistence of blue, red, and yellow is not identified by the IB stock, but by a diegetic use of colour palette through the architecture and the décor (*Figures 7-10*). The *Tanz Akademie* has a red façade and is punctuated by yellow window frames. The interiors are made up of an alternation of saturated blue and red upholstery with the exception of the changing room that is yellow. Moreover, every rehearsal room is named according to the colour of the wallpaper, which is regularly blue, red, and yellow. The only monochrome sequence that takes place in natural daylight is the one during the meeting in the convention centre between Suzy, Dr Mendel, and Professor Milius. Thus, the entire film plays on the alternation of blue, red, and yellow to warn the audience of the imminent danger of occultism and witchcraft, and the single incident of natural colour is provided to alert the viewers to the fact that the danger is currently away. Although significant, it is my opinion that both Schulte-Sasse’s and Horrocks’s
analyses of *Suspiria*’s colour palette are somehow reductive. A more exhaustive definition of the use of colour in *Suspiria* is provided by Venzi (2008: 228):

> I colori esposti non sono qui lavorati in funzione espressivo - simbolica, vale a dire non rappresentano le forze maligne che infestano le case infernali; piú propriamente essi sono quelle stesse forze, ne costituiscono la piú pregnante e oscura manifestazione; il processo costruttivo […] consegna in questo senso ai colori un’identità drammaturgica, richiede loro di agire all’interno della vicenda, di segnarne le evoluzioni, di orientarne il corso. 17

Therefore, the colour palette in *Suspiria* is not just a medium to warn the audience of the imminent danger of occultism and witchcraft. Rather, it becomes the full embodiment of such danger, regularly substituting the witches’ presence by acquiring a character status and a dramatic role. In light of this statement, it is interesting to draw a parallel between the use of colour in *Suspiria* and the use of colour and lighting that was at the basis of German Expressionist Cinema of the 1920s. Although German Expressionist Cinema of the 1920s was filmed in a black and white stock, it was able to express a dramatic use of light through the manipulation of bright and dark areas and the technique of tinting the film. As East (2008: 4; 5) has suggested about Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau’s *Nosferatu* (1922):

> Murnau establishes formal dichotomies such as light/dark and naturalistic/abstract through the manipulation of light. Given the content of the respective poles, a thematic opposition of rational and irrational is created.

In Murnau’s *Nosferatu*, when Hutter reaches the dining hall after surviving his first night at the haunted castle of Count Orlock, the long shot of the room manages to reveal not only checkered floor tiles that run from right to left diagonally, but also angular strips of light that cast a harsh shadow effect against

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17 [The colour palette in *Suspiria* is not processed according to its expressive-symbolic function, as it does not represent the evil forces that infest the haunted houses. Rather, it represents such forces themselves and it constitutes their most obscure and weighty presence in the film […] This role gives the colour palette a narrative function, as it requires it to act within the story and to articulate its various subtleties].
the main axis of the room. These strips of light enhance the diagonal of the tiles and underscore the right angle of the room with one beam falling on the jamb of the arch. This combination of acute and right angles is a matrix for ambiguity and distortion. This ambiguity and distortion of shapes through the lighting becomes a full projection of the vampire’s presence as it embodies some kind of danger that not even the safety of dawn is able to remove (East 2008: 5). In Suspiria, when Suzy arrives at the academy the day after Pat’s murder, the projection of the balcony’s shadow on the left side of the frame creates a disquieting human shape in a long shot that closely resembles the profile of a witch in traditional folklore (Figures 11 and 12). The shadow embodies the fact that the academy itself incorporates the physicality of the owner, in this case represented by the deranged evil witches, Markos, Blanc, and Tanner, and the safety of daylight is somehow misleading the audience concerning the lack of danger. In Nosferatu, the alternated use of tinted colour guides the viewers to full understanding of the environment in a way that black and white film could not provide. In the film, alternating blue, green, and yellow indicate respectively the night, the daylight, and the interiors (East 2008: 4). When Hutter crosses the bridge to reach the vampire’s mansion, however, there is the abrupt passage from the tinted blue of the night to tinted orange. In my opinion, the abrupt passage from blue to orange is meant to anticipate and identify with the evil creature and with the supernatural state of the surrounding area. Likewise, the opening sequence of Suspiria in which Suzy leaves the airport of Freiburg by taxi is characterized by a persistent blue in the external environment, while the girl’s face is illuminated by an alternation of red and yellow in medium close-up. On the one hand, the abrupt change in artificial colour palette is meant to symbolize the fact that Suzy has just entered the dimension of the supernatural. On the other hand, the blue-red-yellow scale fully embodies the witches’ presence by anticipating the colour scheme of the Tanz Akademie. Moreover, as Eisner (1969: 99-100) and Manvell and Fraenkel (1971: 31) have suggested, in Nosferatu’s sequence the whole of nature is seen to be disturbed by the presence of the vampire, such as in the case of the crashing waves foretelling the approach of the monster. Similarly, in

18 For an analysis of the narrative structure and visual tropes of Nosferatu, see also Runyeon (2007: 63-64).
the opening sequence of *Suspiria* nature fully combines with the artificiality of
colour to embody evil. The torrential rain that punctuates Suzy’s journey by taxi
is accompanied by an alternation of green and red flashes, and is eventually
collected by a series of sewage pipes shot with the hyperrealist technique of the
extreme close-up (Figures 13-16).

The abrupt change in colour palette in the opening sequence of *Suspiria* is
enacted throughout the entire film, where the predominance of the blue-red-
yellow scale anticipates and sometimes substitutes the physical presence of the
witches both diegetically and through IB stock. A typical example is provided in
the sequence of the maggots dropping from the ceiling onto the ballerinas’ faces
and hair. Although Madame Blanc argues that the reason for the infestation is
that some spoiled food arrived by mail from a company they believed to be
reputable, Argento is more interested in conceiving the sequence with a
crescendo in tension, zooming in and out of the spaces and cross-cutting the
girls’ scared gazes and shouting, rather than in providing a concrete explanation
of the maggots’ presence on the upper floor of the academy. As soon as Miss
Tanner reaches the attic to uncover the sealed boxes from whence the maggots
are coming, a saturated blue colour palette makes it impossible to decipher their
content. In my opinion, such a strategy encourages the audience to think that
these filthy creatures have come out of nowhere and have been generated from
the corrupted and befouled environment, which is embodied by the colour itself.
Moreover, Argento decides to opt for artificial red and yellow in two key
sequences in which Sarah is the protagonist. Following the maggot infestation,
Madame Blanc organises temporary accommodation for the night in the practice
hall. There, Sarah is haunted by a distinctive whistling snore coming from
someone behind a tent. She immediately convinces herself that the terrible
wheeze comes from the school’s director, who is not abroad as both Madame
Blanc and Miss Tanner assert, but is hidden somewhere in the academy. The
peculiarity of the sequence resides in the fact that as soon as Sarah perceives the
evil presence, the whole screen is tinted red as if to identify it with the witch (Cfr.
§ 4.5). Likewise, what the audience witness in the sequence of Sarah’s murder in
the attic is a window lighted in saturated yellow as a possibility of a way out (Cfr.
§ 4.5). This conviction is quickly denied by the film’s events. When the victim manages to climb out of the window, she is suddenly immersed in an abyss of razor wires. As Sarah wiggles in the pool of wires, a yellow-illuminated open door is visible on the left side of the screen, as if to indicate that even if there is a way out it is unreachable. The saturated yellow is not identified with salvation, but it is only a transient illusion of such because the control of black magic is everywhere and unlimited. The dramatic role of colour is eventually expressed in the final sequence of the film. The secret of the Tanz Akademie is hidden in the blue, red, and yellow irises in relief within the décor, which give access to the witches’ secret lair. The three irises diegetically convey the presence of the evil triad, Markos, Blanc, and Tanner, as they evoke the cult-like experiences the coven of witches share by echoing the blue-red-yellow scale of the entire film. The only thing Suzy can do is to act by interpreting the colour, turning the blue iris to find out the truth and gaining access to the ultimate mystery of black magic (Cfr. § 3.3.3; 4.1; 4.4.2).

4.4. The expressionist use of architecture and décor

In the previous section, I have established that the artificiality of colour palette through diegesis and cinematography is aimed at embodying the witches’ physicality and psychology to such an extent as to acquire the status of a character in itself. Such peculiarity is also traceable in Suspiria’s use of setting, namely the diegetic qualities of the architecture and décor. In Profondo rosso, the representation of the environment as locus suspectus is a leitmotiv in the sequence of Marc Daly’s visit to the “house of the screaming child”. In the ten-minute-long sequence in which Marc goes to the abandoned villa to investigate, the man does not utter a single word while he observes and tries to capture any essential detail of the solution to the case. As Argento (Lucantonio 2003a: 15) has stated:

Stavo crescendo. Provavo il piacere di raccontare con dei tempi lunghi [...]. È il racconto di una persona sola che cerca di capire il segreto di questa
Accompanied by The Goblin’s progressive rock soundtrack, the whole sequence is conceived as a film within a film. Each one of Marc’s steps is followed in detail and it seems that Argento is presenting the effective time it would take to explore such a place in reality. Marc eventually manages to find a valuable clue, which is the mummified corpse of the murderer’s husband walled inside a room (Cfr § 3.1; 3.3.1). Thus, the architecture of daily life becomes the depositary of some of the most hidden disturbances and shocking crimes that can lie behind the veneer of any apparent domesticity. In Profondo rosso, the apparent calm of the abandoned villa clashes with the murderous impulses of the people who once inhabited it. In this respect, Suspiria constitutes an evolution in the representation of spaces. In Suspiria, the presence of evil and murderous impulses is not expressed through the deviant psychology of the people acting in a specific domestic environment, but is conveyed through a dramatic and symbolic understanding of architecture and décor. Specifically, architecture and décor function as full embodiment of such evil and act like characters in themselves. This statement has been validated by Argento (Costantini and Dal Bosco 1997: 61-62 cited in Carluccio 2003: 62):

Mi ha sempre interessato l’architettura [...] Ho passato dei mesi, magari per trovare una strada che corrispondesse all’idea che mi ero fatto per una scena, un luogo che materializzasse il sogno che era quel particolare momento di un film [...] Credo che in Suspiria si possa cogliere abbastanza bene il senso di questa idea. La casa dove si svolge la storia non è altro che un organismo vivente.  

19 [I was growing as an artist. I felt the pleasure of telling the story with a documentary style [...]. It is the story of a lonely person who tries to understand the secret of this house. Pressed by the music, the audience also begin their inner journey. The protagonist never speaks. He observes and tries to understand].

20 [The clash between the apparent calm of the environment and the murderous impulses of the people that inhabit it is also traceable in Frau Bruckner’s villa in Phenomena (1985) and in Rod Usher’s house in Il gatto nero, the second instalment of the two-episode film Due occhi diabolici (1990). In Phenomena, Frau Bruckner protects her deformed and necrophiliac son, who is a murderer who enjoys burying his preys in a pool full of human corpses within the house. In Il gatto nero, Rod Usher is a photographer who murders his fiancée and walls her up inside his house to hide his crime.]

21 [I’ve always been interested in architecture [...] I’ve sometimes taken a lot of time to find a street that corresponded to the idea I had for a scene, a place that materialized the dream in that particular moment in
As Vidler (1992: 70-73) has argued, the definition of architecture and décor as a *living organism*, from Vitruvius to the present, includes the notion of the building as a body of some kind, the idea that the building embodies states of the body and states of the mind that are based on bodily sensation, and the sense that the environment as a whole is endowed with bodily or organic characteristics. In my opinion, Vidler’s definition of architecture and décor as *living organism* finds full application in German Expressionist Cinema of the 1920s. In it, the different states of the body and the soul are identified in the various geometries of the setting (Scheffauer 1920: 77; Manvell and Fraenkel 1971: 18; Vidler 2000: 103). In his analysis of Robert Weine’s *Das Kabinett des Dr. Caligari* (1920) and other expressionist films of the immediate post World War I, Schneider (2001: 65-66) has stated:

One of the defining features of [...] *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1920) [...] is a warped reflection of the protagonist’s psychological instability in highly artificial and often hyper-aestheticised [...] set design [...].

The whole plot of Wiene’s *Das Kabinett des Dr. Caligari* derives from the imagination of the male protagonist’s disturbed mind that cannot distinguish dream from waking. Despite the fact that the man does not explicitly show any striking behavioural abnormalities throughout the film, the confused quality of his anguished self is fully reflected by the external environment that is “both all-absorbing and all-embracing in depth and movement” (Vidler 2000: 106).

Specifically, the small town where the story takes place is rendered through unrealistically distorted and exaggerated architectural shapes and through a series of curving, oblique, and rectilinear lines converging across an undefined expanse toward the background, for the expressionist purposes of reproducing the dreamlike atmosphere seen through the eyes of a madman (Eisner 1969: 20; Bordwell and Thompson 2008: 448). Such a use of the architecture and décor manages to work on a double level. On the one hand, their symbolic purpose is to generate states of ambiguity and anxiety because of the psychic reaction

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a film [...] I think that in *Suspiria* one can grasp this idea. The house where the story takes place is nothing but a *living organism*.
caused in the viewers by distorted and exaggerated lines. On the other hand, these spaces achieve a dramatic status as they “do indeed seem to vibrate with an extraordinary spirituality”, creating the animation of the inorganic through bodily and mental projections (Eisner 1969: 21-22). Similarly, as Gallant (2001c: 22) has argued:

In [...] Suspiria, colour, shape, music, and movement do more than simply articulate the anxieties of their characters, they substitute character psychology altogether [...] The people that inhabit these worlds are ciphers, their two-dimensionality flaunted unrestrainedly, while their physical environment is psychologised in the extreme.

In light of Eisner’s and Gallant’s statements, we can argue that Suspiria’s mixture of the symbolic and dramatic function of the architecture and décor, and the subsequent identification of the environment as living organism, assume a purely expressionist purpose. In my opinion, this expressionist purpose is applicable on a double level. On the one hand, the shapes in the architecture and the décor of the Tanz Akademie are aimed at symbolising the basic theme of the film which is the omnipresence of witchcraft. On the other hand, the diegetic references to Art Deco and Art Nouveau within the academy’s décor are granted a dramatic function, namely the projection of metaphorical bodily and mental types of the evil triad, Markos, Blanc, and Tanner.

4.4.1. The symbolic function of architecture and décor

Suspiria’s Tanz Akademie is presented for the first time during the stormy night of Suzy’s arrival in Freiburg. It is a gothic-style building from 1516 that is historically known as Das Haus Zum Walfisch, the house of the whale (Lenzi 2007: 50). It is fictionally located in the middle of the Black Forest, which Suzy crosses by taxi before reaching her destination. The building is firstly introduced to the audience through Suzy’s POV, with a tracking shot simulating the movement of the taxi carrying the girl and proceeding from a long shot to a medium shot of the red façade. Argento then switches to a close-up of a red plaque to the right of the entrance gate and that manages to inform the audience that Desiderius
Erasmus of Rotterdam had once lived there. The close-up is followed by a high angle shot of the academy’s richly-decorated front door (Figures 17-20). Two adjectives characterize the architecture of the Tanz Akademie. On the one hand, it is imposing in breadth. On the other hand, it is austere in decoration. Throughout the film, the building’s exaggerated ceiling-height and the vaulted door and window series give the impression of dwarfing the actresses, as if they were being crushed by the massive architecture. This impression does not occur at random as the idea of reducing the actresses’ size through architecture and décor was a factor of Argento’s original conception. Suspiria’s original setting was to be a children’s school. Argento eventually changed the script after an argument with his Italian distributor, who considered the idea of children being chased and tortured by evil witches inappropriate (Gallant 2001e: 49; Jones 2004: 81; Maiello 2007: 111-112). However, Argento managed to transmit the original idea through the production design. The door handles, for example, are placed higher than normal as if the story was told from a child’s POV (Lucantonio 2003a: 17). This is a purely expressionist technique, as the environment becomes the character’s mental projection. Specifically, the adult actresses’ perception of the environment is proportional to the perception of a child acting in the same place. As Lenzi (2007: 50) has suggested, the austere vivid red façade of the building also incorporates some of the architectural features that are typical of a Gothic Cathedral. Like the religious building, the Tanz Akademie’s window series on the first floor has a triangular design, with the central panel higher than those at the sides. The triangular shape is taken up in the balcony located over the central door and in the triple vault that gives access to the main entrance. The interior of the academy also provides the same sacral connotation by the ogival shapes of the vault, in the various decorative doors, hallways, and window series. In my opinion, this repetition of triangular design and shapes can be interpreted according to a different perspective that is more closely related to the narrative of the film. Specifically, I think that both the occult practices carried out in this place and the manipulating natures of the people that inhabit it are symbolically conveyed in the series of diegetic triangles in the film. The presence of the esoteric red triangle within the Art Nouveau fantasy in the central balcony of the
academy symbolises the hierarchy of the evil triad Markos, Blanc, and Tanner. This hierarchy is also symbolically conveyed when Pat takes the elevator to reach her friend’s apartment and a red triangle lighting up indicates the engine’s movement (Figures 21 and 22). The shape is repeated both in the bathroom of the apartment, where a series of vertical inverted triangles are shown in the white door of the interior and in the shower glass, and in the skylight where Pat is ferociously stabbed, which is made of triangles of glass that reflect the primary blue, red, and yellow used in the film. In Suspiria, the witches’ hierarchy is symbolised with a pyramidal structure. At the top is Mater Suspiriorum, at the sides are Madame Blanc and Miss Tanner, at the bottom is the staff of the Tanz Akademie. This hierarchical component is also expressed by the attitude and behaviour of each character. Madame Blanc barely manages to interact with the young ballerinas and her will is eventually put into practice by the authoritarian and manipulative Miss Tanner. The rest of the staff do not utter a word, they walk behind Madame Blanc and Miss Tanner and place themselves in a semicircle when both women enter a room. As far as Helena Markos is concerned, she embodies the power of the whole coven of witches. Such a power is eventually explained to Suzy by Professor Milius through the metaphor of the cobra:

Una regina [...] è tale in quanto possiede il potere di fare magia che è moltiplicato per cento rispetto alle altre streghe. È come un serpente. La forza risiede nel suo leader, cioè nella testa. Un’associazione priva di testa è come un cobra decapitato, innocuo.22

Helena Markos’s supremacy over the other witches is symbolically conveyed by her hidden lair. The place is anticipated by a long corridor consisting of an alternation of circular and ogival shapes and whose sides are covered with esoteric phrases in ancient Greek, Hebrew, and Latin. The diegetic presence of the “All Seeing Eye”, which is believed to be the eye of Lucifer and of those claiming physic and psychic control, is represented inside a triangle on the right

22 [A queen of her magic is a hundred times more powerful than the rest of the coven. It’s like a serpent. Its strength resides with its leader, that is, with its head. A coven deprived of its leader is like a headless cobra, harmless].
side of Markos’s room (Figure 23). Markos’s complete control and power over the whole coven of witches is ultimately manifested in the final sequence of the film. As soon as Suzy manages to stab Markos’s neck, it is as if Suzy had struck the pulsating heart which had kept the entire coven alive. Following the act, there is an apocalyptical effect on the building, as it crumbles, explodes, and shakes in a fiery inferno just after Suzy has run outside into the rain from which she first entered. This idea of the control and power of Helena Markos over the coven of witches, and of the coven of witches over the ballerinas, has brought Schulte-Sasse to a re-interpretation of Suspiria from a historical-political perspective. As Schulte-Sasse (2002) has argued, although Suspiria is neither a historical nor a political film in the conventional sense and it does not make any reference to National Socialism, a subtle link between the two may lie in the academic authority’s behaviour and organisation. Specifically, National Socialism was a historical version of what the witches try to achieve on a seemingly apolitical level: a hunger for power and a reign of surveillance by the medium of injustice and oppression. Schulte-Sasse’s interpretation is not entirely misleading as Argento had previously expressed a strong interest in this historical period.

After completing Quattro mosche di velluto grigio (1971), Argento intended to tackle a classic horror film such as Frankenstein and to set it in 1920s Germany, just before the advent of National Socialism. This would have been the depiction of an authoritarian and destructive society and the creation of the monster was to be a direct consequence of such evil control. However, the project was not realised as both Hammer Film Productions and Paramount were unable to finance it at that period (Maiello 2007: 68). In Suspiria, Argento is indirectly referencing that period through his tribute to certain avant la guerre German cinema. As the director (Gentilhomme 1997: 276-277) has stated, Suspiria’s plot was loosely inspired by Leontine Sagan’s Mädchen in Uniform (1931). Mädchen in Uniform centres upon the relationship between two women, Manuela Von Meinhards, a young student newly arrived at a Potsdam boarding school for girls, and Fraulein von Bernburg, the school’s most adored teacher. Thus, the film can be associated to Suspiria by the all-woman environment and the thoroughly
feminine atmosphere of the school. Moreover, in both Mädchen in Uniform and Suspiria, the ultimate incarnation of ever-present authority and discipline are represented both by the school’s female staff, whose authoritarian behaviour is suggested by their reliance on oppression and punishment as a medium to tame strong-willed people, and by the surrounding architecture. In Mädchen in Uniform, an imposing circular stairway, which it is prohibited to climb, becomes the symbol of rigorous mind control and senseless rules that are imposed on the female classmates (Rich 1981: 44). The boarding school is an imposing neoclassical building whose geometry and lines recall those of the empty nocturnal piazza in the sequence of Daniel’s murder in Suspiria (Cfr. § 4.5). In this respect, it becomes significant that the act of aggression by Daniel’s guide dog was shot in the Königplatz, a monumental place in Munich that was used during the Third Reich as a field for the Nazi Party’s mass rallies (Horrocks 2001: 47; Schulte-Sasse 2002; Carluccio 2003: 59). In the sequence of Daniel’s murder, therefore, the subtle reference to National Socialism is obtained through historical evocation and recollection. Other sequences in Suspiria seem to refer more indirectly to a dramatic system of mental and physic control and torture that is characteristic of the Nazi period. On her arrival at the academy, Suzy is told by Madame Blanc and Miss Tanner that at present the dormitory within the school is full, so she has to stay in the apartment of Olga, a third-year-student living in town. As soon as Madame Blanc informs Suzy that the dormitory room is finally available, the girl replies she would prefer to stay at Olga’s. Suzy’s refusal to leave Olga’s house and to move into the school’s dormitory infuriates both Madame Blanc and Miss Tanner. Blanc’s and Tanner’s initial disappointment at Suzy’s refusal is turned into punishment. While walking down a corridor of the academy, Suzy glimpses a school attendant sitting in a corner and rubbing a triangular silver object (Figure 24). The object’s reflection dazes Suzy, who manages to crawl to the classroom for the lesson and eventually passes out. After coming round, Suzy realises that Madame Blanc and Miss Tanner have

23 While in Sagan’s film male roles are completely absent, in Argento’s film they are reduced to a few marginal roles, and only two of them are relevant to the story. I refer to Dr Frank Mendel and Professor Milius, who eventually help Suzy to understand the meaning and purpose of black magic.
moved her into a dormitory room against her wishes. The other ballerinas, for their part, seem to unwillingly adapt to and collaborate with the austere and repressive climate within the academy in order to avoid punishment and trouble. Hence, those disciplined and punished in the film are the ones destabilising and upsetting the established power of the witches, both by investigating the series of mysteries within the academy and by refusing to adapt to the authoritarian and repressive system of the school. Such established power is diegetically conveyed through the symbolism of the triangles in the architecture and décor so as to remind the audience of the omnipresence of witchcraft within the *Tanz Akademie* and the dramatic and horrific consequences that derive from opposing it.

4.4.2. *The dramatic function of architecture and décor*

As far as the set design of the *Tanz Akademie* is concerned, Argento instructed designer Giuseppe Bassan to re-create some pieces of furniture based on the German Art Deco and Art Nouveau styles or *Jugendstil*, especially the ones present in Bavaria and in the Black Forest (Lucantonio 2003a: 16; Lenzi 2007: 50; Maiello 2007: 113). The interior of the academy is constantly punctuated by the mathematical alternation of both styles that rigorously identify the various areas and sometimes coexist within a single space. As Arwas (1980: 16) and Schmutzler (1964: 29) have argued, Art Nouveau in architectural and pictorial décor has been an attempt at re-creating style by taking inspiration from nature. In this regard, the techniques adopted were to reproduce animal and natural shapes through architectural décor and to directly paint explicit or stylized anthropomorphic and organic features onto the wall. The desired effect was to create an ideal combination of artifice and nature.24 Similarly, as Lenzi (2007: 49) has discussed, the peculiarity of the architecture and décor within the *Tanz Akademie* is the constant dualism of artifice and nature. Specifically, the sophisticated elegance of the environment is to be found in the mathematical and obsessive recurrence of animal and natural shapes through architectural and

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24 For more information on Art Nouveau’s history and features, especially associated to German *Jugendstil*, see also Bloom (1988).
pictorial devices. The audience can recognise features of Art Nouveau within the academy in the golden staircase leading to the first floor, whose décor reproduces an intersection of curvilinear lines in the form of a serpent (*Figures 25*). Both the curvilinear lighting apparatus and the series of female statues carrying a plant present the same ochre colour of the staircase and clash with the ogival vaulted front door (*Figure 26*). These curvilinear lines are eventually re-created in the window shades placed above the dormitory doors, which reproduce the organic shape of a shamrock (*Figure 27*). Madame Blanc’s studio is the ultimate essence of the Art Nouveau techniques. It is a circular and enclosed room featuring a completely hybrid style, in which there are a series of oval pictures on both sides, whose design recalls Beardsley’s style. The wall behind the desk is decorated in the Art Nouveau style, with a mixture of elaborate vegetable fantasies that re-create through painting the form of the real natural vegetation on the sides of the room. The flower vases on the desk diegetically reproduce the blue-red-yellow colour scheme of the film, which is also expressed by the painted irises on the left side of the central wall. Both the real and painted floral fantasies clash with the structural geometry and representation that is contained in the misleading and deceptive perspectives typical of M.C. Escher’s *Relativity* (1953) on the central wall (*Figures 29 and 30*). Such a co-existence of artifice and nature in set design lies at the heart of Wiene’s *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*, in which the director availed himself of organic shapes in the painted architecture and décor in order to generate a metaphorical projection of the bodily and mental types that inhabit such places. As Prawer (1980: 197) has suggested:

In *Caligari* [...] the painter’s images are fully at home, harmonize perfectly with the work’s theme and style: with its attempt to make the physical setting a hieroglyph of inner experience, its suffusion of landscapes and townscapes with feelings and states of mind.

In *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*, Jane’s bedroom and sitting room are presented with a series of floral fantasies in the central wall. These floral fantasies are made of concentric circular and curvy lines that symbolically match
the voluptuousness of the protagonist’s curvy female body (Figures 31 and 32). By contrast, in the sequence in which somnambulist Cesare manages to kidnap Jane, the painted trees on both sides of the décor are represented through an intersection of oblique and slanted lines to match the woman’s feeling of anxiety and unease through broken and distorted organic shapes (Figure 33). Suspiria’s use of nature through artifice is strongly related to Wiene’s. Specifically, the Art Nouveau shapes in the film are characterised by morbid and voluptuous circular lines that symbolically match the almost exclusive female presence within the academy and the harmony of gestures of classical ballet as the supreme form of refinement in dance. Moreover, all the artificial and natural shapes of set design graphically interact to create an overall composition with the actresses’ physicality. While the circular and concentric flowery wallpaper in Olga’s apartment takes up the cinnamon bun hairstyle of the woman (Figure 28), Madame Blanc’s flouncy dresses, hairstyle and jewellery reproduce the harmonic circles and lines on the artifice of her studio (Figure 34). With regard to Art Deco, Argento re-creates the angular and linear geometries of the clerk’s office in Wiene’s Das Kabinett des Dr. Caligari in the depiction of Miss Tanner’s rehearsal room.25 The room has ochre wallpaper that is characterised by a series of subtle vertical lines of the same colour and is interspersed with a series of squared multi-coloured glass windows and mirrors on the central wall and on both sides. While the morbid and voluptuous circular lines of Art Nouveau symbolically match the ballerinas’ elegance and femininity, Miss Tanner’s gestures and stance are almost brusque like the linear geometric angles and lines of the Art Deco rehearsal room, and clash with the smooth gestures of the ballerinas (Figure 35). As Scheunemann (2003: 129-130) has discussed, in Wiene’s film the squared lines of the high chair of the town clerk compared with the low bench on which Dr Caligari has to wait are identified with the bureaucratic arrogance of the environment and of the state authority (Figures 38 and 39). In Argento’s film, they are identified with the character of Miss Tanner and what she embodies. Indeed, she is a symbol of the arrogance, authority, and control within the

25 For more information on Art Deco’s history and features, see: Arwas (1980); Hillier and Escritt (1997); and Benton et al (2003).
academy of dance and her physical appearance and fashion make her resemble a Nazi guard rather than a dance teacher.

The alternation of Art Deco and Art Nouveau in the architecture and décor of the Tanz Akademie is also present in the building where Pat and her friend are brutally murdered. The orange-red façade and the interior of the building are emblematic of the Art Deco movement, characterised by geometric shapes arranged with symmetrical elegance and alternating orange and white (Figures 36 and 37). The lift has Art Nouveau decoration, with curvilinear lines for ostentatious refinement (Figure 22). The bathroom in which Pat is eventually murdered has angular Art Deco features, and on the sides there is faithfully reproduced a fantasy of Escher’s woodcut Sky and Water (1938). In my opinion, the perfect compatibility in the architecture and décor of both the Tanz Akademie and the building where Pat and her friend are brutally murdered metaphorically indicates the ubiquity of witchcraft and its evil control over people which forms the central theme of the film. If Madame Blanc’s physicality is identified by Art Nouveau lines and Miss Tanner’s physicality is represented through Art Deco lines, the repetition of these features in the other building projects their omnipresence through architecture and décor and metaphorically conveys their responsibility in the concretisation of the criminal act against Pat and her friend. Additionally, both places diegetically cite the work of M.C. Escher. Argento pays tribute to the Dutch artist at the beginning of the film, Escher Strasse being the fictional address of the Tanz Akademie. As Argento (Gentilhomme 1997: 278) has stated:

Le génie de cet artiste, explicitement cité dans la fresque en trompe-l’œil dissimulant la porte escamotée, hante tout l’intérieur, plein d’escaliers, de couloirs qui mènent va savoir où [...] Par cette succession de pièces, de vitraux hermétiquement fermés, de pièces sombres, sans issue, j’ai voulu créer une atmosphère de claustration totale, où règne une seule certitude: l’Académie de Danse est un labyrinthe dans lequel on rentre, mais duquel, peut-être, on ne pourra jamais sortir.²⁶

²⁶ [The genius of this artist, explicitly cited in the trompe-l’œil bas-relief dissimulating a retracted door, haunts the whole interior of the academy of dance, with its stairways and corridors that lead who knows where [...] By showing this maze, with tightly closed windows and dark rooms with no escape, I wanted to
The fantasy depicted in the central wall of Madame Blanc’s studio is clearly inspired by Escher’s lithograph *Relativity* (1953) ([Figures 40 and 41](#)). In *Relativity*, Escher manages to portray a world in which the normal law of gravity does not apply. In the lithograph there are depicted three stairways that connect with each other, and in two of them people are represented as climbing them upside-down, but based on their own gravity source they are climbing normally. Likewise, the internal structure of the *Tanz Akademie* resumes the composition and intersection of lines of *Relativity*, as it is represented by a repetitive and stratified coexistence of corridors and stairs that make it look like a Chinese box. The academy’s structure strongly relies on Eco’s definition of a mannerist labyrinth. According to Eco’s definition (1983: 524-525), wherever you progress you face a kind of tree with many blind alleys. There is only one exit but you can make mistakes and you need the thread of Ariadne not to get lost. In this context, Suzy manages to follow her thread of Ariadne as the key to reaching the witches’ secret. She counts the teachers’ footsteps with the help of Sarah’s notes until she reaches Madame Blanc’s studio. At this point, Escher’s lithograph assumes a dramatic role within the film. After remembering Pat’s statement over the entry phone, Suzy manages to turn the blue iris that is in relief on the left side of the lithograph and is part of the design itself. A door drawn on the wall and part of the design gives access to the witches’ secret hideout. The fact that the door is both real and part of the design imbues the reference to Escher’s work with a role of transition between the real world and the world of the occult. The undermining of the law of gravity in Escher’s lithograph manages to depict a world where the law of science has no value. Similarly, what is perceived behind the door in *Suspiria* is dominated by the supernatural and witchcraft, and, in general, by a world that does not relate to any physical law of nature. The function of transition between the rational and the supernatural is also applicable to Argento’s reference to Escher’s *Sky and Water* in the bathroom of Pat’s friend. In Escher’s *Sky and Water*, horizontal series of fish and birds are fitting into each other like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle and the pictorial shapes create an atmosphere of total confinement, where there is only one certainty: the academy of dance is a labyrinth that one can enter, but from which it is impossible to escape].
are alternately foreground or background, depending on whether the eye concentrates on light or dark elements (Figures 42 and 43). As the fish progress upward and the birds downward they gradually lose their shapes to become a uniform background of sky and water respectively. This gradual loss of shape indicates the futility of objective reality, as everything may change before our eyes and bring us to an indiscernible world of fantasy. Similarly, Suspiria gradually transports the audience from one world to another and metaphorizes the coexistence of both worlds through Escher’s artwork.

4.5. The expressionist representation of spaces through camerawork

In addition to colour palette and set design, Suspiria constitutes a step forward in Argento’s career due to the expressionist representation of spaces through camerawork. By expressionist representation I mean that the complex camerawork through which the film’s spaces are shot is intended to symbolise the omnipresence of evil as well as to embody the characters’ bodily and mental states. As far as Suspiria’s camerawork is concerned, Argento (Maiello 2007: 110) has stated:

Suspiria è un film teso, compatto, senza concessioni di tregua. È un’esasperazione di quanto ho già descritto con Profondo rosso. Ogni inquadratura di questo film doveva avere un senso. Doveva possedere una propria micro-storia come se fosse un piccolo film. La macchina da presa doveva muoversi, girare intorno ai personaggi per motivi ben precisi. A ogni suo movimento doveva corrispondere una giustificazione psicologica.

In the Animal Trilogy, Argento still differentiates the technique of the POV according to the holder of the gaze by alternating long focal length lenses for the serial killer’s POV, standard lenses for the eyewitness’s POV, and wide angles for

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27 For an outline of M.C. Escher’s style and techniques in the lithographs mentioned above, see MacGillavry (1965); and Schattschneider (1990).
28 [Suspiria is a tense film that does not allow the audience to rest. It is the aesthetic and visual exasperation of what I have already described with Profondo rosso. Every frame of the film had to make sense. It had to develop a micro-history as if it were a short film in itself. The camera had to move and to turn around the actors for a very specific reason. Every move was to correspond to a psychological justification].
the victim’s POV (Cfr. § 3.2). In Profondo rosso, Argento applies a violation of the narrative form typical of the Animal Trilogy by the unconventional use of the camera, which constantly disorientates the audience by moving back and forth and by alternating any omniscient shot with a specific POV without discernible pattern (Cfr. § 3.2). In Suspiria, the director carries on shooting from the non-identified and non-perceptible perspective experimented with in Profondo rosso with a subsequent failure to motivate cinematic space and time by cause-effect logic. In Suspiria, Argento makes use of dislocated POVs with disquieting regularity and the audience are never presented with a figure to whom this POV may be assigned and are never informed whether what is being watched is the literal representation of a character’s visual field or the result of an unmotivated tracking shot (Gallant 2001g: 13-14; Horrocks 2001: 33-34; Pugliese 2011: 62). In my opinion, this technique in Suspiria is justified on a double level. On the one hand, it relates to the supernatural theme of black magic and occultism that removes any logical explanation of the complex camerawork. Throughout the film, in fact, the audience are encouraged to believe that something supernatural may materialise from the surrounding spaces through camerawork. In this respect, the sequence of the ballerinas gathering in the rehearsal room-cum-dormitory for one night after the maggot infestation becomes very significant. As soon as the light is switched off, the predominant colour becomes an unnatural saturated red. A long shot of the room introduces a series of white curtains dividing the space and the shadows of the ballerinas projected behind the curtains are so elongated as to dominate the whole screen. The camera focuses on a tent and makes a tilt movement from bottom to top to climb over it and to return in a low angle shot to the place where the young women sleep. The low angle shot is followed by a pan movement from the right and the camera rotates to the left of the screen. The sound of shortness of breath accompanies the camerawork, as if this was the POV of an unseen presence. The viewers then see the shadow of a figure lying down on a bed behind a curtain in medium long shot. The figure is identified by Sarah as the director of the school, who is not abroad as Madame Blanc and Miss Tanner assert, but is hidden within the academy. Likewise, Argento uses the same technique in the sequence of the conversation
between Suzy and Sarah in the pool of the academy. During the sequence, a tilt movement from bottom to top and followed by a pan movement in low angle shot focusing on the two women swimming is identified with an unseen presence filling the stage and spying on them. This association of the pan and the tilt becomes the director’s way to express Helena Markos’s presence through camerawork. Although the witch’s identity has not yet been revealed, her omniscient gaze and supernatural power are constantly perceptible throughout the elaborate camerawork spying on people in the surrounding environment.

On the other hand, the representation of spaces through complex camerawork in Suspiria acquires a dramatic status. While the colour palette becomes the full embodiment of the omnipresence of witchcraft and the co-existence of Art Deco and Art Nouveau in the set design identifies with metaphorical bodily and mental types within the academy, the complex camerawork is intended as a projection of the characters’ mental phobias and states associated with spatial fear, such as claustrophobia and agoraphobia. Various images of enclosure and emptiness recur throughout the film, especially during the three elaborate murder set-pieces. The first gruesome murder set-piece, in which Pat is brutally killed and her friend impaled by the wreckage of a falling window frame, alternates images of agoraphobia and claustrophobia. This is a typical example in which aesthetic contemplation takes over the story and the virtuoso exhibition of highly complex murder scenes takes place. Before the act of murder is enacted, Pat is frightened by a storm she is observing from the window of her friend’s apartment. The long shot showing Pat looking out of the window is taken from outside and lets the audience share the murderer’s POV. In this case, it is as if Pat is being spied on by a supernatural creature, as the apartment is on the third floor and only a being endowed with supernatural power could reach the place as seen from that perspective. The long shot from outside creates a composition in which the window, itself framed by ornamental shades, becomes a frame within a frame imbued with red and blue and offset by black lingerie flying in the wind in long shot. This effect generates a claustrophobic impact on the audience as the oasis of light is strictly bounded by
the perimeter of the window and gives the idea of compressing the female figure on all sides so as to delimit her space of action. Meanwhile, the outside provides the impression of an endless expanse of darkness (Figure 48). The same claustrophobic impact is at the basis of the sequence in which Sam Dalmas is observing from the outside a crime that is going on inside an art gallery in *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo*. He rushes to help and is eventually trapped between the double set of glass doors which constitutes the entrance to the gallery (Cfr. § 1.2.1). While in the sequence of *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo* the claustrophobic impact is rendered through the objective physical entrapment of the protagonist, in *Suspiria* it is subtly achieved by the sharp contrast between light and shadow. The approach of the evil creature is rendered by a slow zoom in of the camera. As soon as Pat glances out of the window with the help of a lamp, two yellow-coloured eyes in the darkness are shown by a close-up. A male arm manages to break the window and presses Pat’s face against the glass with such force that it breaks. The action creates a transition from the metaphorical claustrophobic effect of the environment to the physical claustrophobic effect by the medium of choking the victim (Figure 49). The action is followed by a cross-cutting alternation between Pat and her friend who tries to enter after hearing the scream. The hysterical roommate is shown from a range of long perspectives that similarly render her a minuscule part of the graphic design of the Art Deco architecture surrounding her. Then, Pat is stabbed through her heart by the same bodiless hand, placed in a noose and dropped through a glass skylight into the foyer of the apartment house where she hangs dripping with blood, while her roommate is impaled by the wreckage of a falling window frame. Throughout the act of murder, the space itself is effectively designed according to an alternation of claustrophobic and agoraphobic feeling rather than according to any architectural logic. As soon as Pat receives the first stab, she is magically thrown into a dark space that provides access to the skylight and behind which there is a huge metal grille. The claustrophobic effect of the architecture is reproduced in the type of torture to which the woman is subjected. The mysterious assailant, in fact, makes the woman helpless by tying her with a long rope (Figure 50). Meanwhile, when Pat’s friend is calling for help, the scene is
shot from a low angle perspective that makes her powerless and tiny against the surrounding emptiness of the environment (Figure 51). Moreover, the placement of the two women’s corpses following the act of murder is subsumed by the law of geometry that literally reduces them to an objet d’art. The horizontal position of Pat’s friend lying on the floor and the vertical position of Pat’s body hanging from the ceiling form a right angle on the screen so that they seem to recall a horrific geometric sculpture. This artistic quality of the murder sequence is also validated by the role of blood. The red fluid dripping from Pat’s corpse creates a pool on the floor that is similar to a Rochat Test (Figures 44-47). Like in Profondo rosso’s murder set-pieces, the blood in Suspiria’s sequence is not perceived as the physical consequence of the act of murder, but as colour whose chromatic strength and reflective power recall the hyperrealist canvasses of Richard Estes (Cfr. § 3.3.2).

As far as Sarah’s murder set-piece is concerned, it also becomes exemplary in reference to the claustrophobic representation of spaces as shown in Pat’s sequence. The act of murder is anticipated by the low angle shot of the façade of the academy. The sequence switches to Sarah, who realises she is no longer secure inside the academy and decides to run away. A series of approaching noises and giggles from the main corridor of the school push the girl to escape. Before Sarah leaves the room, Argento takes a long shot of the girl through the glass of a lamp hanging from the ceiling. The effect gives the impression of assisting an insect trapped in transparent amber (Figure 52). The shot is followed by a zoom into the girl’s face that resumes from a long shot to a medium close-up and shows the terror in the girl’s face in detail (Figure 53). Sarah leaves the room and finds herself amongst the mazes of the academy, which seem to have come to life and create a source of continual fear. Such anxiety is generated by the camerawork, which alternates a series of long and medium shots and high angles of Sarah trying to escape from spaces that seem to compress and expand to infinity, so that the environment itself alternates images of emptiness and enclosure indefinitely. Finally, Sarah manages to find a way out into the attic. There, she is attacked by an unseen presence and closes herself in a place she believes is safe. The room is unadorned and in the central
wall there is a small window (Figure 54). After slipping into it, Sarah is trapped in iron wires that fill the room and whose presence was unseen both by her and the audience. The iron wires entrapping the woman materialise the idea of claustrophobic space as they compress the figure in a tension-evoking crescendo. The more Sarah tries to break free, the more she becomes trapped in the spiral wires until she is completely sucked into the trap and becomes barely perceptible (Figure 55). By contrast, blind pianist Daniel falls prey to the surrounding emptiness before being murdered by his guide dog in an empty square in Freiburg at night. In the sequence of Marc’s and Carlo’s conversation before Helga Ullmann is murdered which takes place in the nocturnal piazza of Profondo rosso, Argento applies a rejection of spatial verisimilitude through camerawork. Specifically, the director expresses the unsettling effect of the disquieting and perturbing architecture by dilating and distorting the environment through the alternation of fixed camera and wide angles (Cfr. § 3.4.1). A similar representation of spaces through complex camerawork is traceable in Daniel’s murder set-piece. As in Sarah’s case, Daniel’s murder is anticipated by the director’s zoom into one corridor of the academy that resumes with a turn of the camera to the right where there is a way out, to indicate that it is the POV of a mysterious being leaving the place. The sequence switches to Daniel sitting in a pub featuring the Schuhplattler, a folkloristic Bavarian dance. He is accompanied to the exit of the pub and finds himself in a deserted square at night. The space itself is made of two imposing neoclassical edifices of white marble that are located on both sides of the square (Figure 56). Although the act of aggression is extremely short, it is preceded by more than forty perspectives of the place, ranging from high and low angles to a series of long and extreme long shots (Figures 57-59). This is the description of a cruel act of murder that is driven by the negativity of the place and by unseen forces. It is as if the architecture itself refuses to remain ornamental and threatens to intervene in the story by plunging downward as a weapon. The edifices, in fact, seem to come to life through camerawork. Before the attack, the camera is placed behind the columns of a building and makes a pan movement from right to left. From that perspective, the audience see Daniel in extreme long shot and
the imposing façade of the other building is opposite. The shot creates a sense of expanded emptiness, so that Daniel is resultingly defenceless against the environment. It is followed by a close-up of an eagle in stone placed on the roof of a building. The abrupt passage from the extreme long shot and the close-up provides again the idea of expansion and contraction of the space. To re-create the negative and oppressive environment, Argento animates the eagle through the use of the camera. The camera moves from the eagle’s POV and plunges toward Daniel, with the sound of beating wings accompanying the movement. To achieve such an effect, Argento’s crew attached a 300 metres cable invisibly to the ground, and pulled it very taut so it was as stiff as it could be to let the camera slide down. When the camera got close to the ground, a mechanism was triggered into action that released the cable, causing it to go up taking the camera with it (Jones 2004: 94; Maiello 2007: 116-117; Pugliese 2011: 17). Then, a long shot shows some anthropomorphic shadows on the façade of one of the buildings that run fast from left to right. The guide dog goes berserk and bites Daniel in the throat, who then dies in agony and drenched in blood. Thus, by presenting alternate images of claustrophobic and agoraphobic representation of spaces, Argento focuses the audience’s attention on a distorted and hostile perception of the environment through complex camerawork. Such a distorted and hostile perception of the environment is directly related to the characters’ mental states in a precise moment of their lives to such an extent it becomes a projection of their spatial anxieties and phobias. By doing that, Argento manages to display the omnipresence of black magic and occultism and their devastating and horrific effects on people through camerawork.

4.6. Conclusion

Suspiria constitutes a turning-point in Argento’s career both in terms of narrative and style. In Profondo rosso, Argento relied on the classic narrative Giallo formula to experiment with technical innovation and visual flamboyance, namely the remarkable combination between the acoustic and the iconic that became the trademark of the director’s mature work up to the mid-1980s. In this context, artistic imagery assumes an essential role, as it does not function in
counterpoint to the stylistic and visual excessiveness of images and sound but combines with them to become an integral element to convey Argento’s stylistic and technical achievement. In Suspiria, Argento takes his experiment with the narrative as well as with the symbolic and visual repertoire to the extremes.

Suspiria revolves around Professor Milius’s statement to Suzy Banyon that magical thinking “quoddam ubique, quoddam semper, quoddam ab obnibus creditum est”. The ubiquity of black magic and occultism throughout the film is fully conveyed in narrative and style. As far as the plot is concerned, Argento chooses the narrative trope of the fairy tale to narrate the effects of black magic on people and the dramatic and horrific consequences that derive from opposing the evil power of witches. As far as the style is concerned, this evil power is rendered through an expressionist – that is a combination of dramatic and symbolic - use of cinematography, set design, and a disquieting representation of spaces through elaborate camerawork. Suspiria’s expressionist use of colour palette, set design, and representation of spaces through camerawork manages to work on a double level. On the one hand, the saturated blue-red-yellow colour palette, the elaborate lines and shapes of the Art Deco and Art Nouveau in the architecture and in the décor of the Tanz Akademie, and the regular use of dislocated POVs without discernible holder of the gaze are aimed at symbolising the basic theme of the film - the omnipresence of witchcraft - though artificiality and complex camerawork. On the other hand, the colour palette, the diegetic references to Art Deco and Art Nouveau within the academy’s architecture and décor, as well as the disquieting representation of spaces, are granted a dramatic role because of their association with the characters’ physicality and psychology. As a result, in Suspiria artistic imagery not only combines with the stylistic and visual excessiveness of the images through symbolism, but totally replaces the characters’ presence by acquiring both a symbolic and dramatic status in itself that is able to determine the progress as well as all the nuances of the story.
Chapter 4 - Figures

Figures 1-6: The blue-red-yellow colour palette through the IB stock.

Figures 7-10: The blue-red-yellow colour palette in the set design.

Figures 11 and 12: The shadow of the vampire in Murnau’s Nosferatu (1922) and the shadow of Helena Markos through the projection of the balcony.
Figures 13-16: Nature foretelling danger in the opening sequence of *Suspiria*.

Figures 17-20: The *Tanz Akademie* from different angles and perspectives.

Figures 21-24: The esoteric triangle in the architecture and décor.
Figures 25-30: Examples of Art Nouveau in the architecture and décor.

Figures 31 and 32: Examples of association between circular lines and femininity in German Expressionist Cinema of the 1920s.

Figures 33 and 34: Organic shapes in the décor of Wiene’s Das Kabinett des Dr. Caligari (1920) and in Suspiria.
Figures 35-37: Examples of Art Deco in the architecture and décor.

Figures 38 and 39: Angular lines in the clerk’s office of Wiene’s Das Kabinett des Dr. Caligari (1920).

Figures 40-43: Diegetic references to E.C. Escher’s Relativity (1953) (40 and 41) and Sky and Water (1938) (42 and 43) in the architecture and décor.
Figures 44-47: Victims as objets d’art.

Figures 48-59: Images of enclosure and emptiness in Suspiria’s murder set-pieces.
Chapter 5

Principles of Dualism through Iconography in *Il fantasma dell’Opera* (1998)

"Io non sono un fantasma, sono un topo"

*Il fantasma dell’Opera* (1998)

"Ces abîmes me peignaient ceux où j’étais tombée"

Jacques-Antoine Révéroni Saint Cyr (1798: 197)

Analysing Argento’s adaptation of Gaston Leroux’s literary classic *Le Fantôme de l’Opéra* (1910) is challenging and problematic, especially due to the lack of significant critical literature on the film. Unlike *Profondo rosso* (1975), *Suspiria* (1977), and *La sindrome di Stendhal* (1996), which are still experiencing great critical interest both domestically and internationally, *Il fantasma dell’Opera* was a total box-office flop and the only material available on the film is a series of non-critical short articles from horror-related fanzines and websites. These articles are concerned more with listing the film’s various weaknesses regarding the sketchy characterisation of the main roles and unconvincing narrative progress rather than selecting some of the positives in the cinematography and the *mise-en-scène*. Specifically, all these articles agree in arguing that Argento’s decision to adapt such a popular novel for worldwide audiences has not contributed positively to his cinematic oeuvre for two reasons: on the one hand, Argento’s *Il fantasma dell’Opera* does not convince the aficionados of Leroux’s literary classic because of the presence of ultra-gory sequences which are absent from the original story. On the other hand, the film does not appeal to Argento enthusiasts because of a lack of the elaborate camerawork that is the director’s trademark in his cinema of the 1970s and 1980s. Mike Lorefice (2002) in an online review of the film makes a statement with which I broadly agree:

The biggest weakness of the movie [...] lies in the script. [...] It’s hard to figure out what the main characters were designed to do. They don’t serve the purpose they did in Leroux’s novel, but also don't provide chuckles or really elicit our love or contempt [...] The strength of Argento’s movie, as always, is
the look [...] The improvements in sets, staging, and costuming help balance off the areas that are obviously going to be weaker given the type of movie [...] I’d still rather watch this than most films because it offers a unique visual experience.

Thus, in trying to combine all the themes that lie at the heart of Leroux’s literary classic, Argento’s film is eventually rendered uneven and overwrought. Despite some drastic changes in the plot, Il fantasma dell’Opera’s major weakness resides in the lack of any psychological characterisation of the main roles. This element makes it difficult to understand fully the reason behind the actions and thinking of both the male hero and heroine. Nevertheless, Argento’s film is able to offer a unique visual experience in relation to my analysis of the director’s use of an art-historical repertoire within his cinema. In my opinion, at the basis of Leroux’s narrative structure and psychological characterisation of the main roles resides a double principle of dualism. On the one hand, this dualism is expressed by the physical deformity and propensity for murder of the male hero on the one side and his purity of feeling for the art of music and for the female heroine on the other side. The male hero’s physical deformity and psychological dualism are metonymically conveyed in the coexistence of a familiar space represented by the opulent environment of the Paris Opera House, which expresses his good side, and a horrific space represented by the basement of the Paris Opera House, which expresses his evil side. On the other hand, Leroux’s dualism is played out through the complex relationship between the hero as a villain and the heroine as a victim, both codified in their propensity to do evil and good. As far as Argento’s adaptation is concerned, in my opinion, the film’s greatest merit resides in the use of a specific pictorial iconography that is fully able to re-interpret and re-shape at an aesthetic level the narrative principles of dualism at the basis of Leroux’s novel. Thus, the research question I shall take into consideration is the following: How and to what extent does Argento’s use of a specific pictorial repertoire in Il fantasma dell’Opera help to re-interpret and re-shape at an aesthetic level the principles of dualism that lie at the heart of Leroux’s Le Fantôme de l’Opéra? By answering the question, I will define the principles of dualism within Leroux’s literary classic and I will demonstrate how
Argento’s adaptation manages to re-visit and re-shape them through a specific aesthetic repertoire which provides a completely original visual look to the film.

5.1. Synopsis

During a stormy night in Paris, a woman is walking down a street carrying an infant. She manages quickly to discard the bundle, setting it adrift down the river, whose strong current carries it to the basement of the Opera House. A group of sewer rats retrieve the abandoned child from the river and raise him in the underground as one of their own. The scene flashes forward to 1877 when three cellar workmen are brutally murdered in the basement of the Opera House while an evening performance is taking place on the floor above. The audience soon realise that the murderer is the grown up infant who has transformed into the Phantom, a fiery misanthrope living in the underworld of the Opera House and attacking any intruder who interferes with his solitary life and threatens his hidden lair. One day, the Phantom notices soprano Christine Daaé performing alone on the stage and singing to an imaginary audience long after the crowd has left. He immediately feels attracted to her. Christine is also drawn to the Phantom with whom she shares a telepathic link and the two begin a secret affair. The affair gives the Phantom the possibility of emerging from his underworld and consequently of jeopardising the safety of the many people working within the Opera House. Enchanted by Christine’s beauty and voice, the Phantom instigates a series of crimes aimed at enabling her to gain success with the audience. By bringing down the chandelier of the main hall during an evening performance, the Phantom eventually ensures Christine the role of protagonist in Gounod’s Roméo et Juliette. Although Christine is attracted to the Phantom’s charm, she soon feels herself torn between her dark and passionate obsession for him and her slowly blossoming affection for courtly suitor Baron Raoul De Chagny. After indulging in a sexual intercourse with the Phantom in his hidden lair, Christine is seized by guilt and manages to seek comfort in Raoul by ascending to the roof of the Opera House and confessing her sin. In the meantime, the Phantom spies on them while they are confessing their love for each other and promising mutual support. The following night, as Christine is
performing Gounod’s *Roméo et Juliette* on the stage, the Phantom kidnaps her, taking her down to his subterranean world and forcing her to stay with him. The authorities inevitably begin to show an interest in the Phantom and set out to hunt him down in the basement. Eventually tracked down, the Phantom's main preoccupation becomes Christine's safety and he becomes concerned that the police could injure her during the fight. He finally shows Raoul a way out along the subterranean canals and dies after fighting off the police while Raoul rows Christine to safety.

5.2. **Contextualising Argento’s *Il fantasma dell’Opera* from literature to adaptation**

*Il fantasma dell’Opera* was co-written with screenwriter Gérard Brach.¹ The film is loosely adapted from 1910 literary classic *Le Fantôme de l’Opéra* by French journalist and novelist Gaston Leroux.² This is Argento’s second experience working on period dramas after the non-horror political venture *Le cinque giornate* (1973) (Cfr. § 3.2), and it is the director’s second adaptation of a literary classic following the re-interpretation of Edgar Allan Poe’s short tale *The Black Cat* (1843) in the two-episode horror *Due occhi diabolici* (1990).³ Leroux’s *Le Fantôme de l’Opéra* has been repeatedly re-interpreted in cinema and theatre since Rupert Julian’s silent horror film *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925). The best known stage adaptation of the novel is Andrew Lloyd Webber’s musical, *The Phantom of the Opera*, which opened in the West End in 1986 and on Broadway in 1988. Lloyd Webber’s musical is the longest-running musical in Broadway history and the second-longest-running West End musical after Claude-Michel

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² As Tentori (1997: 157-158) has pointed out, Argento had already collaborated on the script of a cinematic adaptation of Leroux’s *The Wax Museum*, which took the title *MDC-Maschera di cera* (1997). The idea to adapt *The Wax Museum* came from Argento’s meeting with director Lucio Fulci. The two decided to work together to create a horror film, searching for inspiration among the classic literature of the genre. The collaboration could not be realized due to Fulci’s sudden death in 1997. However, Argento decided to complete the project and entrusted the shooting to Sergio Stivaletti, his long-time collaborator of make-up and visual effects since *Phenomena* (1985).

Schönberg’s *Les Misérables* (1980). The reason behind Argento’s interest in transposing Leroux’s literary classic comes from his having seen Arthur Lubin’s filmic adaptation (1943) when he was a teenager (Jones 2004: 249; Maiello 2007: 215; Thoret 2008: 16; McDonagh 2010: xviii). The first time Argento contemplated the idea of remaking Leroux’s novel was while shooting *Suspiria* in 1976, when he considered setting it during the Russian Revolution of 1917 using the Bolshoi Ballet in Moscow as the backdrop. The project was, however, scrapped due to the Russian government’s prohibition of shooting in Moscow and to the advent of a new artistic interest that culminated in 1980 with the realisation of the director’s *Inferno*. In 1996, Mediaset carried out a poll of men and women in the eighteen-to-forty age bracket. The group spent forty million liras conducting a survey asking the Italian public which stories they would like to see on the screen in the future. One subject mentioned in the survey was Leroux’s novel, as long as it was directed by Argento himself. This factor eventually convinced the director to take up the story for the second time (Lucantonio 2003a: 23; Jones 2004: 83; 249; Maiello 2007: 215; Gracey 2010: 133). As Gallant (2001f: 240) has argued:

*Here is a film that chooses to go against the contemporary grain in retelling the original tale in a radically revised form, and yet insisting on dressing it in the period garb of the novel.*

Although Argento focuses his attention on the irrational and self-destructive *amour fou* of the Phantom for Christine that is typical of Leroux’s novel, he also applies some radical changes to the plot that contribute to the shedding of new light on the motives and psychology of the main characters, while maintaining the historical period of *Belle Époque* Paris (Pallanch 2008: 318). With regard to the location, Leroux’s novel is almost entirely set in the Paris Opera House, also known as *Palais Garnier*. The building was fictionally reconstructed after consulting the plans and projects of the original architect Charles Garnier (Razzini

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4 For a detailed and updated list and critical analysis of the major screen and theatrical adaptations of Leroux’s *Le Fantôme de l’Opéra* from 1925 onward, see Hogle (2002: 135-231); and Hall (2009: 33-94).

5 Mediaset is the Silvio Berlusconi owned TV entertainment conglomerate also controlling Medusa, the company that released the film in 1998 (Jones 2004: 249).
Similarly, Argento’s film is overflowing with period details of the original story. As the Paris Opera House refused to allow Argento’s crew any access, a faithful historical reconstruction of fin-de-siècle Paris and of the Palais Garnier was rigorously rebuilt around the Budapest Opera House and the Mafilm facility on the Félix Máriássy Studio (Jones 2004: 252; Maiello 2007: 218).\(^6\)

With regard to the narrative structure, Leroux’s literary classic first appeared in the French journal *Le Gaulois* from 23 September 1909 to 8 January 1910 as a *roman feuilleton*. The fact that the novel was firstly conceived as a *roman feuilleton* is at the basis of Leroux’s hybrid combination of literary genres with the specific intent to *tenir en haleine* the reader page after page (Razzini 1996: 11). As Hogle (2002: 29) has argued, Leroux’s decision to set the entire novel around the enclosed space of the Paris Opera House, Christine Daaé’s forced incarceration in the basement at the hands of the Phantom, and the consequent descent of Christine’s courtly suitor Raoul De Chagny into the labyrinth of this horrific place to rescue her, make the basic plot of *Le Fantôme de l’Opéra* close to that of Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794). In Radcliffe’s Gothic novel, Emily St. Aubert shares a close bond with her father, whom she accompanies on a journey from their native France over the mountains. During the journey they encounter Valancourt, a handsome man to whom Emily becomes attracted. As soon as Emily’s father dies, the girl is forced to live with her aunt and is psychologically harassed by her aunt’s husband Montoni, who eventually manages to imprison her in the castle of Udolpho until the final

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\(^6\) As Jones (2004: 251-252) has pointed out, Charles Garnier was the architect of the Paris Opera House and he provided the stimulus for those close to him to design two other theatres. One is in Krakow, Poland, and the other is in Budapest, Hungary. As the Krakow Opera House is too small in relation to the Paris Opera House, Argento eventually opted for Budapest as the ideal location for the film. As far as the historical accuracy of the period is concerned, a reason for Argento’s faithful reconstruction of the theatrical milieu may also lie in his previous attempt to work in the operatic sector. In July 1985, Argento was commissioned to work on a version of Verdi’s *Rigoletto* (1851) by the Teatro Semisferio in Macerata. The project eventually did not come off due to Argento’s unconventional changes to the original story, such as the representation of the Duca di Mantova as a vampire, which were considered inappropriate by the theatre’s managerial staff (Lucantonio 2003a: 20-21; Giovannini 2008: 168; Pugliese 2011: 22). This experience was useful for Argento, however, giving him the opportunity to master the opera milieu, such as music and staging (Maiello 2007: 171-172). This missed opportunity also gave inspiration to Argento’s film *Opera* (1987), in which the director ironically identifies himself with the character of Mark, a horror filmmaker directing a controversial and gory version of Verdi’s *Macbeth* (1846) (Cooper 2005: 71; Bondanella 2009: 411; McDonagh 2010: xviii-xix; Pugliese 2011: 80).
denouement and Emily’s reunion with Valancourt. Similarly, Leroux’s Christine Daaé has a special bond with her father, a famous fiddler with whom the girl manages to travel all over Sweden playing folk and religious music. It is during these travels that they encounter Baron Raoul De Chagny. At her father’s death, Christine moves to Paris and lives with Mamma Valerius, the elderly widow of her father’s benefactor until she is eventually given a position in the chorus at the Paris Opera House and becomes the victim of the Phantom’s obsession. At first, Christine relies on the Phantom because she believes he is the “Angel of Music”, a protective creature her father promised to send before dying. The Phantom deceives Christine by claiming he has materialised in order to make her taste the supreme joy of the art of singing and to teach her some music. Christine passes from being an absolute beginner to an expert soprano who is able to arouse deep emotion in the audience. As soon as the Phantom steals her away to his secret lair and reveals his real face behind the mask he is wearing, Christine’s reaction is physical repulsion which, little by little, turns into pity for the unlucky creature. Although she loves Raoul, she remains faithful to her tormentor because of her sympathy.

As far as Leroux’s Phantom is concerned, his background is presented using a combination of detective fiction and journalistic reconstruction. As Razzini (1996: 11) has discussed, presenting the Phantom’s life in a journalistic style using different documentation harks back to Leroux’s previous experience as a freelance reporter for the Echo de Paris and Matin. Specifically, Leroux’s novel relies on the assertion that the Phantom had really existed and the proof of his existence was provided by the discovery of his corpse in the basement of the Palais Garnier. His story is mainly narrated by the written submission of the Persian, the ex-chief of police in Persia, who knows everything about the man’s past crimes. The Phantom is named Erik and he used to work as a master executioner and political assassin in Persia, where he learned the sadistic tricks of his trade. He is hideously disfigured and was abandoned by his biological mother because of this deformity. The unmasked face of Erik is that of a naked

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For a detailed analysis on the narrative structure of Ann Radcliffe’s The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794), see also Ellis (2000: 48-65).
skull. His visage is a death’s head overlaid with thin, yellow, and parchment-like skin, since Erik’s flesh never thickened as most epidermis should. Erik’s face was made more horrific by his red and recessed eyes. He was also a gifted architect leading a nomadic life until he eventually worked with the construction crew of the Opera House and secretly built a home for himself in the cellar (Hogle 2002: 8). By contrast, Argento’s Phantom is not deformed. He is an abandoned child without a name or a past and whose primordial fault lies in being disowned by his biological mother. He was raised by a group of sewer rats as one of their own in the underworld of the Palais Garnier and he communicates with them by telepathy (Pallanch 2008: 318). He developed an animal instinct because of his upbringing that led him to the defence and preservation of his natural habitat by punishing anyone who dares penetrate into his world. The only reason that eventually drives him to prove his existence and resurface to the upper world is his irrepressible love for Christine. The fact that he is physically attractive provides an innovative element in his relationship with Christine. The woman, in fact, is immediately attracted to him during their first encounter in a balcony of the Opera House and throughout the film she will call into question both her morality and social etiquette to indulge him carnally. Thus, Argento’s Christine becomes a woman worn down by guilt. On the one hand, she realises she is risking her reputation; on the other hand, she cannot prevent herself from loving the Phantom because of the unruly lifestyle he embodies.

With regard to the people working within the Paris Opera House, Leroux divides them into two main categories. The first category deals with the description of the artistic and managerial roles within the building. In depicting them, the novelist makes use of the documentary reconstruction that their profession requires and manages to add some elements of comic relief in the narrative when describing these people’s emotional and physical reaction to Erik’s threat. The second category deals with the people investigating Erik’s past and present crimes, such as the aforementioned character of the Persian and Mifroid, the commissary of police who is called in to investigate Christine’s disappearance. Argento restricts the scope of enquiry entrusted to a clumsy reporter of Le Coq Républicain who carries out personal research into the crimes
within the Opera House, and leaves out all the figures regarding the pasts of the Phantom and Christine. The remaining roles are grotesque caricatures of fin-de-siècle Paris who are intended to represent the opulent and vulgar world that has relegated the Phantom to living as an outcast. Specifically, Argento exaggerates Leroux’s comic relief with the result of transforming his secondary roles into examples of moral and physical corruption and degeneration. These people seem to play a role that is encoded by their propensity to do evil. They appear to have been written into the story to represent a variety of human vices with which the animal innocence of the Phantom may be compared and whose conduct fully justifies their violent end at his hands.

5.3. The opposition between the lower and the upper through iconography

As Prungnaud (1997: 308-310; 379-380) has discussed, the representation of spaces in Ann Radcliffe’s The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794) is based on the principle of inadequacy and violation between their function and their nature. In Radcliffe’s novel, while the surface of Montoni’s castle is designed as a common place of residence, the basement where Emily St. Aubert is eventually imprisoned becomes a site of danger and degeneration “with the living-space darkening and contracting into the dying-space of the mortuary and the tomb” (Baldick 1992: xx). Radcliffe’s representation of spaces is in metonymic relationship with Montoni’s psychology. Both the environment and the villain are subject to the same descriptive codes as the character’s appearance sometimes matches the characteristic architecture of the place, while both exhibit a sign of impending danger. While Montoni masquerades as a charming nobleman to gain Madame Cheron's hand in marriage, he immediately becomes haughty and scheming when imprisoning Emily and Madame Cheron in Udolpho in the attempt to acquire control over Madame Cheron’s fortune. In my opinion, Prungnaud’s principles of inadequacy and violation in relation to Radcliffe’s representation of spaces are also applicable to Leroux’s layered structure of the Palais Garnier. Leroux’s novel is centred on Erik’s physical deformity and propensity for murder on the one side, and the man’s love for the art of music and for Christine on the other. This dualism is metonymically represented in the
coexistence of a familiar space in the opulent environment of the *Palais Garnier* and a horrific space in the basement. A place of crime and suffering, the basement of the Paris Opera House is equal in depth and size to the upper world and in some way symbolises the guilty conscience of the dwelling itself. The entrance to the basement is activated through a mechanism that is hidden in the central mirror of Christine’s dressing room. Through the mirror people have access to a series of passages which encircle the entire *Palais Garnier* and which spiral down towards the centre of the earth. These passages were discovered by Erik at the time of his collaboration in the construction of the building. They had been dug at the time of the *Commune de Paris*’s brief occupation of the Opera House, which began shortly after mid-March and lasted until the end of May 1871. Their function was to lead the dissenters to a secret prison built in the basement (Hogle 2002: 25). From the main corridor people can descend to a depth of fifteen feet and as they spiral down the subsoil becomes narrower assuming the shape of a cone. This corridor leads to a still and leaden lake near which Erik has built his lair. This is reached by a small boat, which is used to cross the lake. The lair itself is divided into a habitable part that matches Erik’s cult of art and the so-called *chambre des supplices* that matches the man’s evil self. On the one hand, Erik’s home by the subterranean lake is specific to what has remained of his humanity and is part of the man’s attempt to recreate the decent life of which he was deprived because of his deformity (Hogle 2002: 7; 54-60). It is a cosy bedroom that is filled with the kind of petit-bourgeois furniture of suburban France during the reign of Louis Philippe (1830-1848) with a huge church organ dominating the wall. On the other hand, the *chambre des supplices* is fully structured as an ingenious trap specially built by a criminal and perverted mind and ready to shoot at anyone who approaches. It is a small hexagonal-shaped room whose walls are entirely covered by six mirrors. Through a game of reflections, such walls are designed to stun anyone who has entered and ultimately compel him or her to suicide. In Argento’s adaptation, both the Phantom’s upbringing in the basement as part of the animal world and the way the people inhabiting the upper world are physically and psychologically depicted provide a re-interpretation of Leroux’s dualism of familiar and horrific
spaces. This re-interpretation is symbolically conveyed through a specific pictorial repertoire rather than through narrative progress.

5.3.1. The double nature of the Phantom through the pictorial depiction of his lair

During the film’s credit sequence, Ennio Morricone’s melancholic soundtrack accompanies the image of a bolt of lightning that crashes to the ground in medium shot as if presaging a looming disgrace. The image of the bolt of lightning fades out and is replaced by the medium shot of a crying woman accompanied by a man, standing in the rain after placing her baby in a basket and letting the bundle be driven by the current of a river. The camera focuses on the basket containing the abandoned child that is violently dragged to the brink of a waterfall and whose journey is followed from different camera distances and perspectives. The cargo is fortuitously caught on a rock and a group of sewer rats rescue the baby by dragging the basket to dry land. The audience witness the infant reaching toward the whiskers of a red-eyed rat in extreme close-up while giggling. The rescue is followed by the red-typed writing “così per circostanze fortuite un’alleanza è appena nata tra il bambino abbandonato e gli abitanti delle tenebre” (Figures 1-8). This alliance between the abandoned child and the sewer rats is eventually explained to Christine by the adult Phantom after making love for the first time:

Dalla mia nascita fui abbandonato sul fiume del tempo e dello spazio. Ma fui nutrito e cresciuto da creature, che sono diventate i miei amici, i miei fratelli, questa è la ragione della mia doppia natura e perché ritengo questo mondo sotterraneo la mia casa.

8 While in the Animal Trilogy composer Ennio Morricone opted for a mixture of orchestral tunes and jazz (L’uccello dalle piume di cristallo) with echoes of beat, rhythm and blues (Quattro mosche di velluto grigio) and in La sindrome di Stendhal (1996) he experimented with a palindrome known as passacaglia (Cfr. § 2.4; 3.2), in Il fantasma dell’Opera he opted for a melancholic pattern that is less innovative in relation to the aforementioned soundtracks, but that is in accordance with the classic story of the Phantom and Christine. For more information, see Maiello (2003: 168); and Lucantonio (2008: 215-223).

9 [Through fortuitous circumstances, an alliance is born between the abandoned baby and the creatures of darkness].

10 [From my birth I was left on the river of time and space. But I was nurtured and raised by creatures who have become my friends, my brothers, this is the reason for my double nature and for considering this underworld my home].
The aforementioned double nature in the Phantom resides in the conflicting rage between the man’s “bestial hell-raising subterranean creature side and his ennobled and lofty operatically conditioned humanity” (Jones 2004: 251). As Jones (2004: 251) has pointed out, in the first script of Argento’s *Il fantasma dell’Opera* the Phantom was conceived as a rat-like mutant wearing a scarf around the lower part of his face to disguise his rodent teeth. In the final draft, however, the character’s animal side has been interiorised and projected through his telepathic skills. In this respect, one can draw a parallel between the Phantom’s relation to the animal world and Jennifer Corvino’s story in Argento’s *Phenomena* (1985). Forced to study in a Swiss boarding school, Jennifer is soon punished for her disinclination to comply with the school’s strict rules. In addition, she has a telepathic power that enables her to communicate with various insect species. They interact with her when she is nervous, they become excited by contact with her, they become calm when she is serene, and they rescue her in the final sequence of the film in which a swarm of flies rushes against the deformed serial killer or against the school’s central window when her classmates make fun of her.11 Similarly, after making love to Christine the Phantom re-establishes contact with his animal side by kissing and stroking his animal family and by removing his shirt so that the little vermin can scurry around his bare chest and naked body.

Apart from the information provided by the plot, this coexistence of the animal and the human within the Phantom is also symbolically achieved through the nature of the basement to imply that the Phantom does not feel himself to belong to the human race, but rather he defines himself as part of the animal world. In Argento’s adaptation, Leroux’s layered underworld is transformed into a pristine and wild space that does not show any human intervention and that has remained intact for centuries.12 It is a peaceful natural site that is made of rocky passages with stalagmites and stalactites throughout and sandy shores


12 The basement of the Paris Opera House in Argento’s adaptation was rebuilt in the pristine grottos of Pertosa, near Salerno (Maiello 2007: 218).
with a leaden lake in the middle that, as Argento has stated, is a close reminder of Arnold Böcklin’s painting *Die Toteninsel* (Joisten 2007: 118; Giusti 2010: 496). Böcklin’s *Die Toteninsel* is made of five different *tableaux* of the same theme, all painted between 1880 and 1886. All five depict a desolate and rocky island seen across an expanse of dark water. An oarsman dressed in black manoeuvres the boat from the stern. Facing the island is a standing female figure clad entirely in white and in front of her lies a coffin (Burroughs 1926: 146-148) (*Figure 9*). The direct inspiration of Böcklin’s painting in Argento’s film is perceivable through *plan-tableau* when Christine, standing and dressed in white, is guided by the Phantom’s telepathic skills and eventually takes the boat to reach his hideout, filmed in extreme long shot (*Figure 10*). According to Schmidt (2001: 262-264), Böcklin’s painting evokes the theme of voluntary isolation from human society that was typical of the artistic *milieu* in late 19th century Europe. Specifically, many *artistes* and *hommes de génie* in the historical period of the Second Industrial Revolution in Europe (1870-1914) did not feel at ease in a society that only aspired to economic power and profit through industrial and technological innovation. Thus, Böcklin’s deserted and rocky island is to be symbolically associated with the artist’s extreme condition of psychological loneliness and voluntary retreat from a world he does not feel compatible with his own art. Schmidt’s interpretation of Böcklin’s painting can be applied to Argento’s depiction of the Phantom as both an animal and a human. Specifically, the Phantom’s attitude in Argento’s film is that of an artist whose sensibility resides in his animal purity and in his deep love towards Christine and music, and who has eventually chosen to stay away from a society he perceives as foreign and hostile. However, the redolent atmosphere and visual opulence of the Phantom’s subterranean home near the lake manages to throw into relief another aspect of the Phantom’s double nature as well as of his association to the *hommes de génie* in *fin-de-siècle* Paris. In Argento’s film, the Phantom’s home is a four-tier construction that is divided into two main sides, which are the elegant Louis Philippe bedroom and the room for playing the organ in the way of Leroux’s novel. Both sides are connected by a rickety wooden walkway and both the colour and the form of the central wall are like in a cave as if the home was built.
inside a grotto. This opulence in the décor manages to show that although Argento’s Phantom is well aware of the hypocrisies in class-climbing and class-descent, he does not completely succeed in moving away from his human side. In doing so, the Phantom echoes the contradictory attitude towards society of mid-19th century homme de génie Charles Baudelaire. In the poem *L’Héautontimorouménos* from the collection *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857), Baudelaire (1936: 30-31) writes:

> Je suis la plaie et le couteau! [...]/ Et la victime et le bourreau! [...]/ Un de ces grandes abandonnés/ Au rire éternel condamnés/ Et qui ne peuvent plus sourire!

In the extract, Baudelaire opposes his confessed attraction towards urban middle-class pleasures to his caustic attack on their hypocrisies and manages to admit that by verbally killing other people he somehow injures himself. Despite being a poetic “assassin”, Baudelaire was also famous for his flâneur attitude of drug-taking and wandering in mid-19th century cosmopolitan Paris. Although Argento’s Phantom does not wander in fin-de-siècle Paris and has retreated from society to live in his voluntary prison, his paradoxical interplay of intoxication with and withdrawal from society is fully conveyed in the double nature of his underworld made of a habitable bourgeois space, his human side, in the middle of a pristine site, his animal side. Moreover, although the Phantom symbolically identifies with the idea of the “assassin” of society in the way he injures and tortures the people penetrating his underworld, he also identifies with the idea of the flâneur, leading towards the pleasures that society is able to impart. This is represented in the way he becomes attracted to Christine so far as to be eventually killed for her.

5.3.2. *The grotesque and the sublime through the pictorial depiction of the upper world*

Following the sequence in which the Phantom is rescued by the sewer rats, the camera makes an upward tilt movement leaping out of the underworld.
of the past, breaking through the layers of architecture and simultaneously slicing through decades until 1877, finally to emerge above ground outside and to show the magnificent façade of the *Palais Garnier* in medium long shot surrounded by the opulent *milieu* that constitutes an evening opera performance. The sequence continues by focusing on the richly-decorated painted ceiling of the Opera House in medium close-up and the camera makes a tilt movement from top to bottom that culminates in the long shot of the balconies and the orchestra playing below. The camera then focuses on close-ups of some of the people attending the performance through crosscutting and floating around the whole imposing architecture. As Gracey (2010: 136) has argued, the Opera House in *Belle Époque* Paris was an institution corrupted by class snobbery, which people attended simply to show off their social status. As a result, very little attention was paid to the actual performances on stage. This element is evident in Argento’s meticulously planned and researched historical reconstruction. In the sequence mentioned above, the auditorium is blissfully unaware of what is happening on stage and the audience seem to be more interested in drinking, eating, flirting, and socialising in the balconies (Figures 11-16).

The audience’s attitude in the sequence is not only important for historical accuracy and reconstruction. It also anticipates Argento’s portrayal of the people inhabiting and working within the *Palais Garnier*, whose moral and physical abjection symbolically clashes with the architectural magnificence of the place. As Rauger (2003: 102) has stated concerning the symbolic contrast within the film, “l’opera […] è il *topos* ideale di un cinema fondato sull’impurità, sulla mescolanza di nobile e ignobile, di sublime e di triviale”.14 Rauger’s mixture of sublime and trivial derives from the fact that, while the architecture and the décor of the building are meant to exalt the cult of beauty in art and the nobility of the artistic creation which the place embodies, the crudeness and the lack of morality of the people working in it function as an implicit complaint against a society whose corruption and cowardice made possible the relegation of an innocent creature like the Phantom to the status of an outcast. In my opinion,

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14 [The Opera House [...] becomes the ideal setting for a mixture of noble and ignoble, of sublime and trivial].
such implicit complaint is eventually rendered through pictorial symbolism rather than through narrative progress. In this respect, the technique of caricature, which Argento employs, portrays the moral and physical abjection of the people inhabiting and working within the Paris Opera House in a way that is very close to the effect achieved by the grotesque in pictorial iconography. As Connelly (2003: 5) has discussed, the term “grotesque” in artwork is problematic as it identifies a class of imagery that does not fit comfortably within the boundaries typically set by traditional iconography. From the mid-16th century the term “grotesque” has been at the heart of art-historical debates to describe a series of artistic experiences that are distanced from the classical canon of reality. In this respect, over the last two centuries the term “grotesque” has come to mean something horribly exaggerated that challenges the established classical canon of fixity, order, and stability of proportion and shape and which manages to construct a new canon through the formless, the misshapen, and the ugly (Chaouli 2003: 47; Connelly 2003: 5). In Argento’s film, the grotesque depiction of the people inhabiting and working within the Paris Opera House is rendered through visual exaggeration and hyperbole to create a comic effect for the audience. The idea is expressed as soon as Argento focuses on Ignace, who is the person responsible for sanitation. The character has a filthy appearance and behaviour exemplified by a scene in which, after dealing with the corpse of a rat, he tastes some of the cheese that is used for the trap he is preparing. Both the caricatural physicality of the man and the way this gesture is enacted are exaggerated in a way to generate a sudden comic effect and mocking through disgust and repulsion (Figure 17). In light of this statement, it becomes significant to apply Bakhtin’s category of “carnivalesque types” and “grotesque bodies” to Argento’s secondary roles. In his study on 15th century French writer François Rabelais, Bakhtin (1968: 321; 325) identified under the term “carnivalesque” a brief period of revelry known as the Feast of Fools. This was a mediaeval festival originally of the sub-deacons of the Cathedral. During this period, sacred ceremonies were burlesqued and social hierarchies of everyday life were mocked

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15 For an extensive literature on the different uses of the term “grotesque” in art-historical debates from the mid-16th century onwards, see the footnote 1 in Connelly (2003: 16).
and profaned by the medium of comic degradation and of the lowering to the material level of all that was noble by tradition. Through the Feast of Fools and the carnivalesque types the world was symbolically turned upside-down, as ideas and truths were endlessly tested and contested and all demanded equal dialogic status through their mingling of high culture with the profane (Hyman and Malbert 2000: 14; 16; Connelly 2003: 8). This carnivalesque lowering and overturning generated a new range of imagery and masks that were inherited from folk culture and which culminated in the depiction of the grotesque bodies. In Rabelais' period it was accepted practice to ridicule the clergy and the king. Their bodies were never represented in their entirety but rather in a detailed description of bodily convexities and orifices as metonymies of bodily functions, such as defecation, drinking, eating, and sexual life. This was not just to mock, rather it was to unleash what Bakhtin saw as the people’s power and to regenerate and renew the entire social system for a whole day. The exaggeration of the mouth by a comic mask, for example, was the fundamental grotesque way of rendering people’s gluttony or sexual appetites. Argento’s caricatural depiction of his secondary roles is very close to the one shown through Bakhtin during the Feast of Fools. In this respect, Argento’s types become cinematic examples of what Bakhtin identified as “carnivalesque types” and “grotesque bodies”, as their most despicable sides and vices are visually deployed through hyperbole and metonymy to create a comic effect. Apart from mocking, Argento’s carnivalesque types and grotesque bodies also work as an implicit criticism through comic degradation. In the sequence in which there is a replacement of the managerial staff within the Opera House, the outgoing director accuses the incoming one of using political corruption for his personal purposes and of being a thief. While doing so, the accuser is seized by an attack of malaria that is meticulously described by a camera close-up of the copious streams of saliva coming out of his mouth under the eyes of the new director who does not show any sympathy (Figure 18). The mouth itself becomes the filthy hole through which an infection can spread and be displayed, and it

16 For more information on the “carnivalesque types” and “grotesque bodies”, their function and symbolism, see also Bakhtin (1984).
metonymically represents the inner corruption and rottenness of the people in power. Likewise, if one takes into consideration the character of the obese *prima-donna* Carlotta Altieri, throughout the film she is metaphorically described by the people of the Opera House as an abject and disgusting animal because of her obesity and spoiled attitude. A typical example of Carlotta’s irrepressible physicality and spoiled attitude is provided by the sequence in which the woman is singing an aria from Bizet’s *Carmen* (1875) during a rehearsal for an evening performance. The close-up of Carlotta’s heavy makeup and vulgar taste in dress makes her into a caricature. The caricatural effect is metonymically highlighted by the woman’s foul language. When Carlotta entangles her mantle in a sculpture on the stage, she manages to tear it apart arguing that: "Questa maison è un vero bordello, è scandaloso, vaffanculo". The fact that Argento focuses on the degrading side of Carlotta’s physicality and rudeness encourages the audience to reflect on the lack of artistic sensibility of the people inhabiting and working within the Paris Opera House. The *Palais Garnier* is a place dedicated to the art of music and singing, but the people practising it do not embody such art. Particularly, these people enact an artistic profession without understanding the nobility behind it. Consequently, the identification of art through these people’s attitude and behaviour becomes overtly grotesque. Carlotta’s mouth, for example, is depicted as a filthy orifice whose only function is to produce disgust through comic relief and hyperbole and not the instrument with which she can move the audiences of the *Palais Garnier*. In the sequence in which Carlotta is examined by a doctor, for example, her open mouth is shown by the extreme close-up of her pulsating sore throat (Figure 19). As soon as Carlotta realises that Christine might replace her in an evening performance due to her poor condition, Argento emphasises her tantrum by zooming in from the medium shot to the close-up of her screaming mouth that becomes gigantic (Figures 20 and 21). Similarly, Carlotta’s open mouth is metonymically associated with a series of grotesque noises, for example when she gargles or when, by her powerful breath as she angrily screams, she is able to put out the candles (Figure

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17 [This house is a real brothel, it is scandalous, screw it].
By contrast, the sincerest feeling towards the sublime art of music is provided by Christine and the Phantom. During a sequence depicting a rehearsal for an evening performance, Christine’s reaction, while singing Gounod’s *Plaisir d’amour* from *Faust* (1859), is to faint in front of the composer. Christine immediately clarifies to herself that she had fainted both because of the emotion of singing in front of such a great composer and because of the Phantom’s deep affection that had overcome her mental and physical stability. Such a coexistence of people searching for emotional and spiritual aspiration through the sublime power of the artistic creation and people symbolising physical limitation as represented by their grotesque bodies and vices also lies at the heart of Argento’s depiction of the *Palais Garnier*. In this respect, it would be interesting to focus on Hugo’s romantic ideal of a necessary coexistence of the grotesque and the sublime to create art and apply it to Argento’s types. In *La Prélude de Cromwell* (1827), Hugo (Howarth 1975: 129-130) provided a theoretical insight of a new romantic aesthetic that clashes with the archaic idea of theatre by representing the complexity of life from a different perspective:

La muse moderne [...] sentira que tout dans la création n’est pas humainement beau, que le laid y existe à côté du beau, le difforme près du gracieux, le grotesque au revers du sublime, le mal avec le bien, l’ombre avec la lumière [...] Elle se mettra à faire comme la nature, à mélanger dans ses créations, sans pourtant les confondre, l’ombre à la lumière, le grotesque au sublime, en d’autres termes, le corps à l’âme, la bête à l’esprit [...] La poésie de notre temps est donc le drame; le caractère du drame est donc le réel; le réel résulte de la combinaison toute naturelle de deux types, le sublime et le grotesque, qui se croisent dans le drame, comme ils se croisent dans la vie et dans la création. C’est de la féconde union du type grotesque au type sublime que naît le génie moderne.18

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18 [The modern genius [...] will feel that everything in creation is not humanly beautiful, as the ugly is near the beautiful, deformity is near the graceful, the grotesque is near the sublime, evil is near good, darkness is near the light [...] It will start doing as nature does, to mingle them in her creations, but without confusing them, shadow to light, the grotesque to the sublime, in other words, the body to the soul, the beast to the spirit [...] The poetry of our time is the drama, the characteristic of the drama is the real, the real results from the natural combination of two types, the sublime and the grotesque, which meet in drama, even as they do in life and in creation. It is from the fruitful union of the grotesque and sublime that modern genius is born].
When Hugo uses the term “sublime” and the term “grotesque” he is considering them to be opposite, but opposites that must be brought together in theatre in order to create true art. Specifically, Hugo analyses the grotesque as both contrary and complementary to the sublime in artistic creation. The combination of the two categories gives birth to the modern genius (Chao 2006; Stone 2007: 6). Similarly, by combining pictorial symbolism with a grotesque portrayal of society, Argento’s creative impulse in the film is based on this harmonia contraria. This coexistence of grotesque and sublime within the film is particularly perceivable in three sequences. When Jérôme and Raoul De Chagny visit the bathhouse, the place is metonymically represented as an orgy of bodily orifices, all intent on the pursuit of the sexual act as commerce. The Caligula-esque bathhouse displays a hotbed of moral and sexual depravity in a succession of heterosexual and homosexual loves, odalisques and prostitutes, whose physicality is expressed through groaning bodies and genitalia on display in a mixture of sperme et sueur. These people’s physicality and sexual appetites clash with the architectural refinement of the place itself, as if it was inspired by Jean-Léon Gérôme’s oriental tableaux, and with the two dressed young men near the swimming pool who are praising Baudelaire and Rimbaud and celebrating the redemption of poetry (Figures 23-28). However, both the orgy of naked flesh on display and the violent outburst related to a debate about poetry are in someway linked to each other. There cannot be any redemption through poetry without an original sin through the body, as Baudelaire’s double attitude of “assassin” and flâneur within his contemporary society fully testifies (Cfr. § 5.3.1).

Similarly, in the already mentioned sequence of Carlotta’s rehearsal, the woman’s grotesque attitude and physicality are symbolically opposed to what is simultaneously happening in the background. Degas is shown painting a group of ballerinas with their teacher, which is filmed in long shot to represent the plan-tableau of La classe de danse (1873-1876) (Figures 29 and 30). Degas is observed by the paedophile Opera manager Monsieur Pourdieu, who is waiting for the ballerinas with a handful of fine Swiss chocolates in the hope of seducing one of

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19 For more information on Hugo’s ideal of a necessary coexistence of the grotesque and the sublime at the basis of modern genius, see also Grossman (1994); and Porter (1999).
them. This opposition between the abjection of bodily appetites as embodied by Monsieur Pourdieu and the nobility of the artistic creation as embodied by Degas is repeated during the sequence at the Café de l’Opéra. While Baron Raoul De Chagny is waiting for Christine at the table, he notices Degas painting a sleeping man shown in medium close-up and mimicking the 1877 sketch known as La Fille Elisa. The contrast between the nobility of art and the crudeness of those working in the building is underlined by the waiter’s statement: “A lui (Degas) piace ritrarre le allieve della scuola di danza, altri (Pourdieu) preferiscono dare loro dei dolcetti”. As a result, Rauger’s definition of the operatic milieu as the ideal setting for a mixture of noble and ignoble, trivial and sublime is fully expressed in the aforementioned sequences. In the film, Argento manages to display a coexistence of sin through the body and redemption through artwork. Like Baudelaire in poetry and Degas in painting, Argento crystallizes the ignoble and the trivial and raises them to a pure art form within these sequences. At the same time, Argento provides an upside-down vision of good taste and morality through “carnivalesque types” and grotesque iconography and in that resides one of the greatest aesthetic achievements of Il fantasma dell’Opera.

5.4. “Female otherness” through iconography

As Hume (1969: 283; 287-288) has discussed, the basic narrative structure of Ann Radcliffe’s The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794) revolves around the physical and psychological vicissitudes that the male villain Montoni imposes on the naïve heroine Emily St. Aubert. This implies a male-centered kind of narrative, as the focus of all action is not to be found in a persecuted heroine trapped in a decaying mansion but rather in a psychologically complex villain hero. Similarly, in Leroux’s novel Christine is described as a woman constantly dominated by Erik’s persuasive power. Firstly, she completely relies on the man’s voice because she associates it to that of the “Angel of Music”, a protective figure of her childhood. Secondly, as soon as Erik’s identity is revealed Christine’s sympathy for the unlucky creature does not allow her to rebel against him. As a result, Christine’s naivety is crucial to her involvement with Erik and Leroux does not

20 [Some are delighted to paint the little ballerinas, others prefer to give them chocolates].
question the woman’s good faith and virtue for a moment. By contrast, Argento’s Christine is injected with a sense of ambiguity that is perceivable from the woman’s first appearance on the screen. In this sequence, the audience witness Christine singing in front of an empty theatre. Both her long white dress and mantle and her sweet voice symbolically associate her with an angel (Figures 31 and 32). As soon as Christine finishes her rehearsal and reaches the corridor leading to her dressing room, the Phantom is waiting in a corner. This first encounter is symbolically played on colour opposition. While Christine has black hair and is dressed in white, the Phantom is blond and is dressed in black. What is more significant is that from that encounter Christine undergoes a physical and psychological transformation that resides in her consciousness of sin, as if she has mirrored her evil self through the Phantom. This consciousness of sin reaches its climax when Christine eventually manages to descend into the basement of the Opera House guided by the Phantom’s telepathic skills. While in Leroux’s novel, the woman’s descent into the basement takes place because she is kidnapped by Erik and, therefore, there is no choice on her part, Argento’s Christine chooses to meander as if driven by her evil self through the Phantom.

In light of this statement, it would be interesting to apply Bronfen’s definition of “female otherness” in western art-historical iconography and literary culture to Argento’s Christine. According to Bronfen (1992: 181):

> While western cultural discourses construct the self as masculine, they ascribe to femininity a position of otherness. As other, woman serves to define the self, and the lack or excess that is located in the other functions as an exteriorisation of the self [...] Woman comes to represent the margins or extremes of the norm, the extremely good, pure and helpless, or the extremely dangerous, chaotic and seductive. The saint or the prostitute; the Virgin Mary or Eve. As the outsider per se, woman can also come to stand for a complete negation of the ruling norm, for the element which disrupts the bonds of normal conventions and the passage through which that threat to the norm is articulated.

In Argento’s film, the two opposite poles of the masculine self, as physically represented by the Phantom and by courtly suitor Baron Raoul De Chagny, are combined and exteriorised in Christine’s feminine “otherness”. As an
outsider “per se”, Christine is psychologically depicted as a woman who is constantly worn out by what she would like to be and by what society requires her to be. In this respect, one could analyse Christine’s struggle between the Phantom and Raoul through a double perspective. On the one hand, the Phantom constitutes a lifestyle that fascinates her because of his evil self. On the other hand, he manages to destroy the normative order she is part of as physically represented by Raoul’s good self. In my opinion, the exteriorisation of the Phantom’s evil self and Raoul’s good self into Christine’s otherness are aesthetically achieved through a specific pictorial repertoire that visually manages to work as a metaphor of Christine’s struggle and transformation. Il fantasma dell’Opera is not the first of Argento’s films to define a psychological transformation through pictorial iconography. In La sindrome di Stendhal (1996), Anna Manni’s circular progression from victim of sexual abuse, to executioner of her torturer, to victim of her own murderous impulses, is aesthetically achieved through a specific pictorial symbolism. This pictorial symbolism ranges from Mantegna’s Il Cristo morto that visually identifies Anna with the victim (Cfr. § 2.5), to Caravaggio’s Medusa that symbolises Anna as a murderer (Cfr. § 2.4.3), to Caravaggio’s Deposizione that expresses Anna’s final psychological collapse due to her psychosis (Cfr. § 2.5). Similarly, Christine’s psychological progression from naivety to temptation, from temptation to completion of sin, from completion of sin to final repentance, is accompanied by a specific pictorial symbolism. After making love to the Phantom in his hidden lair, Christine is given a silver ring with the effigy of Medusa as the symbol of their commitment and mutual trust. The Phantom’s gesture becomes significant in relation to my previous interpretation of Caravaggio’s Medusa as symbol of the femme castratrice in La sindrome di Stendhal (Cfr. § 2.4.3). Although Argento’s Christine does not completely reflect the image of femme castratrice through the Medusa’s symbolism as expressed by Anna Manni in La sindrome di Stendhal, the Phantom’s gift becomes the symbol of Christine’s consciousness of evil. Specifically, the ring with the effigy of Medusa becomes a reminder that Christine has just committed a sin and is no longer pure. She has eventually surrendered to the Phantom’s evil self to the detriment of her previous affection for Baron Raoul De Chagny. From that
sequence, Christine begins to incorporate the principle of “otherness” as theorised by Bronfen through pictorial symbolism. The two opposite poles of the masculine self as physically represented by both the Phantom and Raoul are fully exteriorised in Christine’s pictorial depiction as both a prostitute and a virgin. As soon as the previously virginal and white-clad Christine carnally gives herself to the Phantom, her naked body manages to mimic the posture of the prostitute depicted in Jean François Millet’s *Reclining Nude* (1844-1845) (Figures 37 and 39). Christine’s symbolic transformation into a prostitute continues in the sequence in which the Phantom is on the roof of the Paris Opera House and imagines her, semi-naked and projected through the sky in medium long shot, staring at him in a lascivious position (Figures 33 and 34). Similarly, as soon as Raoul approaches a prostitute in the bathhouse sequence, he imagines this person is Christine, inviting him to sexual intercourse (Figures 35 and 36). Christine’s depiction as both a virgin and a whore reaches its climax in the sequence in which the young soprano is waiting for the Phantom’s return to his secret lair after he has brought down the chandelier of the main hall during an evening performance in order to ensure Christine gets the leading role in Gounod’s *Roméo et Juliette* (1867). In the sequence, Argento manages to depict the plan-tableau of Georges De La Tour’s *La Madeleine aux deux flammes* (Figures 38 and 40). As Argento (Jones 2004: 253) has stated:

> I went to see an exhibition of the painter Georges De La Tour. For ages, this 17th century painter has been underrated in his homeland but now France has gone delirious over his work that uses light, shade and reflection in the most intoxicating fashion. He evoked an extraordinary atmosphere using the natural light of candles, fires, lanterns and torches emanating in the darkness and it was precisely the look I wanted for *The Phantom of the Opera*.

Argento’s plan-tableau retrieves De La Tour’s detail of the candlelight reflected on the mirror. While Christine is facing the mirror from right to left in medium shot, De La Tour’s painting displays Mary Magdalene’s entire body facing the candle light from left to right. Despite these changes, the iconographic association between Christine and the biblical figure of Mary Magdalene in De La
Tour’s painting becomes very significant in relation to my analysis. Mary Magdalene is a prostitute who repents after her encounter with Christ. According to Bloch et al (1972: 177) and Rosenberg (1998: 82), De La Tour’s Mary Magdalene is portrayed while she is meditating on the vanity of the world and at the beginning of her repentance. This interpretation is reinforced by the presence of the heavy gold frame, the richly-embroidered skirt and especially by the jewels on the table and scattered on the floor. These are all objects identifying Mary Magdalene’s continuing - yet feeble - attachment to material pleasures. Similarly, Argento’s depiction of Christine through plan-tableau is portrayed at the beginning of her repentance. Although still attracted to the Phantom, Christine effectively feels like a prostitute whose only desire is to wash away her sin. According to Bloch et al (1972: 13-14; 16), in De La Tour’s painting the dualism between materiality and spirituality is also played on the choc des contraires. This choc des contraires is symbolically and visually conveyed through the technique of chiaroscuro in lighting. Similarly, in Argento’s sequence the co-existence of cast shadow and shading emphasises Christine’s psychological dualism. In my opinion, the co-existence of cast shadow and shading in the sequence becomes the metaphor to express Christine’s feeling of attraction for the Phantom on the one hand, and her attempt to reconnect with her lost purity on the other hand. After that sequence, in fact, Christine convinces herself that she has gone too far and manages to seek help from Raoul. The two meet on the roof of the Palais Garnier. The fact that Christine is willing to be taken to the roof by Raoul is highly significant in relation to the woman’s previous descent to the basement to meet the Phantom. While the basement is the realm of the Phantom and it is the metaphor of the woman’s guilty conscience, the desire to reach the opposite side of the building is to be associated to the woman’s reunion with her good conscience as embodied by Raoul’s presence. This statement is underlined by Christine’s confession to Raoul:

Christine: “Tu sei la mia luce, ma c’è tanta oscurità dentro di me, c’è il buio.” Raoul: “Tutti abbiamo dei lati oscuri dentro di noi, fa parte della natura umana. Christine, dov’è lui, è reale o esiste solo nel lato oscuro
Christine’s desire to reconnect with her good self as represented by Raoul is also played on a colour association that is opposed to the one used during the woman’s previous encounter with the Phantom in the basement. While the metaphor of the basement as obscurity clashes with Christine’s white dress and unawareness of sin, after she sins the counter metaphor of the roof as light clashes with Christine’s black dress and veil as if the woman is exteriorising her guilty conscience. Despite the attempt to reconnect with her good self, Argento’s Christine still proves to be unsure about who she really desires. As soon as Christine is eventually kidnapped by the Phantom after confessing her love for Raoul during their encounter on the roof, she realises that her passion for the Phantom is deeply rooted in herself. After the kidnapping, however, the Phantom realises that the police are chasing them and there is no possibility of escape. He manages to seek help from Raoul to carry Christine to safety. This final sequence concludes with a close-up of Christine’s face bathed in tears while watching from the boat as the Phantom is killed by the police. Significantly, as soon as the Phantom is stabbed to death by the policemen, Christine’s ring with the effigy of Medusa falls into the water and disappears in the obscurity of the lake floor. Simultaneously, a beam of light coming from the outside becomes stronger and stronger as the boat approaches the exit. Both details symbolically imply the fact that killing the Phantom is like killing Christine’s evil self. In this respect, the threat of “female otherness” theorised by Bronfen and represented by Christine’s dualism and struggle is momentarily suppressed by the Phantom’s sacrifice.

5.5. “Retribution” and “Retaliation” through iconography in the act of murder

In the sequence of the Phantom’s nightmarish hallucination on the roof of the Palais Garnier, Argento makes use of computer-generated imagery (CGI) to

[Christine: “You are my light, but there is so much darkness inside me”. Raoul: “We all have a dark side within us, it is part of the human nature. Christine, where is he? Is he real or does he only exist in the dark side of your mind?” Christine: “Both. His will is my will. His thoughts are my actions”].
depict an orgy of rodent-headed people projected onto the sky, squirming in death and writhing in agony in a man-sized giant rat trap that approaches the screen from long shot to close-up to extreme close-up and eventually catches fire (Figures 42 and 43). The Phantom’s hallucination is anachronistic and patchy, as the use of CGI and the ultra-modern effect the sequence is able to impart seem to contradict the elegant period in which the narrative of the film is set. However, the whole composition becomes significant if read in relation to the pictorial iconography behind Argento’s representation of the sequence. The way the entire sequence is conceived, as well as the iconography of deformed and naked bodies and evil machines of torture displayed, seem to be inspired by Bosch’s images of crime and punishment in the Garden of Earthly Delights (1503-1504) (Figure 41). As Gibson (1973: 12) and Marijnissen and Ruyffelaere (1987: 465) have argued, Bosch’s deformed and macabre creatures in his tableaux are a direct consequence of late-medieval iconography and pictorial symbolism to depict evil and sin through grotesque images in order to teach certain moral and spiritual truths. Specifically, the assembled “otherness” of medieval society, from criminality to heresies, is gathered in some grotesque cabinet of cruelty in order to be damned, tortured, and vilified (Koerner 1998: 263). Similarly, Argento’s depiction of a giant rat trap in the Phantom’s hallucination may be interpreted as the metaphor of the controlling and repressive society inhabiting the Paris Opera House who is willing to condemn and imprison anyone displaying echoes of diversity and individuality as incorporated by the Phantom himself. This willingness is metaphorically expressed through grotesque images of death and torture. If the Phantom symbolises the desire not to conform to a label imposed by a repressive society, Ignace, who is the person in charge for sanitation, symbolises the castration of such desire. The character of the rat-catcher is the director’s invention. Leroux only introduces him once when the Persian and Raoul penetrate into the basement of the Palais Garnier to rescue Christine. In the literary classic, the rat-catcher is described as a beam of light because of the torch he carries with him and for that reason he had previously described

22 For a critical interpretation and reading of Bosch’s iconography from the 16th century onwards, see also Marijnissen and Ruyffelaere (1987: 23-43).
frightened many people because they thought him to be the Phantom himself. In Argento’s adaptation, the rat-catcher becomes the person responsible for invading the Phantom’s pristine world through the medium of a futuristic rat-mobile as designed in Georges Méliès’s Le Voyage dans la lune (1902) (Jones 2004: 256; Thoret 2008: 13) (Figures 44 and 45). As Argento (Giusti 2010: 496) has stated about the futuristic invention:

The device itself is conceived as a giant copper machine that slices the rats’ heads off with a revolving blade fixed to the undercarriage. Ignace’s dwarf companion then cuts the vermin’s tails off and stores them in dated boxes of formaldehyde back at their headquarters. This introduction of a futuristic machine within a classic story is also linked to Bosch’s pictorial depiction of bizarre devices and ingenuity of tortures in his Garden of Earthly Delights. Specifically, Ignace is identified with a creative torturer in the same way as the demonic figures in Bosch’s triptych. As the Phantom considers himself as part of the animal world, the act of killing the vermin by Ignace and his companion becomes an act against the Phantom’s family. The only defence available to the Phantom is by responding to violence with violence through the act of murder.

The murders of Gustave, Marcel, and the third cellar workman who are attempting to investigate a large cistern in the basement of the Opera House at the beginning of the film, are mainly linked to the Phantom’s will to protect his environment according to his animal instinct. As Gustave is lowered down to inspect the masonry, he is immediately hacked apart from the waist up by the Phantom (Figures 52 and 53). His colleagues try to rescue him but they are

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23 [There was a desire to pay homage to both the adventurous tales of Jules Verne and the silent cinema of the Méliès Brothers with their bizarre and strange machines. Sergio Stivaletti and I have striven to offer something that could quote them directly. This machine is a composite of modern and antique at the same time: it is evocative of a futuristic time in a classical story].
trapped and captured as well. We leave the scene only hearing their cries and the terrible hacking sound of their slaughter. Thus, the fault of these men is to have unwittingly meandered into the Phantom’s territory. The martyrdom of the flesh is also traceable in the sequence during which the Phantom decides to punish the managerial staff for not allowing Christine to sing in the evening performance of Gounod’s *Roméo et Juliette* by bringing down the chandelier of the main hall. The camera makes a fast tilt movement from top to bottom that accompanies the chandelier’s fall, first in close-up and then in long shot. A series of crosscutting show some of the victims’ injured flesh in extreme close-up. As soon as the chandelier reaches the ground, these injured bodies are metonymically depicted through a series of gouged eyeballs and exploding heads (Figures 46-51). However, considering the logic of execution of the other murder set-pieces in the film, one could venture a different interpretation that is strictly related to Bosch’s iconography of punishment and torture. As Gallant (2001f: 241) has argued:

> The victims [...] are a truly appalling bunch, thoroughly deserving of their fate [...] A number of characters are injected into the story as dispensable Phantom-fodder, identifiable as soon-to-be-victims from the moment they appear until they meet their inevitable (and inevitably spectacular) deaths.

Specifically, these people appear to have been introduced into the story to symbolise a variety of vices against which the Phantom may be compared and against which he constantly fights. When Ignace is driven by the Phantom’s telepathic power to injure himself with the mousetrap he has just prepared, the tool to kill the vermin is eventually turned against him as a weapon (Figures 54-57). In this respect, the Phantom has acted according to the principle that all crimes against other creatures should be severely punished with a violence that is comparable to the previous fault. A code that manages to assign a particular punishment to a specific crime is the *lex talionis* or the “law of retaliation”, whose ancient formula resides in “life for life” and “an eye for an eye”. In a proven case of physical assault on a person, the law of retaliation is defined by
the claim that punishment is morally justified and made morally obligatory by the action of the guilty. The type of punishment that should be employed in return is also settled by the nature of the crime committed (Weingreen 1976: 1-2; Morris 2010: 45-46). The most basic standard is the principle of equality as mentioned by Kant (1965: 99), according to which:

If you slander another you slander yourself; if you steal from another, you steal from yourself; if you strike another, you strike yourself; if you kill another, you kill yourself.

A typical example of retributive justice through the act of murder was previously provided by Argento’s *Trauma* (1993), in which Adriana Petrescu decapitates the medical staff who were responsible for accidentally beheading her son at birth (Cfr. § 2.4.3; 3.3.1). Similarly, such retributive justice is a recurrent theme in *Il fantasma dell’Opera*, in which all crimes against the Phantom serve as a justification for his cruel murders. In this regard, the Phantom comes to play a dual role of victim and victimizer at the same time. The Phantom’s dualism as victim and victimizer could also be analysed according to some art-historical interpretations of Bosch’s iconography. As De Siguença (De Tolnay 1965: 401-404) has suggested, Bosch’s artwork is religiously orthodox in the way it expresses the verdict of Christianity on the vanity of the world by the medium of “macaronic” images. If we relate such images to Argento’s grotesque types of cowardice, cruelty, and idiocy, we realise that these characters in the film only exist as the vices they represent and the subsequent punishment they deserve. In this regard, the reference to Bosch’s imagery becomes significant. It is as if Argento tries to do what Bosch had done in both the *Tabletop of the Seven Deadly Sins and the Four Last Things* (1485-1500) and the *Garden of Earthly Delights* (1503-1504), depicting the world’s corruption and depravity and the punishment they deserve. If one takes into consideration the people inhabiting the Paris Opera House, they seem to be more characterised by the deadly sins they embody rather than by their narrative roles as also happens in Bosch’s

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24 For more information on the origins of both “compensation” and “retaliation” in Biblical Law and in Hebrew society, see also Weingreen (1976: 11)
Tabletop. Similarly, these people are portrayed as grotesque, as if they were made of excrescences and orifices whose only function is to be torn apart, as in Bosch’s depiction of Hell in the *Garden* (Cfr. § 5.3.2).

As Canova (2008: 74-75) has pointed out, in Argento’s cinema the body is usually subjected to a *kamasutra* of tortures. In *La terza madre* (2007), for example, the several murder set-pieces are conceived as real tortures given in punishment for profaning *Mater Lacrimarum*’s secret. This profanation is paid with tortures that are typical of the inquisition. The curator of the Roman Museum, Giselle, is dismembered, eviscerated, and strangled with her own guts in a form of retaliation that is reminiscent of the soothsayers’ punishment in Dante Alighieri’s *Inferno*. The lesbian couple consisting of Marta and her girlfriend are blinded and impaled by a phallic blade. In addition to this, there are all the various types of practices, such as anthropophagi, cannibalism, necrophilia, that are constantly exhibited. Similarly, in *Il fantasma dell’Opera* people are punished for desecrating the sanctity of the Phantom’s lair and for their vices. If one takes into consideration Alfred’s and Paulette’s death, they are punished for both their greed and their lust. They meander into the Phantom’s lair in the hope of finding some kind of treasure. As a repayment for Alfred’s idea, Paulette’s response is to loosen her clothes and to offer her body. As Alfred and Paulette meander through the passages of the basement, the camera follows them from behind alternating medium long shots with medium shots. Similar camerawork is traceable in the first murder sequence of Argento’s *Non ho sonno* (2001). In *Non ho sonno*, Argento enacts his first murder in an empty train which is carrying the killer and his victim, a prostitute named Angela. Angela is eventually attacked by her assailant and struggles through the deserted and labyrinthine corridors of the train. During the whole sequence, the killer remains unseen. Through external long shots of the moving train, we see Angela running in panic, and nowhere in the entire train can the audience glimpse her pursuer. She is eventually reduced to beating against the window of a carriage with bloody fists, after one of her fingers is cut off during the fight. As the train finally
pulls into the station, Angela is eventually killed. In *Il fantasma dell’Opera* the carriages of a train are replaced by the corridors of the basement, which are similarly conceived as a hellish and labyrinthine trap. The visual trope of the camera following the victims from behind creates a disquieting feeling as if there could be someone attacking these people from nowhere. As soon as the danger materialises in the figure of the Phantom, Alfred is lifted from the ground by the man, who reaffirms their crime as the invasion of his territory. In blaming Paulette for the intrusion, Alfred calls her a “whore”. The Phantom punishes the man by throwing him against a phallic stalagmite that pierces his stomach (Figure 58). Alfred showed an act of cowardice by accusing a woman, so he is punished by being penetrated by a phallic symbol. This Opera House couple, therefore, represents a side of humanity of which the Phantom disapproves. Their passion finds fuel in avarice and lust. These attitudes completely clash with the nobility of the Phantom’s feeling for Christine. He is an admirer of the sublime beauty of art and eventually becomes close to Christine for the beauty of her voice.

In the sequence during which the paedophile Opera House Director, Monsieur Pourdieu, chases after a pre-pubescent ballerina with the intent to do evil, Argento shows a more complex and elaborate camerawork if compared to Alfred’s and Paulette’s death. It begins by showing Monsieur Pourdieu, who pushes a piece of chocolate into the mouth of the unfortunate little girl while holding her arm. This gesture is shot from different camera angles, starting from a high angle framing in extreme long shot and ending with a reverse shot of the two people involved in medium close-up. The sequence continues by showing Monsieur Pourdieu’s chase of the little ballerina into the caves of the basement from a variety of perspectives. As the young girl hides in the darkness, he looks for her, red-faced and repulsive, until the Phantom arrives to murder and partially devour him. The Phantom’s attack on the man from behind is metonymically rendered through a handful of chocolates that fly through the air in medium shot. The Phantom starts devouring the man’s face and the full

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sequence is shown through the extreme close-up of the paedophile’s pulsating lacerations (Figure 59). The *lex talionis* becomes clear; the man who stuffed the girl with chocolate is devoured with a ferocity that takes inspiration from some images of cannibalism in Bosch’s depiction of Hell in the *Garden of Earthly Delights*. Thus, the director’s Phantom is not a criminal. He is both the consequence and the punishment of a corrupted society whose primordial fault was to abandon him. He was thrown and dragged out into the basement of the *Palais Garnier*, which symbolises the depth of the soul, the sewer of the human mind, and the subsoil of these people’s guilty consciousness. As a result, *Il fantasma dell’Opera* is the only of Argento’s films to make the act of murder fully justifiable and “lawful”.

5.6. Conclusion

Leroux’s principles of dualism in *Le Fantôme de l’Opéra* are fully achieved through narrative structure and psychological characterisation of the two main roles, Erik and Christine Daaé. On the one hand, Erik’s physical deformity and propensity for murder clash with the man’s purity of feeling for the art of music and for Christine. Erik’s physical deformity and psychological dualism are metonymically conveyed through the environment, namely a coexistence of a familiar space through the opulent surface of the Paris Opera House which expresses the man’s good side and a horrific space through the basement of the Paris Opera House which expresses the man’s evil side. On the other hand, the way the complex relationship between Erik as villain and Christine as victim is described by Leroux makes a stereotypical codification of the two main roles according to their propensity to do evil and good. As far as Argento’s adaptation is concerned, the film provides a re-adaptation and a re-shaping of the thematic dualism at the basis of Leroux’s classic through drastic changes in the plot. These changes are aesthetically conveyed by a specific pictorial repertoire. In Argento’s adaptation, the Phantom’s upbringing in the basement of the Paris Opera House as part of the animal world, as well as a different physical and psychological characterisation of the people inhabiting the upper world of the building, provide a re-interpretation of Leroux’s dualism of familiar and horrific spaces through
pictorial symbolism. On the one hand, Argento’s depiction of the Phantom’s hidden lair as a pristine world in the style of Böcklin’s *Die Toteninsel* symbolically matches the male protagonist’s animal purity and upbringing and also provides a metaphor of his voluntary isolation from the pleasures and technologies of modern society. On the other hand, the director’s caricatural portrayal of the people inhabiting the Paris Opera House, through the visual exaggeration and hyperbole that are typical of the “grotesque” in painting, works as an implicit critique to an ignorant and opulent society that is responsible for rejecting the Phantom. This grotesque portrayal of society also clashes with the symbolic *milieu* of the Paris Opera House as the cradle of artistic creation. This opposition paves the way for another aesthetic dualism in Argento’s film, namely the coexistence of sin through the grotesque bodies depicted and of the sublime in artwork conveyed through the pictorial depiction of the environment, ranging from Jean-Léon Gérôme’s oriental *tableaux* in the sequence of the bathhouse to the *plan-tableau* of Degas’s *La classe de danse* in the sequence of Carlotta’s rehearsal. Moreover, Argento’s *Il fantasma dell’Opera* manages to shed new light on the complex relationship between Erik and Christine through reference to a pictorial repertoire. Leroux’s codification of evil through Erik and good through Christine is re-shaped by Argento into Christine’s struggle between her evil self and her good self. In Leroux’s literary classic, Christine’s naivety is crucial to her involvement with Erik and Leroux does not question the woman’s good faith and virtue for a moment. By contrast, Argento’s Christine is attracted to the Phantom’s evil side to indulge him carnally. Christine’s physical and psychological progression from naivety, to temptation, to completion of her sin, to repentance of her sin is conveyed through a specific pictorial repertoire focused on the female as a virgin and the female as a whore. The association of Christine with both a virgin and a whore reaches its climax in Argento’s *plan-tableau* of Georges De La Tour’s *La Madeleine aux deux flammes*. Finally, both the motives and the procedures behind the Phantom’s murder set-pieces are also described according to the aesthetic principles of dualism. In this regard, Argento’s Phantom comes to play a dual and simultaneous role of victim and victimizer. On the one hand, he is the victim of an ignorant and opulent society that has
relegated him to live as an outcast. On the other hand, the Phantom applies the principle of retributive justice as a justification for his cruel murders against the same people who have rejected him. In this respect, Argento’s depictions of his murder set-pieces are enacted in a way they resemble Bosch’s moral verdict on the vanity of the world through the medium of grotesque images in *Tabletop of the Seven Deadly Sins and the Four Last Things* and *Garden of Earthly Delights*. As a result, any intervention by a specific pictorial repertoire in Argento’s *Il fantasma dell’Opera* appears to be acting according to these principles of dualism and to be showing their many subtleties.
Chapter 5 - Figures

1. Il Fantasma dell'Opera

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8. “Così per circostanze fortuite, un’alleanza misteriosa è appena nata tra il bambino abbandonato e gli abitanti delle tenebre.”

Figures 1-8: The sequence showing the rescue of the Phantom.

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Figures 9 and 10: Arnold Böcklin’s Die Toteninsel (1880-1886) (9) and the extreme long shot of Christine rowing to the Phantom’s lair (10).
Figures 11-16: The historical reconstruction of the *Palais Garnier*.

Figures 17-22: Grotesque bodies: Ignace (17), the Opera Manager (18), and *prima donna* Carlotta Altieri (19-22).
Figures 23-30: The grotesque and the sublime through spaces. References to Jean-Léon Gérôme’s imagery in Argento’s depiction of the bathhouse (23-28) and the plan-tableau of Edgar Degas’s *La classe de danse* (1873-1876) (29 and 30).
Figures 31-36: Christine as an angel (31 and 32) and Christine as a prostitute in the Phantom’s dream (33 and 34) and in Raoul’s dream (35 and 36).

Figures 37-40: Plan-tableaux of Jean-François Millet’s *Reclining Nude* (1844-1845) (37 and 39) and of Georges De La Tour’s *La Madeleine aux deux flammes* (38 and 40).
Figures 41-43: A detail of Hieronymus Bosch’s *Garden of Earthly Delights* (1503-1504) (41) and the Phantom’s hallucination on the roof of the *Palais Garnier* (42 and 43).

Figures 44 and 45: Méliès’s futuristic machine in *Le voyage dans la lune* (1902) (44) and Ignace’s futuristic rat-mobile in *Il fantasma dell’Opera* (45).
Figures 46-51: The chandelier falling from the Opera’s ceiling.
Figures 52-59: The "law of retaliation" through the act of murder: Gustave (52 and 53), Ignace (54-57), Alfred (58), and Monsieur Pourdieu (59).
Conclusion

My research explored Dario Argento’s appropriation of art-historical references in his cinema and argued for the importance of such references in terms of reading the main films of my primary corpus. In doing so, I complemented existing literature on the filmmaker by addressing new and underexplored areas of analysis within his cinema in terms of influence, referentiality, and intertextuality. To achieve my goal, I used previous investigations that contextualised Argento’s corpus of work within the domestic cinematic tradition from which he sprang in the early 1970s, and identified the key features in narrative and style inherent to the director’s cinema. According to these studies, Argento’s corpus of work can be classified as a combination of exploitative genres in narrative and “high art” in style and technique. The “high art” dimension of Argento’s cinema is apparent in the director’s use of elaborate camerawork, such as the persistent use of dislocated and unconventional POVs, lavish cinematography and \textit{mise-en-scène}, and an evocative soundtrack within narrative conventions typical of Italian Horror. Peripheral to my research is scholarship that focuses on Argento’s oeuvre discussing and complementing previous debates around the dynamics of gender, gaze, and spectatorship in the horror genre, put forth in film studies by influential theorists such as Laura Mulvey, Carol J. Clover, and Barbara Creed. Such critical examinations of Argento’s work have produced a recasting and reinterpretation of the traditional horror genre’s gender politics, and of the dynamics of strictly generic gendered positionalities and spectatorship. Whilst such analyses are clearly significant, they did not directly inform my own position.

My own analysis of Argento’s use of a specific art-historical repertoire drew on the aforementioned literature dealing with the contextualisation of Argento’s cinema within Italian Horror in terms of narrative and style. My approach connected this work with recent studies on the interplay between painting and cinema conducted by Pascal Bonitzer, Jean-Louis Leutrat, and Angela Dalle Vacche. These scholars’ investigation engages with citation and intertextuality without overlooking larger cinematic issues, such as the construction of space,
framing, referentiality, and temporality. Dalle Vacche also focuses on the way art-historical references interact with the aesthetics and narrative of the films analysed through iconographic, symbolic, and thematic affinities. Likewise, I discussed how art-historical references are integrated into Argento’s oeuvre via copying and quotation and how they function within the film texts in terms of colour, framing, and lighting. I achieved this using an inductive method of analysis. From the evocative specificity of a single shot and sequence containing a specific artistic reference I provided more general hypotheses related to the use of art within the film in question. Subsequently, I explored whether the iconographic and symbolic processes through which this art-historical repertoire is enacted form a strict bond with the film’s narrative context.

Drawing on previous investigations on Italian Horror and *Gialli*, in the first chapter I provided the framework for Dario Argento’s engagement with the exploitative genre from which he emerged in the early 1970s. Belonging to a domestic popular tradition that places more emphasis on spectacular rather than narrative pleasures, these studies agreed with the fact that Argento has contributed to the creation of the perfect format within which the visual tropes typical of Italian Horror and *Giallo*, such as an avant-garde soundtrack, prohibited camerawork, and sophisticated technologies, could be put on display.

Having established that stylistic concern and technical engagement constitute the key feature of Argento’s exploration and innovation of Italian Horror and the reason for his increasing recognition worldwide, from chapter two I turned my attention to the role of art in Argento’s films. Here, I explored the director’s extensive use of an art-historical symbolic and visual repertoire in a selected corpus of work. I argued that Argento alludes to and / or cites directly from a range of artistic sources within his cinema. This art-historical repertoire is not only related to the cultural and historical heritage of Italy. Rather, it is expanded across a variety of countries, from Northern Europe to the United States, and related art-historical heritage, from Hieronymus Bosch in *Il fantasma dell’Opera* to American Hyperrealism of the 1960s and 1970s in *Profondo rosso*. In this respect, my analysis demonstrated that, on the one hand, the director’s
choice of the art-historical references displayed is sometimes linked to the fictional location of the film in question. This is the case of *La sindrome di Stendhal*, whose sequence at the Uffizi Gallery in Florence fully justifies the diegetic references to well-known tableaux that are placed in there. On the other hand, Argento’s allusion to and / or quotation of a specific work of art are dictated by the visual impact that the director envisioned for the film in question. This conclusion emerged after drawing a parallel between the reference alluded to and / or cited in a single shot or sequence and the filmic context in terms of colour, framing, and lighting. In all the cases analysed, it was also clear that the art-historical repertoire alluded to and / or cited served both to consolidate and re-interpret previous analyses of Argento’s work in terms of the aesthetic and narrative conventions of the director’s cinema.

Previous academic debates have argued that Argento places more importance on style and use of technology rather than on the psychology of his characters. In Chapter Two, I applied recent theories related to artistic fruition in post-Freudian psychoanalytical studies and I demonstrated how these previous analyses of Argento’s cinema are somewhat reductive. Specifically, I challenged existing literature on Argento and I demonstrated how in *La sindrome di Stendhal* Argento manages to depict the psychology of his female protagonist at aesthetic level. The sequence at the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, for example, displays a variety of tableaux, each one carrying a symbolic significance when associated to the female protagonist’s psychological states throughout the film, including her temporarily repressed memories of family conflict as well as a series of latent psychoses.

Existing debates also focused their analyses on the extreme poles of female representation in Italian Horror. These studies identified a certain tendency in Italian Horror to represent female figures according to a stereotypical binary opposition between woman as castrating figure and woman as victim. These debates led me to the conclusion that these stereotypical gendered positionalities in Italian Horror are also symbolically portrayed through pictorial iconography in Argento’s cinema. In *La sindrome di Stendhal*, the female
protagonist’s mental progression from victim of sexual abuse to perpetrator of crimes is aesthetically conveyed through a specific pictorial symbolism throughout the film. This pictorial symbolism ranges from Botticelli’s *Venere* at the beginning of the film, which symbolically identifies the woman’s fragility toward her upbringing in an all-male environment, to Caravaggio’s *Medusa*, which symbolises the woman’s transformation into a murderer through iconography.

Furthermore, previous literature agreed with the fact that Argento is part of a domestic horror tradition that places equal (if not more) importance on the method of killing rather than on the resolution of the crime. Grabbing the audience’s attention through a combination of aural and visual signs, these debates concluded that Argento was able to create in his murder set-pieces a kind of aesthetic pleasure around which the whole plot of the film is constructed. By closely reading the sequences of murder in *La sindrome di Stendhal*, I complemented this literature by demonstrating how Argento implicitly equates murder with an act of artistic creation. This equation is conveyed both aesthetically and symbolically by alluding to, and citing, a highly recognisable art-historical repertoire in some of these key sequences. This element is equally present in the other films analysed in my thesis, where I demonstrated how Argento makes use of distinctive iconography, from American Hyperrealism of the 1960s and 1970s in *Profondo rosso* to Hieronymus Bosch’s *tableaux* in *Il fantasma dell’Opera*, for the same purpose. On the one hand, the various sequences of murder in the corpus of work analysed reproduce the colour, framing, and lighting of these renowned *tableaux*. On the other hand, the act of murder sometimes ends with the victim being placed in a position mimicking pictorial iconography, producing the eventual transformation of the victim into an *objet d’art* through the composition of the shot.

Chapter Three is structured around a re-engagement with existing scholarship identifying *Profondo rosso* as the first film in which Argento strongly explores a remarkable association-provocation of the acoustic and the iconic through an effective combination of editing, elaborate camerawork, displacing
music and sound in the several sequences of murder and violence. These studies concluded that the film’s association-provocation of the acoustic and the iconic is the director’s key contribution to the stylistic tropes of the Italian horror tradition, which tended to accord more importance to complex and elaborate spectacles of death rather than to focus on the investigative element of the plot. In this respect, I complemented existing literature by demonstrating how Argento’s stylistic engagement in the film is also inspired by the photographic-type accuracy and sharpness of images that are typical of photo-realist painting of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Interacting with previous art-historical debates around the techniques adopted by Charles Bell and Richard Estes to convey their manipulation of the size of the object depicted through the camera, I showed how Argento takes inspiration from such pictorial techniques, such as the snorkel camera, to provide a high definition of images within the film in terms of colour and potentialities of light. At the same time, I demonstrated how the stereotypical theme of the misleading sight of the eyewitness regarding the true situation of crime in the Italian Gialli is eventually conveyed by Argento through the technique of the trompe-l’oeil in painting. In doing so, I complemented and re-interpreted existing literature by arguing that Profondo rosso is the first film by Argento in which an art-historical repertoire acquires a pivotal role both in terms of narrative progression and style.

Previous debates on Argento’s Suspiria have recently discussed the director’s decision to film with an outdated Technicolor IB stock and his use of a highly elaborate set-design within the film. According to this literature, Argento uses both in order to metaphorically convey the supernatural theme of the film through the psychedelic quality of the colour palette and the artificiality of the décor. In Chapter Four, I proposed a reading that radically challenges such positions. I demonstrated how Argento’s colour palette and references to Art Deco and Art Nouveau in the film are granted a dramatic function, acting as projections of metaphorical bodily and mental types within the film. This was possible by dialoguing with previous studies on the “dramatic role” of colour and lighting at the basis of German Expressionist Cinema of the 1920s and by...
interacting with Anthony Vidler’s analysis of architecture and décor as embodiment of states of the body and states of the mind through the geometries of the setting. Similarly, I demonstrated how the complex camerawork in the film is intended as a projection of the characters’ mental phobias and states associated with spatial fear, such as claustrophobia and agoraphobia, in the various murder set-pieces. In doing so, I also expanded Rob Baker’s intuition of a possible association between Suspiria’s style and German Expressionist Cinema of the 1920s.

Chapter Five breaks new ground in its analysis of Il fantasma dell’Opera (1998). The film, in fact, has received no critical attention to date. I opted for Argento’s cinematic adaptation of Leroux’s literary classic because this film totally resumes and enhances the crux of my arguments in the broader corpus, such as projection of the character’s psychology and portrayal of deranged femininity through pictorial iconography, and murder sequences as acts of artistic creation. These aspects were all re-interpreted according to what I identified as an “aesthetic principle of dualism”. Drawing on recent art-historical debates around the iconography alluded to and / or cited in the film, I demonstrated how this aesthetic dualism works on three levels. Firstly, Argento’s depiction of the male protagonist’s lair as a pristine world in the style of Böcklin’s tableaux symbolically matches the character’s animal purity within the film. This contrasts with the director’s caricatural portrayal of the people inhabiting the Paris Opera House, through the visual exaggeration and hyperbole that are typical of the “grotesque” in painting, and which works as an implicit critique of an ignorant and opulent society. Secondly, Argento combines the double aspect of woman as a victim and woman as a perpetrator of crime through a single iconographic figure. The female protagonist’s double nature as both a virgin and a sinner reaches its climax in Argento’s plan-tableau of Georges De La Tour’s painting depicting Mary Magdalene, the penitent prostitute. The female protagonist’s iconographic association with De La Tour’s Mary Magdalene in a specific sequence of the film becomes the metaphor of the woman’s repentance for having lost her virtue by indulging carnally with the male protagonist. Finally,
the male protagonist in the film comes to play a dual role of victim and victimizer. On the one hand, he is the victim of the aforementioned ignorant and opulent society that has relegated him to live as an outcast. On the other hand, he applies the principle of retributive justice as a justification for murdering and punishing the same people who have rejected him. In this respect, Argento’s depiction of these murder set-pieces is enacted in a way that recalls Bosch’s verdict on the vanity of the world by the medium of grotesque images in his tableaux.

Through my methodological approach, I have structured a comprehensive and well-balanced analysis of Argento’s aesthetic, iconographic, symbolic, and thematic appropriation of the artistic imagery within his cinema. In doing so, I engaged with key debates in the field, drawing on certain scholars and challenging others, and I crucially argued for a radical re-reading of Argento’s aesthetic and narrative conventions by the medium of the art-historical repertoire. My intra-artistic study of Argento’s cinema could lead to further analyses of the artistic imagery in other influential and renowned filmmakers of Italian Horror. With regard to Mario Bava, for example, he was the son of a sculptor and his first ambition was to become a painter. His interest and talent in painting is apparent from his sophisticated high contrast photographic style as shown in La maschera del demonio (1960), as well as from his technical expertise throughout his long career as a director. In this respect, it would be interesting to analyse Bava’s use of colour, lighting, perspective, and themes as a painter and to see how and to what extent this previous interest and experience may have influenced his future career as a director both in terms of aesthetics and narrative. Another crucial area for further research is the specific study of Argento’s female figures and their related depiction through pictorial iconography, which has remained relatively marginal due to my central preoccupation with the role of artistic imagery as a whole. My investigation has identified a way in which the art historical references might enhance a reading of stereotypical female characters as victims and as perpetrators of violence in terms of narrative conventions in Argento’s cinema. It would be profitable to
challenge my position around the iconographic representation of women in Argento’s cinema also dialoguing with the previous work on threatened gendered positionalities mentioned in my introduction and that I did not take into consideration in my thesis. As discussed in my work, Argento makes use of a consolidated pictorial iconography, from Caravaggio’s *Medusa* to Botticelli’s *Venere*, to identify the extreme poles of female representation, such as woman as castrating figure and woman as victim. In *La sindrome di Stendhal*, however, Argento takes inspiration from pictorial male iconography, such as Christ on the cross, in order to describe the female character’s physical suffering and generate pathos. Thus, the following question emerges: how and to what extent is Argento’s choice of female iconography stereotypical in terms of threatened gender positionalities? Does this choice of iconography challenge or conform to the stereotyped representations of women as virgins and perpetrators of crimes in mainstream Hollywood cinema as theorised by Mulvey, Creed, and Clover? There are doubtless many examples of this dichotomy in Argento’s filmography. Thus, I hope in some way I have contributed to the beginning of a new exploration within the director’s cinematic world and paved the way for a more interdisciplinary-based approach within the study of the popular genre of Italian Horror.
Filmography

A bout de souffle (dir. Jean-Luc Godard, 1960)

L’amante del vampiro (dir. Renato Polselli, 1960)

Un angelo per Satana (dir. Camillo Mastrocinque, 1966)

L’Anticristo (dir. Alberto De Martino, 1974)

Ascenseur pour l’échafaud (dir. Louis Malle, 1958)

L’atleta fantasma (dir. Raimondo Scotti, 1919)

Atto d’accusa (dir. Giacomo Gentilomo, 1960)

Le Bal des vampires (dir. Roman Polanski, 1967)

Bitter Moor (dir. Roman Polanski, 1992)

The Blue Dahlia (dir. George Marshall, 1946)

Caltiki, il mostro immortale (dir. Riccardo Freda, 1959)

Il cartaoio (dir. Dario Argento, 2004)

La casa dalle finestre che ridono (dir. Pupi Avati, 1976)

La casa dell’esorcismo (dir. Mario Bava, 1975)

C’era una volta il West (dir. Sergio Leone, 1968)

Chi sei? (dir. Ovidio Assonitis, 1974)

Cinque bambole per la luna di agosto (dir. Mario Bava, 1970)

Le cinque giornate (dir. Dario Argento, 1973)

Cul-de-Sac (dir. Roman Polanski, 1966)

The Curse of Frankenstein (dir. Terence Fisher, 1957)


Deleria (dir. Michele Soavi, 1987)

Diabolik (dir. Mario Bava, 1968)
Dracula (dir. Tod Browning, 1931)

Dracula (dir. Terence Fisher, 1958)

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (dir. Rouben Mamoulian, 1931)

Due occhi diabolici (segment Il gatto nero, dir. Dario Argento, segment Fatti nella vita del Signor Valdemar, dir. George A. Romero, 1990)

L’etrusco uccide ancora (dir. Armando Crispino, 1972)

The Exorcist (dir. William Friedkin, 1973)

Il fantasma dell’Opera (dir. Dario Argento, 1998)

Frankenstein (dir. James Whale, 1931)

Friday the 13th (dir. Sean S. Cunningham, 1980)

Il gatto a nove code (dir. Dario Argento, 1971)

Giallo (dir. Dario Argento, 2009)

Gone with the Wind (dir. Victor Fleming, 1939)

Halloween (dir. John Carpenter, 1978)

Histoires extraordinaires (segment Toby Dammit, dir. Federico Fellini, 1968)

Holocaust 2000 (dir. Alberto De Martino, 1977)

The House of Usher (dir. Roger Corman, 1960)

Inferno (dir. Dario Argento, 1980)

Das Kabinett des Dr. Caligari (dir. Robert Wiene, 1920)

Kriminal (dir. Umberto Lenzi, 1966)

Labbra serrate (dir. Mario Mattoli, 1942)

Le locataire (dir. Roman Polanski, 1976)

Mädchen in Uniform (dir. Leontine Sagan, 1931)

Un maledetto imbroglio (dir. Pietro Germi, 1959)
La maschera del demonio (dir. Mario Bava, 1960)

M.D.C.-Maschera di cera (dir. Sergio Stivaletti, 1997)

Il mostro di Frankenstein (dir. Eugenio Testa, 1920)

Il mulino delle donne di pietra (dir. Giorgio Ferroni, 1960)

Non ho sonno (dir. Dario Argento, 2001)

Non si sevizia un paperino (dir. Lucio Fulci, 1972)

Nosferatu (dir. Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau, 1922)

Opera (dir. Dario Argento, 1987)

Operazione paura (dir. Mario Bava, 1966)

Gli orrori del castello di Norimberga (dir. Mario Bava, 1972)

Ossessione (dir. Luchino Visconti, 1942)

Paura nella città dei morti viventi (dir. Lucio Fulci, 1980)

The Phantom of the Opera (dir. Rupert Julian, 1925)

The Phantom of the Opera (dir. Arthur Lubin, 1943)

Phenomena (dir. Dario Argento, 1985)

Possession (dir. Andrzej Żuławski, 1981)

Profondo rosso (dir. Dario Argento, 1975)

Psycho (dir. Alfred Hitchcock, 1960)

Quattro mosche di velluto grigio (dir. Dario Argento, 1971)

La ragazza che sapeva troppo (dir. Mario Bava, 1962)

Reazione a catena (dir. Mario Bava, 1971)

Repulsion (dir. Roman Polanski, 1965)

Il rosso segno della follia (dir. Mario Bava, 1969)

Satana (dir. Luigi Maggi, 1912)
Satanik (dir. Piero Vivarelli, 1967)

Seddock, l’eroe di Satana (dir. Anton Giulio Majano, 1960)

Sei donne per l’assassino (dir. Mario Bava, 1964)

Shock (dir. Mario Bava, 1977)

La sindrome di Stendhal (dir. Dario Argento, 1996)

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (dir. Walt Disney, 1937)

Lo squartatore di New York (dir. Lucio Fulci, 1982)

Der Student von Prag (dir. Stellan Kye, 1913)

Suspiria (dir. Dario Argento, 1977)

Tenebre (dir. Dario Argento, 1982)

La terza madre (dir. Dario Argento, 2007)

Tess (dir. Roman Polanski, 1979),

Ti piace Hitchcock? (dir. Dario Argento, 2005)

Trauma (dir. Dario Argento, 1993)

L’uccello dalle piume di cristallo (dir. Dario Argento, 1970)

L’ultima preda del vampiro (dir. Piero Regnoli, 1960)

I vampiri (dir. Riccardo Freda, 1956)

La Venere d’Ille (dir. Mario Bava, 1978)

Vertigo (dir. Alfred Hitchcock, 1958)

Le Voyage dans la lune (dir. Georges Méliès, 1902)

The Wizard of Oz (dir. Victor Fleming, 1939)

Zombi 2 (dir. Lucio Fulci, 1979)

Zombi 3 (dir. Lucio Fulci, 1988)
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