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Mirrors of Reality: Art and Modernity in the Cinema of Dario Argento

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Mirrors of Reality: Art and Modernity in the Cinema of Dario Argento*

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Abstract: Italian cinema has always proven to be an authentic portrayer of the human condition and of contemporary issues. Social transformations, urban and industrial growth are pointed out in many Italian productions. As part of what is considered a new genre, horror and *giallo* confront the problems of the modern world, depicting a certain view on modernity that often engages with the atmosphere of the genre itself. This article intends to explore how a specific aspect of modernity, its problems and virtues, is seen across Dario Argento's films, specially through his focus on art and architecture. A comparison is made with other Italian filmmakers, in order to comprehend how the genre addresses the problems of modernity.

Keywords: italian horror cinema; *giallo*; cinema and painting; cinema and architecture.

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Espejos de la realidad: arte y modernidad en el cine de Dario Argento

Resumen: el cine italiano siempre ha demostrado ser un auténtico retratador de la condición humana y los problemas contemporáneos. Las transformaciones sociales, el crecimiento urbano e industrial se señalan en muchas producciones italianas. Como parte de un género considerado nuevo, el horror y el *giallo* confrontan los problemas del mundo moderno, representando una cierta visión de la modernidad que a menudo dialoga con la atmósfera del género en sí. Este artículo intenta explorar cómo se ve un aspecto específico de la modernidad, sus problemas y virtudes, en todo el cine de Dario Argento, especialmente a través de su enfoque en el arte y la arquitectura. Se hace una comparación con otros cineastas italianos, para comprender cómo el género dirige los problemas de la modernidad.

Palabras clave: cine de terror italiano; *giallo*; cine y pintura; cine y arquitectura.

Espelhos da realidade: arte e modernidade no cinema de Dario Argento

Resumo: o cinema italiano sempre se mostrou um verdadeiro retratador da condição humana e dos problemas contemporâneos. Transformações sociais, crescimento urbano e industrial são apontados em muitas produções italianas. Como parte de um gênero considerado novo, horror e *giallo* enfrentam os problemas do mundo moderno, representando uma certa visão da modernidade que muitas vezes dialoga com a atmosfera do próprio gênero. Este artigo tenta explorar como um aspecto específico da modernidade, seus problemas e virtudes, é visto em toda a produção cinematográfica de Dario Argento, especialmente por meio de seu foco na arte e na arquitetura. É feita uma comparação com outros cineastas italianos, para entender como o gênero aborda os problemas da modernidade.

Palavras-chave: cinema de horror italiano; *giallo*; cinema e pintura; cinema e arquitetura.

Becoming a Genre

Italian genre cinema, specifically *giallo* and horror, is perfectly accurate in capturing many aspects of modernity. On one hand, this happens thanks to the novelty of the genre that, although present in Italian cinematographic imagery since the beginning



of the 20th century, rose to notoriety and presence only in the mid-50s due to fascist and catholic censorship that in previous decades forbade the circulation of fantasy films in favor of themes that assured the population of the regime's ideological dream. On the other hand, because of horror's own singularity as cinema that allows different approaches on the strange, the unknown, the uncanny, the taboo. Its ability to capture the fears and concerns of the contemporary world, transforming them into fantastic stories, reflects as modern.

Thus, horror enters Italy's cinema landscape little by little. We could point to the early cinema of 1910s, like Giuseppe de Liguoro's *Inferno* or Nino Oxilia's *divismo* films, Giovanni Pastrone, Febo Mari and others, in which themes of fantastic nature appear. We could also go back to the presence of Grand Guignol in Italy, which emerged in 1908 with Bella Starace and Alfredo Sainati's *Compagnia del Grand Guignol*, but horror as a movie genre did not appear in Italy until halfway through the 1950s. *I vampiri* (1957, by Riccardo Freda) was the first Italian gothic motion picture to be produced and released in the country. Bringing the tradition of gothic literature and the Hammer films in a vampire-like story that contrasted the glory and decadence of the traditional past in the light of the urgencies and changes of contemporary Europe. Like *Des Esseintes* in J.K. Huysmans *À Rebours*, the secluded mansion of Giselle Du Grand (Gianna Maria Canale) did not seem to keep up to date with the outside world.

So, during the 1950s, before horror became a consolidated genre, comedies like *Totò all'Inferno* (1955), by Camillo Mastrocinque, combined the comic with the horrific. *Peplum* also embraced similar aspects of the genre, with the views and archetypes of the past - the ancient world and mythology. Since national models were practically nonexistent, the directors constantly turned to different sources to compose their notional worlds of horror. As, for example, the classic night scene of the fearful milkmaid in *La maschera del demonio* (Mario Bava, 1960), that was inspired by the macabre overtone of the forest sequence in Walt Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), a trick that Dario Argento would embrace later in his macabre fairytale trilogy¹. This points to the ability that horror motion pictures have to extract from seemingly harmless productions disruptions worthy of fear.

In what refers to censorship, foreign films - previously embargoed by the nationalistic politics of Mussolini's Cinecittà - gather space in Italy. Always

1. Argento often confirms his references to the Walt Disney world in the *Three Mothers Trilogy*. In *Suspiria* (1977) the eerie atmosphere of the Black Forest echoes the same scene referenced by Bava. And *Inferno* (1980) reinvents the theme of the menacing spindle of *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), incorporating even the visual quality and colors of the animation's climax scene.



dubbed in the national language, following the regime's guidelines that favored the homeland's production². Hammer becomes a model for the Italian directors and thus emerges gothic horror, genre immortalized by *I vampiri* (1957), dictating the rules and aesthetic of the motion pictures that would be released in Italy between the years of 1959 and 1969, specifically³.

Although Italian gothic cinema had its foundations in the *villas* and castles of England and the fantastic literature of the 18th and 19th centuries that inspired its plots, the approach to the subject matter was always new and unsettling. The increased explicit violence on screen, as we see at the beginning of *La maschera del demonio*, foreshadowed overseas filmmakers⁴ productions, because,

Until then, audiences were educated by the unspoken laws of American cinema to witness a clean and polite depiction of violence, both in the way it manifested itself and regarding the object to which it was directed. Here, blatantly and with incredible ferocity, the object of violence was the female body, which filmmakers at the time were trying by all means to unveil to the audience, even if just a few inches more, despite the opposition by the censorship commissions. In a matter of minutes, Bava had that very body stripped, humiliated, marked by fire and martyred. There had not been anything like *Black Sunday* before.⁵

Beyond that, gothic films dealt with the social transformations of their time. The violence inflicted on Asa Vajda (Barbara Steele) at the beginning of the film and her reincarnation in the following moments, although portrayed as a supernatural/witchcraft drama⁶, dealt with problems of female representation, explored also in other films of the period. Necrophiliac characters that practice sadistic sexual crimes, mad scientists that reembody the Jekyll/Hyde duality in the alleys of Venice, witches that proclaim their authority in a world of constant revolution around feminist rights, are a few of the many examples that relate to the social and gender issues of the time.

2. With the Cinecittà manifest in 1937, Mussolini restrains the circulation of foreign films, mostly of American origin. Likewise, the government makes Italian dubbing mandatory to every movie showing across the Italian territory. As David Didelot says, "because cinema has always been a pulsating ideological and political vector, the films projected in the obscure rooms of the Boot will be Italian, will speak Italian, will think in Italian, or they won't be". Italy, a ferocious defender of audio post-production (partially because of its low cost), continues to make its movies the same way even after the fall of Mussolini and the fascist regime. Extract from David Didelot, *Bruno Mattei: itinéraires bis* (Paris: ArtusFilms, 2016), 29.

3. The films of this period are well analyzed by Roberto Curti, *Italian Gothic Horror Films, 1957-1969* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2015).

4. Herschell Gordon Lewis and his "Blood Trilogy" for instance.

5. Curti, *Italian Gothic*, 38.

6. Adaptation of *Vij* (1835) by Nikolai Gogol.



The effervescence of the *filone* was renewed with each production, and gradually, the cinema that before turned to the dark past of old mansions, its spirits, vices and secrets, starts to face its own time as a direct representative of its fears, but not without going back to those obsolete and archaic structures of the past. The *gialli*, that inherit their name from the yellow covers of Editore Mondadori's pulp literature, start to appear in the Italian cinematographic circuit. The influence of German *krimi* movies support the birth of the Italian *giallo* and *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* (1963, by Mario Bava), marks the generation of films that would succeed, involving a certain Hitchcockian *whodunit* aesthetic with the pop environment of a 1960s Italy.

In the midst of an increase in consumption and completely aligned with the concerns of 1968, Giulio Questi brought with *La morte ha fatto l'uovo* (1968) the debate on the disproportionate acceleration of the animal industry, in a severe criticism of the consumer society, under the purview of science fiction. Regarding the originality and latent social criticism in the film, Roberto Curti says,

It is hard not to think about contemporary globalized world, full of consumers born without head (that is, the capacity of developing independent thought) and wings (that is, imagination, initiative, the will to detach from the mass and follow their own way), fed and fattened with advertising and commodities, and trained to behave all in the same way, all destined to exploitation and, ultimately, consumption.⁷

Other films, such as *Danger: Diabolik* (1968, by Mario Bava) and *La proprietà non è più un furto* (1973, by Elio Petri), also addressed the situation, in which a critique of the questionable values of modernity and the superficiality of the bourgeoisie was put in evidence. And, although not a *giallo per se*, Piero Schivazappa's *Femina Ridens* (1969) debated gender issues, blurring male with female, domination and subjugation, also imbued with a pop overtone. Here contemporary art, the work *Hon / Elle* (1966), by Niki de Saint Phalle, literally devours the men who go through her legs. The installation that was designed to house the temporary visitors of the Stockholm Museum of Art turns into a colossal man-eater, reducing the civilized male specimens that offer her bouquets of flowers into lifeless skeletons. By doing that, the filmmaker discusses the change of gender roles in Italian society, alluding to a completely new form of art – that is the world of *installation* and *performance* in the art scene.

7. Roberto Curti, "Giulio Questi. The Man with Nine Lives", in *Mavericks of Italian Cinema. Eight Unorthodox Filmmakers, 1940s-2000s* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2018), 99.



Women were starting to take up new places in Italian society. Their voices heard by means of the equal rights movements, the abortion and divorce laws, plus a handful of other factors contributed to the depiction of new themes, new ideas and a new concept of modern life that began to take place in the Boot. We can attest to that not only with Schivazappa's film. *Un fiocco nero per Deborah* (1974, by Marcello Andrei) for instance, a film influenced by Roman Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), grappled with the depenalization of abortion, an issue raised in Italy in the same year of the picture's theatrical release due to a bill of law that was only passed in 1978⁸.

It seems strange to talk about so many different elements when it comes to summarizing the constant transformation of Italian genre cinema during the two decades that followed 1950, but one thing is certain, cinema did not change on its own. It merely reflected the conflicts, aspirations, anxieties, and fears of its fellow countrymen. And if the subject matter explored in horror and *giallo* illustrates the concerns of the modern era, the plurality of topics mentioned above only insinuate how modernity is a manifold notion. To borrow Baudrillard's definition,

Modernity is neither a sociological concept, nor a political concept, nor exactly a historical concept. It is a characteristic mode of civilization, which opposes itself to tradition, that is to say, to all other anterior or traditional cultures: confronting the geographic and symbolic diversity of the latter, modernity imposes itself throughout the world as a homogeneous unity, irradiating from the Occident. Nevertheless, it remains a confused notion, which connotes in a global manner any historical evolution and change of mentality.⁹

It does not interest us to define modernity, as Baudrillard already indicates that "there can be no laws of modernity: there are only traits of modernity"¹⁰. What concerns us exactly is to understand what imbricates the changes in mentality which Baudrillard discusses. Besides the continuous transformations seen through the lens of the cinema, another trait of modernity began to take place in Italy.

It appeared similarly rooted in the atmosphere captured by *avant-garde* cinema, the neobaroque lights on the buildings of *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* (1927, by Walter Ruttmann) whose tribute was to and for the city. Or even, the

8. Roberto Curti, *Italian Gothic Horror Films, 1970-1979* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2017), 121.

9. Jean Baudrillard, "Modernity", *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory/Revue canadienne de théorie politique et sociale* 11, no. 3 (1987): 63-73.

10. Baudrillard, "Modernity", 63.



kaleidoscopic ode to the urban in Busby Berkeley's films as seen in the musical moment "Lullaby of Broadway" in *Gold Diggers of 1935* (1935), with Wini Shaw singing about "the rumble of a subway train, the rattle of the taxis" while her face transforms into a bird's-eye view of the night lights of New York city. But the cinema that emerged in Italy also managed to return to the matter of confrontation between the traditional and the modern.

The Silence of Modernity

It is in the *gialli* and horror films of the 70s and 80s that those very particular traits of modernity are deeply manifested. The cinema of that time, also representing the urgencies of modernity, conceived a visual aesthetic of the city, its streets and buildings. Where the metallic attributes, translucent surfaces and their reflections compose a compliment of the material, of the contemporary, but also, a critical view of it.

In Italy, but not solely, the cinema of the 1970s captured the harshness of modern life. A slightly more detailed explanation is needed here. Let us focus on some films by Dario Argento, a filmmaker who carries an appreciation for art and architecture, routine foundations of his motion pictures. His *Profondo Rosso* (1975) is a film that uses art in an insightful and plural way. Besides the central plot of the *giallo* - the face of the murderer is confused amongst paintings of expressionist qualities that bring to mind, besides Munch's *Skrik* (1893), Ivan Serpa's *Série negra* (1960s) - the film's *mise en scène* comprises a set of influences from the American paintings of the 20th century.

As already explored by several authors, Argento reconstructs in Piazza C.L.N., in Turin, a *tableau vivant* of *Nighthawks* (1942), by Edward Hopper. In the sequence in question, we spot a bar supported by the stilts of the building behind it, located in the left corner of the square. The neon sign sets the scene, the Blue Bar. Inside, static characters seem to talk. In there, the lighting is strong, compared with the scene of the drunken dialogue that takes place in the foreground. The extras within it and the conceived environment bring Hopper's painting to mind. In the bar's lounge, the atmosphere is diverse. The frozen characters and the inert space, almost suspended in time, give the scene an unreal air.

This immobility inserts us into a completely different atmosphere. The Blue Bar's appearance does not seem to be meaningless. The director's attention to carefully



recreating the work belonging to the Art Institute of Chicago's collection is evident, to composing a meticulous and singular reconstruction of the painting in question. In the moments when the interaction of the main characters takes place within the space of the bar, the atmosphere is mobile and vivid. Carlo (Gabriele Lavia) plays the piano next to Marc (David Hemmings), a girl appears touching up her makeup. And, in the restricted room, the characters interact warmly. But when the scene unfolds outside the establishment it articulates itself as a world apart, unchanged in its own materiality. Argento comments in an interview with Giulio Giusti about the immobile characteristic of the *Blue Bar*:

I was mainly inspired by Edward Hopper and his frozen atmosphere. And then I was also inspired by others that have now escaped my mind, but that at the time I had studied with great interest. In particular, I liked the idea of representing my characters, sometimes full of life and interest, happy and jovial, placed in frozen and hyper-realistic situations, and suspended as in a painting.¹¹

In *Nighthawks* there is a night scene that takes place inside a dine. Four characters are portrayed at the core of the establishment. The waiter dressed in white is seen at the counter, an isolated male figure is shown with his back to the street and, further down on the opposite side of the bar, we see a couple. He is in a hat and jacket, she in a dress and vibrant red hair. As in Argento's bar, the figures inside the painting seem static. No signs of movement are perceived in Hopper's brush. Outside, emptiness fills the city. The windows and doors of buildings nearby have no lights on. The few figurative characters give us the impression of being the only inhabitants of the painter's private world. The framing of the painting does not allow us to see the exit door of the place. As if it represented its own closed environment, where the world is articulated in another way and corresponds to another time. A reading of Hopper's painting can also be placed alongside the scene of *Profondo Rosso*:

We have the impression that we are looking at buildings and a banal cafeteria. The archetypal character of the scene is thus reinforced. Glass imposes itself as the dominant element of *Nighthawks*. Despite its transparency, it separates. The painting lends itself perfectly to the painting's transposition of Hopper's

11. "Principalmente mi sono ispirato a Edward Hopper e alle sue atmosfere gelide. Poi mi sono ispirato anche ad altri che adesso mi sono passati di mente ma che all'epoca, invece, avevo studiato con molto interesse. 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, e congelate come in un quadro". Giulio Giusti, "Turbamenti figurativi: Conversazione con Dario Argento", *Filmcritica* 609, no. 10 (2010): 490-496, <http://shura.shu.ac.uk/13685/3/Giusti%20%20Turbamenti%20figurativi.pdf>



postulate, which states that it is difficult to paint both an interior and an exterior. “The walls, all on an angle with only discreet steel supports, make the separation between interior and exterior almost disappear”. The windows of the cafeteria correspond to the shop windows in front. Another store is seen in obscurity through the back window, interior and exterior represented simultaneously, as confused. To the transparency of the glass, Hopper opposes the blinds half lowered from the windows of the building in front. The cafeteria was meticulously staged: salt and pepper shakers, dispenser of paper napkins, cups of coffee machines, everything you need. Passers-by, the viewer, can appreciate the impeccable staging. The picture, again, is not intriguing. It transposes only one situation, an instant. People are isolated from each other in the glass cage where not even the couple speak to each other.¹²

As in Hopper’s painting, which “transposes an instant”, the sequence in *Piazza C.L.N.* has no disturbing elements - until the discovery of Ulmann’s body (Macha Meril) by the window. Hopper’s chromatic palette comes down to blacks, greens, yellows and reds. The characters, as if fused to the place, do not exhibit glaring colors of clothes. However, they visually correspond to the tones given to the scenography. Similarly, the Blue Bar and its people do not seem to reveal a visual discrepancy to their surroundings. They belong in that frozen space, suspended in time.

But Hopper insistently portrays the presence of an unseen figure. Diagonal angles, with photographic impressions, seem to capture these urban moments, whose protagonists are always anonymous characters of the city and the countryside. Inserted in these empty, silent and nocturnal spaces they are caught by a *voyeur* spectator who, oblivious to the scene, observes them in their most banal moments: taking refuge from winter with a cup of hot coffee, waiting for a film to end, or serving the few customers in a bar at night. In view of Hopper’s paintings, we are also inserted in the position of this *voyeur*.

All of this consolidates the encounter between the artist’s paintings and *Profondo Rosso*. While elements common to both are perceived, such as silence, introspection, voyeurism and immobility, details particular to Hopper’s painting enter the film and develop new dimensions. Not only the design of the bar, but a certain feeling of private/public permeates *Profondo Rosso*.

12. Ivo Kranzfelder, *Hopper* (Köln: Taschen, 2003), 147-51. The author’s quote refers to Richard Sennett, *Verfall und Ende des öffentlichen Lebens. Die Tyrannei der Intimität* (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1986), 27-30.



In the painting, exterior and interior spaces get confused because of the use of glass, as Sennett¹³ indicates, precisely because glass surfaces are presented as empty spaces, whose materiality is lost in the compositional solution. In Argento's film, however, glass surfaces play a completely opposite role. Their materiality can not only be seen, as they also manifest a surface to project different images. In other words, while in Hopper's painting they configure as spaces of transition and manage to build certain lack of definition in the rooms, precisely because they appear as "open windows", in Argento, the glass surfaces (and mirrors) make the sites merge. Similarly, interior and exterior become lost into one, reflection and reality combine and there, in place of the transparency of the glass, reflections of the unseen are inserted, which prolong the space, deceive the eye and, again, give the scene a feeling of artificiality.

The Italian director constantly indicates that his inspiration for the film came due to American hyper and photorealism paintings. He identifies this "hyper-reality" even in Hopper's canvas, according to the filmmaker, "I considered that work of art [*Nighthawks*] to be a kind of manifest of the hyper-realism present inside the film"¹⁴. But in addition to Hopper, the feature dialogues with other American productions, in which similar effects of projection, light and transparency are the true protagonists of the paintings.

Among the artists whose work explores a photorealism of surfaces, we can mention, in comparison with Argento, the art of Richard Estes, in which an ambiguous nature persists and the mirroring effect creates a third image, formed on the ultra-polished surface of glass and metal. The same can be identified in Ralph Goings' paintings, whose interiors can be placed next to that unreal space of the daytime Blue Bar. About his work, Amy Dempsey states:

The glowing images of Goings, which refers to the culture of the highway and the objects produced in series - cars, trucks, trailers -, are also stripped of an obvious human presence, and exude a loneliness and isolation that remind us of the work of Edward Hopper.¹⁵

13. Sennett, *Verfall und Ende* cited in Ivo Kranzfelder, *Hopper*, 147-151.

14. "Consideravo quell'opera d'arte una specie di manifesto dell'iperrealismo che il film aveva al suo interno". Dario Argento, *Paura* (Roma: Einaudi, 2014), 171.

15. Amy Dempsey, *Estilos, escolas & movimentos* (São Paulo: Cosac & Naify, 2003), 252.



The approximation between Goings' photorealistic art and Hopper's paintings corroborates the very understanding of what Argento sees as hyperrealism in *Nighthawks*. Both work with urban environments, Goings with a stunning brightness of space and attention to everyday objects, automobiles and diner interiors; Hopper with a minimalism of forms and a conciseness of details; however, the two match the artificiality of Argento's Turin.

Both artists and the filmmaker are interested in conceiving a portrait of the urban landscape. The city, the highways, the polished windows of the skyscrapers, the fancy cars and their shiny hubcaps, metal doors and structures and the effects of rain on the streets and sidewalks create a universe that is so millimetrically designed, that is completely immersed in unreality. It is not about using a reference completely contemporary to the time he is depicting, but to accommodate a certain feeling intrinsic to those painters' compositions that allude to what both of them understand as modern and urban. These elements of hyper-realism run transversely in Dario Argento's filmography. Present in his initial *gialli*¹⁶, but also in *Suspiria*, *Tenebre* and *Trauma*. The effects of light, reflection and translucency are alluded to throughout all his films.

In *Suspiria*, the urban landscape will appear specially in the scene where Suzy (Jessica Harper) talks to Prof. Mandel (Udo Kier) and Prof. Milius (Rudolf Schündler). As the camera is dragged to the characters' dialogue – something also concerning mirrors and fake reflections – the BMW building façade reflects the blurred images of both. Depicting also Argento's second *cameo*, being the first when Suzy enters the taxi, at the beginning of the picture.

In *Profondo Rosso*, this essence of hyper-reality can be seen in the film's photography, signed by Luigi Kuiveller (who had previously worked with Argento in *Le cinque giornate*, 1973). The treatment given to the square makes it look different. He does not initially film the pilotis' structures up to their upper limit, but when he looks back at the buildings, he does it in a vertical traveling shot, making it a binary space, sometimes imagined as very wide and distant, other times cloistered and narrow. This gives us the feeling that the structures are endless. The photographic dimension also denotes a greater distinctiveness of the architecture, highlighting, for example, the various elements of the square. The glass surfaces show prominence, the pilotis of the stores in the background unfold a three-dimensional effect and the massive sculptures by Umberto Baglioni that decorate the *piazza* are inserted in a set of their own.

16. *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo* (1970), *il gatto a nove code* (1971), *4 mosche di velluto grigio* (1971), known as the Animal Trilogy.



A certain idea of silence persists throughout *Profondo Rosso*, just as it persists in Edward Hopper's and the photorealist paintings. They are silent figures, confined to isolated urban spaces, inhabited only by them. Even when there are several characters in the compositions, they do not seem to interact, they place themselves, however, in the same space as the others, trapped in inner thoughts, imprisoned in a frozen atmosphere. In Argento, this solitude is portrayed precisely through the use of sound. The inaudible here expresses the incommunicability of its characters. In the moments that are not taken by silence, we become engulfed by these urban turbulences - vehicle engines, coffee machines, conversations, constructions. Noises that prevent full understanding between the characters, a clear disturbance of balance so blatant in Argento's movies. This quiet atmosphere and, above all, its problems in comprehension, however, are not exclusive to his productions¹⁷.

As stated, the films of the 1960s and 70s, in line with the artistic production of its time, constantly work with these mirroring effects. Some cases resemble that of Argento, like in Aldo Lado's *La corta notte delle bambole di vetro* (1971), in which photorealism is evident in the film's atmosphere. Much of the plot is developed in a hospital environment, where medical instruments, stretchers and space are treated with a quality of politeness and clarity that corresponds to the medical surroundings. Sometimes these images still seem to converge with Gregory's (Jean Sorel) uninterrupted attempt to retrace the steps of the previous night, in order to discover the reason for his arrival at the morgue. The memory, although fragmented, is composed of images of absurd brightness, where buildings, train windows, cars and other features of the urban environment present hyper-realistic connotations.

Another example is *La morte accarezza a mezzanotte* (1972) by Luciano Ercoli. The movie deals with the urban via reflexes and transparencies. For Ercoli, the city (Milan) is not observed through its historical characteristics. Rather, there is a cutting modernity that makes itself noticed. The reflections of the shop windows, the monumentality of the buildings and, above all, the murderer's *voyeuristic* character flood the film with double and ambiguous images.

17. Among them, and perhaps the most famous, a modern city by Jacques Tati in *Playtime* (1967), built especially for the film and as spare parts of the incongruity between human life and modernity. As also expressed in *Traffic* (1971) and *Mon Oncle* (1958), where Mr Hulot is the man who must adapt to modernity and technology and not the other way around. Something similar happens in *Profondo Rosso*. Mainly in Marc's scene in a cafe, where the protagonist tries to talk to Gianna on the phone and is disrupted by the noises and the hot steam of the coffee machine behind him; or even in the scene of the phone booth, by the road.



Italian cinema, in a certain way, had a particular preference for the subject of paranormality and parapsychology in its productions of the 70s. The beginning of *Profondo Rosso* takes place at a parapsychology congress. Other films, like Lucio Fulci's *Una lucertola con la pelle di donna* (1971) and *Sette note in nero* (1977), would also discuss the matter, presenting the idea of visions as method of investigation. In Ercoli's film, however, the issue is not presented as an exclusively supernatural force. Valentina's (Nieves Navarro credited as Susan Scott) visions are caused by the use of hallucinogenic drugs. The modern approach resides not only in the visual aesthetic of the film but is also in the consumption of illegal substances and its effects, a point constantly mentioned among the Italian gothic films of the decade¹⁸.

Modernity as a threat

If in films like *Profondo Rosso* art and modernity are presented by visual quotations, the projection of an urban and introspective silence particular to Hopper's art and the photorealistic realm, Argento works with references to the world of visual arts in almost all his filmography. On a more psychological approach to images, certain films insert artistic imagery using contact through immersion and correspondence between character and work of art. Before being a source of visual inspiration, images are linked as living organisms in these films. This is identified explicitly in *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo* (1970) and *La sindrome di Stendhal* (1996)¹⁹.

In *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo* (1970), his first work on direction, art is unescapable, but also deadly. The protagonist is Sam Dalmas (Tony Musante), an American writer living in Italy with his girlfriend Giulia (Suzy Kendall), stuck in a creative block, fated to write studies on exotic birds of the world's fauna. One night, walking across the streets of Rome, he is faced with a violent scene that takes place inside an art gallery. A man, dressed in an overcoat, a black hat and gloves, inflicts a dagger against a woman's womb. The apparent rapist escapes and Sam, in an attempt to save the victim, finds himself trapped between two large glass doors, which seal the entrance to the establishment, an ironic situation due to his recent writings on birds.

18. We could quote, for example, the hippie tribe of *Il prato macchiato di rosso* (1972, by Riccardo Ghione), *Estratto dagli archivi segreti della polizia di una capitale europea* (1972, by Riccardo Freda and Filippo Ratti [uncredited]), *Flesh for Frankenstein* (1973, by Paul Morrissey, Antonio Margheriti) and *Shock* (1977, by Mario and Lamberto Bava). Also, a similar approach was intended in *Profondo Rosso*, as Argento writes in his autobiography that he had cut a scene where Marc rolls a joint. Argento, *Paura*, 182.

19. This subject matter was explored in Leticia Badan Palhares Knauer de Campos, "A cultura visual no cinema de Dario Argento" (master's thesis, Universidade Estadual de Campinas, 2017), <http://repositorio.unicamp.br/jspui/handle/REPOSIP/322713>



The interior space of the gallery, built meticulously, includes bronze sculptures of large proportions in a vast white marble hall. The items present a slight thematic union, an almost modernist vision of tribal objects. Some resemble weapons or hunting tools, others totems, gods and warriors. The solution for this place is different from the subsequent artistic environments depicted in the movie. Again, the space of brightness and the reflections of light on the doors bring the scene closer to American photorealism art, especially that of Richard Estes.

Throughout the film, we discover that the veiled killer has a strong connection to the art world. According to psychiatrist Rinoldi (Gianni di Benedetto), Monica Ranieri (Eva Renzi) had previously demonstrated paranoid tendencies. She had been brutally attacked by a man ten years earlier and suffered from severe trauma as a result. After coming into contact with one of the paintings by *naïf* artist Berto Consalvi (Mario Adorf) - which represents the fateful scene of her encounter with the psychopath - the trauma resurfaces, Monica begins to identify with her attacker, and protected by her husband Alberto (Umberto Raho) starts murdering the young girls of Rome.

The film reveals another element, which especially connects it to *Suspiria* (1977) and *Tenebre* (1982). Following a confrontation between Sam and Monica, inside the Ranieri Gallery, one of several sculptures exhibited there is dropped by the assassin on Sam, who falls on the floor, trapped under the immense metal plate. The object, part of the iconographic compendium displayed in the hall, depicts a large metallic panel incusted with sharp edges.

Returning to the gallery space, which, at first, he had only partially entered - trapped between the glass cage and where he partakes as an impotent spectator of the homicidal spectacle - Sam participates effectively in the drama staged in the gallery area. Trapped by the menacing artwork, he becomes an easy target for the psychopath who stabs into Sam's open palm the dagger used for the murders. The innumerable pointed blades of the sculpture imprison him against the gallery floor, piercing and injuring his legs.

In *Suspiria*, on the other hand, this element is taken up the moment Suzy (Jessica Harper) enters Mater Suspriorum's lair. In the isolated and dark environment of her dorm, she bumps into an ornament, a large bird on display, which, like the title of Argento's first feature film, flaunts exotic crystal plumage. She stumbles on the object, and the once organized animal tail falls apart in sundry feathers



whose bases are made of a metallic and perforating material. At the sound of thunderstorms, the delusional figure of the witch oscillates before Suzy's eyes. At a glance, she can observe the gleaming silhouette of the school's headmistress. Impaling the bird's quills into her neck, the sharp blade cuts the flaky, rotting flesh of the decaying witch.

In *Tenebre* we also notice a kind of consonance between the sequences of the previous films. Peter Neal (Anthony Franciosa) is an American writer famous for his detective novels. His best seller, namesake of the film, is used as a model by an Italian serial killer, who murder his victims following the homicides described in the book. Peter is called in by the Roman police to assist with the investigations. He discovers the identity of the murderer, Cristiano Berti (John Steiner) – a critic obsessed with the work and life of the American novelist. Neal takes advantage of the situation and embodies the murderer himself. He kills Cristiano and assumes his anonymous identity to insert into the chain of homicides his wife Jane (Veronica Lario) and his agent, Bullmer (John Saxon), who were having an affair. Peter had also been a victim of trauma in his youth, and unlike Monica Ranieri, he was subdued by a woman (Eva Robbins) and thus committed his first murder.

At his wife's apartment, after murdering her, Peter is caught by his assistant Anne (Daria Nicolodi) and detective Germani (Giuliano Gemma). His annihilation occurs when the metallic sculpture in Jane's apartment, located by the entrance door - as in *Suspiria* - comes apart, becomes a dangerous weapon and perforates Peter's abdomen, stabbed by the spear on the apartment wall (as in *L'uccello*) with the cutting blade piercing his body (just like Mater in *Suspiria*). The connection with *Suspiria* goes further. The threatening appeal of the work in Jane's apartment is alluded to earlier in the film, with another sculpture, similar in appearance, exposed in Peter's apartment in Rome. Like the sharp metal wielded by *Suspiria*'s employee - which causes Suzy to feel unwell - the blade of the abstract object and its stunning and evil luster are also highlighted.

Based on the three films, it is possible to identify how Argento tackles the issue of art and modernity. Presented not only as a mechanism of fear, but with proper murderous characteristics. Art used as a weapon expresses its most unfamiliar aspect. Whether exhibited in art galleries, decorative objects in private rooms or apartments, art works always bear resemblance to the murderers' weapons and are seen in the above-mentioned films as instruments of annihilation, as if the works of art turned against their viewers. As Vivien Villani attests:



In general, this poetic idea of homicidal art refers to the violence of aesthetic experience: art lovers can sometimes get hurt with this, until they die. This is the very idea that is made in the works at the gallery in *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo*, with their threatening aspect (especially the one consisting of innumerable terrifying tips), or the sculpture formed of iron thorns, one of which pierces Peter Neal at the end of *Tenebre*.²⁰

If photography and *mise en scène* portray the fleeting and lonely aspects of modernity, art and architecture, on the other hand, accentuate the sinister aspects of the movie's genre. The macabre mansions of gothic cinema constantly displayed a certain uneasiness and obscurity that referred to the glorious past the buildings once carried. In *Profondo Rosso* the *villa del bambino urlante*, in reality the liberty style Villa Scott designed by Fenoglio-LaFleur studio in Turin, represents an archetype so massively explored by gothic literature: the haunted house.

The *villa*, a previous residence occupied by Carlo and his mother (Clara Calamai), was the set of his father's murder. The building was closed, and the corpse of the patriarch sealed inside a room, in an echo of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Cask of Amontillado*. Although the supernatural elements of *Profondo Rosso* do not take place in the interiors of the *villa del bambino urlante* - appearing in a more consistent way by the trope of parapsychology - the building becomes a covert for past mistakes and crimes that consumed the family. Like in many gothic films, the problem resides in the core of the familial world, corrupted by its secrecies and regrets.

Films like *Suspiria*, *L'assassino ha riservato nove poltrone* (1974, by Giuseppe Bennati), *Lisa e il Diavolo* (1973, by Mario Bava), and *Un bianco vestito per Marialé* (1972, by Romano Scavolini) are a few of the cases in which the architecture of the past embodies a real menace to its residents and visitors. The locations' prison-like effects are evident. Like the students of the Tam Academy that are encouraged to always remain inside the properties' walls. Or the impotence of the group in Bennati's film, impeded from abandoning the *villa*.

20. "In generale, quest'idea poetica dell'arte omicida rimanda alla violenza dell'esperienza estetica: a volto gli amanti dell'arte possono ammalarsi di essa, forse morire. È questa stessa idea che rimandano le opere nella galleria de *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo*, col loro aspetto minaccioso (specialmente quella costituita da innumerevoli terrificanti punte), o la scultura formata da cuspidi di ferro, una delle quali trafigge Peter Neal alla fine di *Tenebre*". Vivien Villani, "Arte 'Omicida'. L'ambiguità tra arte e realtà", in *Argento vivo: Il cinema di Dario Argento tra genere e autorialità*, Vito Zagarrío, org. (Venezia: Marsilio Editore, 2008), 174.



This captivity is even further linked to the past and the building in productions such as *Un bianco vestito per Marialé*, where “the interior of the castle mutates into a map of Marialé’s soul”²¹, culminating in a theatrical recreation of Marialé’s trauma, with costumes that refer back to the tragic events, and an eclipsed *Last Supper* reference, all filmed inside the Palazzo Borghese in Artena, Rome. Lastly, in Bava’s film *old ghosts*, that are impossible to escape, keep resurfacing in the manor where Lisa (Elke Sommer) is trapped. Those are *loci* that encapsulate an era so distant and unwanted that they do not consort with the perception of time, in a different but also stagnant way, as in Hopper’s frozen atmospheres.

Modern architecture, on the contrary, reflects the voyeuristic feature and the fragilities of the modern world. An example of this is pointed out again in *Tenebre* (1982), which shows us a different side of Rome, in the light of the modern world, linked to the hyper-realistic compositions mentioned before. For, “Argento returns once again to his idea of a monumental, cold and almost soulless city, focusing his attention on modern buildings (...), on other marble, squares or on luxury isolated houses”²².

For *Tenebre* he chooses the Eur district of Rome as the location, area thought by Mussolini as a celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the March on Rome, that took place on October 1922. Its name, originally titled E42, refers to the 1942 *Esposizione Universale di Roma*, which would be held in the city, but due to World War II, had to be canceled. The architecture of the neighborhood was designed by Marcello Piacentini and the buildings compose a visual unit where fascist architecture prevails.

Luciano Tovoli, who had worked with Argento on *Suspiria* (and later *Dracula 3D*) was responsible for cinematography in the film. As in all the projects that Tovoli acts as director of photography, light and photography conforms to the atmosphere of the film, giving each production a different feeling of unreality. If in *Suspiria* the strong light and the over-saturated primary colors combine with the unreal aspect of the Tam Academy, in *Tenebre* it blends with the regularity and authoritarianism of Eur. Tovoli’s photography highlights the modern characteristics of the locations. The light in *Tenebre* is cold and, according to the

21. Kai Nauman, “Blood on a White Dress, essay in the German Blu-ray *Un bianco vestito per Marialé*”, cited in Curti, *Italian horror*, 60.

22. “Argento torna ancora una volta alla sua idea di città monumentale, fredda e quasi senz’anima, focalizzando la sua attenzione su edifici moderni come questo, su altri marmorei e squadrate o su lussuose ville isolate”. Mauro D’avino y Lorenzo Rumori, *Dario Argento, si gira!* (Roma: Gremese, 2014), 151.



director of photography, it corresponds to a “lunar brightness”²³. Here again we have the aspect of photorealism that, even more evident than in the previous *gialli*, is noticed by a maximum exploitation of urban windows, reflections and, above all, the effects of light inside and outside homes. As Argento notes, the photography “is of absolute realism and unbelievable unreality”²⁴.

The whole notion of contrasting interior and exterior spaces in cinema with respectively warm and cold lights falls with *Tenebre*. Exterior and interior become one, increasing the aspects of a constant non-place, always unsafe and easily penetrable by the killer. The difference between ancient and modern architecture in Italian horror cinema abides in the distinction between the types of hazard the respective buildings tend to offer.

In Italian cinema, there are several cases that focus on the exploration of modern architecture. Outside the horror genre, Michelangelo Antonioni was the main director to consolidate the theme. In addition to his attentive look at architecture and the urban environment, which Argento is inspired by, reflections are strongly celebrated in his films, as we see in productions like *La Notte* (1961), *Blow-up* (1966) and others. The first, filmed in Milan, illustrates the city’s windows, with its huge glass doors, supported by its metal stilts, which sometimes reinforce the distance and the incommunicability of the characters. In *Blow-up*, the glass surfaces in Thomas’s photographic studio also mirror an invisible environment of space, of characters hidden within the distance and imperceptible parts of the frame.

The inspiration for filming in the neighborhood comes, according to Argento, from the prominence given to the district by Antonioni in *L’eclisse* (1962), which is sustained as the main location of the film²⁵. Eur had been the stage for other Argento projects such as *4 mosche di velluto grigio*, in which Nina and Roberto Tobias’s house is the same used by Riccardo (Francisco Rabal) in Antonioni’s film²⁶. If in *L’eclisse* the neighborhood manages to bring a sense of collapse in relationships – buildings still under construction, with their beams and structures flaunted in the open sky - in Argento’s films the neighborhood is characterized as a restless space. In *Tenebre* the

23. Comment of Luciano Tovoli, taken from the interview Eric Paccoud, dir., *Tenebres: la maîtrise d’un genre* (Paris: Wild side video and Fenetre sur Prod, 2010), m. 26.

24. Argento’s comment on the same interview.

25. D’avino y Rumori, *Dario Argento*, 71-72.

26. The house is also used as location of *Giornata nera per l’ariete* (1971, Luigi Bazzoni), released in the same year of *4 mosche* and used as residence of Helen (Silvia Monti), with a few changes in its interior, being the biggest a replacement of the suspended fireplace for plants.



structural rigor of the houses, the long urban streets and the carefully set gardens give way to disturbed characters: homeless people who try to take sexual advantage of women, murderers who seek to free humanity from corruption.

As in the city space, the internal settings of the film become blurred. In the modern architectural structures, full of large, polished windows and concrete structures, what prevails is the sobriety of the spaces. The absence of ornaments, the brightness of the walls and the meticulous structuring of the atmosphere characterize these easily accessible places, in which voyeurism is strongly emphasized by the point of view shot²⁷. The killer's house, that of Peter Neal's wife and even his apartment in Rome, are places in which danger is no longer the ornamentation of old building styles²⁸ as in gothic horror, it resides however in the very structuring of modern architecture, within the rationalist skeleton of the house.

The glass skin buildings imply this constant presence of a *voyeur*. We can see this as of the first murder in the film, when Elsa Manni (Anna Pieroni), after trying to steal a copy of Peter's novel, *Tenebrae*, is chased by a man while returning to her home. From the window, through the space of the thin white curtains, he sees her being murdered by the maniac obsessed with punishing "human perversions"²⁹.

Like in Elsa's home, the first killer's house (the critic Cristiano Berti) is one of the places where this concept is also identified. Located on via Perù in Formello, Rome, the house was designed by architect Sandro Petti as his own residence. The interior is decorated with several works by Mimmo Rotella, and the style of the structure is sober. The light, as in the rest of the film, is impregnated with a bluish tint. The space does not display many decorative objects. Unlike other films that use the same house as location, such as *Acqua and Sapone* (1983, Carlo Verdone) and *Le Comiche* (1990, Neri Parenti) that seek to present a brightness within the architecture and a sumptuous, noble aspect of the location by means of showing assorted valuable objects exposed there, in Argento, Petti's architecture is the true element that stands out.

27. The POV shot is a trademark of *gialli* films. It assumes the perspective of the killer, often depicting the gloved hands and the weapon of the crime. Argento explores extensively this type of shot in the Italian genre, and Argento's use of the POV shot as the killer point of view affected horror cinema overseas, as in the first slashers of the turning of the decade: *Halloween* (1978, by John Carpenter) and *Friday the 13th* (1980, by Sean S. Cunningham). The first movie in which such shot is implemented as the antagonists' point of view is *Peeping Tom* (1960, by Michael Powell).

28. Like the *villa del bambino urlante* in *Profondo Rosso*, or the mansions of the *matres* in *Suspiria* (1977), *Inferno* (1980) and *La terza madre* (2007).

29. "*Tenebrae* is about the human perversions and its effects on society" is the way the critic and murderer, Berti, describes Peter Neal's novel. He commits the murders as a way of punishing the abnormal people of society.



Nevertheless, while the murderer manages to easily gain access to the residences, because he also lives in one of these spaces, he becomes like the others, a victim. When Peter Neal trespasses Berti's house (with the help of his assistant, Gianni), the TV critic is stalked and observed by the new murderer, and finally killed by him. The entire area, exterior and interior of the building is shown as a lookout point. Behind a bush, Gianni (Christian Borromeo) witnesses Berti's death. The sequence is shown to us in a set of shots between the inside and outside of the room, so that we observe not only the death of the critic, but the vision of horror in Gianni's face.

Another space still appears prominently in *Tenebre*, and once again, a murder takes place inside of it. It is the home of the girlfriends, Tilde (Mirella D'Angelo) and Marion (Mirella Banti). The building is Villa Ronconi, designed by architect Saverio Busiri Vici in Casal Palocco, Rome. Built between 1970 and 1973, Villa Ronconi is highlighted by the exaltation of reinforced concrete and visible modulated structures. The façade ornament, which is not noticeable in Petti's architecture, emerges from the very materials that conceive the building, the rectangular concrete structures extend at different sizes and levels, creating a visual pattern that works both as a structural base of the upper balconies and as decorative elements of the building.

Modern architecture, whether inhabited by the killer or the victims, is always a dangerous space. We can also see this in Roberto Tobias and Nina's house in *4 mosche di velluto grigio*, in the urban surroundings of Turin de *Il gatto a nove code* and in the Galleria Ranieri of *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo*. The rationality and logic necessary for the calculated acts of homicide do justice to the spaces in which violence and deaths occur, wrapped within rigid, regular and cold structures, where *liberty* ornaments have no space and whose interior, before presenting itself as a place of safety, is seen as an austere and inhospitable environment. As Alberto Pezzotta argues:

Argento shows the outbreak of violence in a modern, anonymous and urban space. [...] Modernity is characterized as cruel and threatening, which obliges us to see the unseen. With all the sadistic overtones on which rivers of critical paint are poured.³⁰

30. The first comment refers to *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo* and the second to *Tenebre*. See Alberto Pezzotta, "La modernità imperfetta", in *Argento vivo: Il cinema di Dario Argento tra genere e autorialità*, org. Vito Zagarrò (Venezia: Marsilio Editore, 2008), 85-86.



This is even evident in both architecture and works of art. The one that finally kills Peter Neal in the apartment is also a rigid and cold structure that illuminates the aspect of *Tenebre's* urban modernity. If with the old mansions and *villas* the terror resided within the walls, representing a physical threat to its inhabitants, in modern architecture the peril dwells in the outer world. Like the rationality that unravels its materiality, modern buildings tend to remain in the domain of the witness, never assuming a role as the agent of horror. It only complies with the demands of its own nature, the one Pezzotta points to, the ability to reveal the unseen. Modern buildings have the peculiarity of displaying violence but never engendering it, for that is an artifice relinquished to the supernatural past of tradition. To mention other films that trace a resembling approach on the topic, *Perché quelle strane gocce di sangue sul corpo di Jennifer?* (1971, by Giuliano Carnimeo) also indicates modern architecture as a place of entrapment. Mikel J. Koven talks about the scene in *La dolce morte*:

But if most of *giallo* cinema is occupied by prosaic moments of narrative, it is the set pieces wherein the poetry of cinema, namely image and sound, come together. For example, Carnimeo films the central love scene between Andrea (George Hilton) and Jennifer (Edwige Fenech) differently. Here, architectural features within Andrea's house often frame the lovers, reflecting thematically how Andrea himself is being framed by the architecture he designs; that is, he is the prime suspect in the murder mystery because he is the architect of the building.³¹

Italian cinema was very nourished by the striking characteristics of modernity to reveal the threat, insecurities and non-belonging of its characters and spaces. Although there are many points that reveal this relation between modernity and detachment, horror and *giallo* are shown as genres that address the issue constantly.

Within films of the genre, even a *giallo* like *Non si sevizia un paperino* (1972), by Lucio Fulci, which takes place entirely in the arid and remote landscapes of Foggia and Aquila, modernity is an element of distinction between the residents of the village and the outsider Patrizia (Barbara Bouchet). Her house accentuates the character's incompatibility and distancing with the fictional village of Accendura. The real location of the house is, as in *Tenebre*, set in the Eur district. Patrizia feels like a complete outsider. Her richness contrasts with the poorness of the villagers. Her sexuality is the corrupting element of the killer's infant victims, conforming a complete opposite position against the bigoted inclination of the place. As Koven once again marks:

31. Mikel J. Koven, "A Perverse Sublime": Excess and the Set Piece in the *Giallo*", in *La dolce morte. Vernacular Cinema and the Italian Giallo Film* (Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2006), 131.



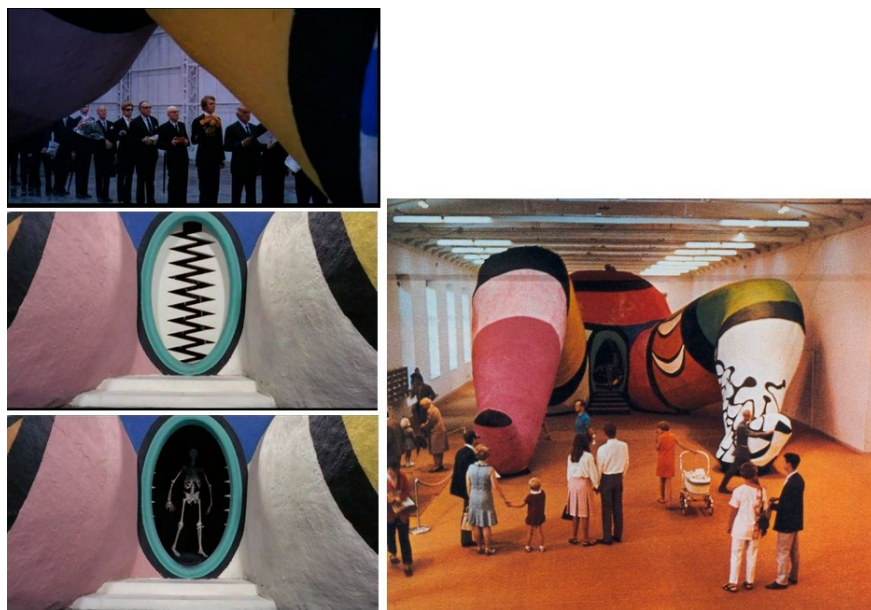
Unlike high-art filmmakers, specifically Pier Paolo Pasolini, Fulci is not glorifying the rural way of life per se; yet neither is he presenting an argument wherein modernity equals progress—either position is much too simplistic. Instead, Fulci presents our perception of the landscape ambivalently—at once bucolic and modern. In Fulci’s previous film, *A Lizard in a Woman’s Skin*, which takes place in London, the sexual repression of the characters is framed against grand Victorian architecture, reflecting that on the one hand the Victorian age built grand churches and the Royal Albert Hall (which is supposed to be the Old Bailey in this film), but also was responsible for the stereotype of the cold, unemotional “stiff-upper-lip,” sexually frustrated modern English. In Fulci’s films, as in the rest of *giallo* cinema, the effects of [sic] modernity are ambivalent.³²

As pointed, this ambivalence of modernity is present in Fulci’s filmography. It comes back to the idea at the heart of Italian gothic horror of the 1960s and 70s, that of the incongruity and disparity among different classes and generations, past and modern times. The speed of social and urban changes in the mid and late decades of the 20th century mark, in horror and in *giallo*, the conflicts of strangeness and misplacement. The genre that for decades was marginalized from the Italian cinema circuit proved to be a faithful representative of the fears and concerns of its time. An evident criticism of the vices of modernity, their disproportionate and obtuse spaces, but also a sort of homage to the splendors of modern life.

But if modern architecture is doomed to marginalize its residents to the threat of invasion, and the gothic mansions, ancient *villas* and abandoned castles on the other hand conform a place of entrapment to the past and its traumas, how does one escape from this constantly menacing world? Well, we destroy the source of evil. We corrupt the incorruptible, as the once writer turned killer in *Tenebre*. In Argento’s films, the power of the corrupted dark mansions is turned into to ashes as are the witches and corpses that they imprison. Like in *Profondo Rosso*, *Suspiria*, *Inferno* and *La Terza Madre* (2007) it is necessary to make the building’s structures collapse to completely overcome the horror of its existence, and thus Italian horror cinema often emphasizes that is possible to overcome the problems of the past, but the dangers of the unknown will always be lurking in the dark days of time.

32. Mikel J. Koven, “Space and Place in Italian *Giallo* Cinema: The Ambivalence of Modernity”, in *La dolce morte. Vernacular Cinema and the Italian Giallo Film* (Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2006), 54.

Figures 1 and 2. Frames of *Femina Ridens* and *Hon/Elle*



Source: Piero Schivazappa, dir., *Femina Ridens*, 1969, 108 m. (left); Niki de Saint-Phalle, *Hon/Elle*, 1966, Instalation, Stokholm Museum of Art (right).

Figures 3 and 4. Frames of *Profondo Rosso* and *Nighthawks* paint



Source: Dario Argento, dir., *Profondo Rosso*, 1975, 127 m. (left); Edward Hopper, *Nighthawks*, 1942, Oil on canvas, Art Institute of Chicago (right).





Figures 5 and 6. Paintings



Source: Richard Estes, *Café Express*, 1975 oil on canvas, Art Institute of Chicago, United States (up); Richard Estes, *Broadway and 64th Street, Spring '84*, 1984, oil on canvas, private collection (down).

Figure 7. Windows



Source: Ralph Goings, oil on canvas, private collection.

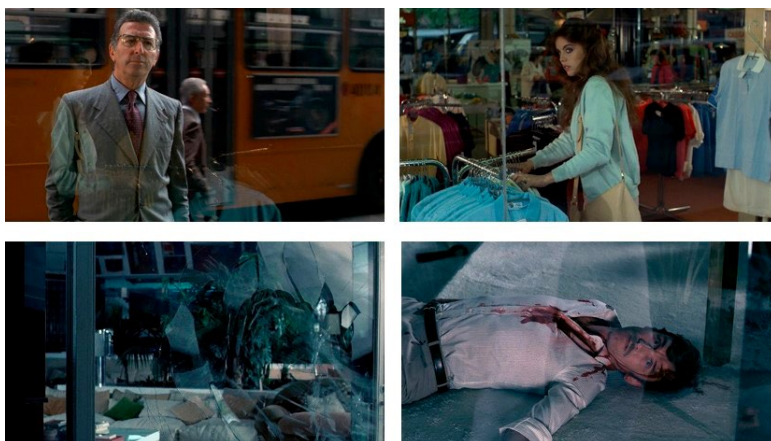


Figure 8. *The reflections and the hyper-realistic atmosphere*



Source: Dario Argento, dir., *Profondo Rosso*, 1975, 127 m.

Figure 9. *The urban and the mirror effect*



Source: Dario Argento, dir., *Tenebre*, 1982, 101 m.



Figure 10. Frames of *La morte accarezza a mezzanotte*



Source: Luciano Ercoli, dir., *La morte accarezza a mezzanotte*, 1972, 102 m.

Figure 11. Sam Dalmas at the gallery sequence



Source: Dario Argento, dir., *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo*, 1970, 93 m.

Figure 12. The interior of the Ranieri Gallery



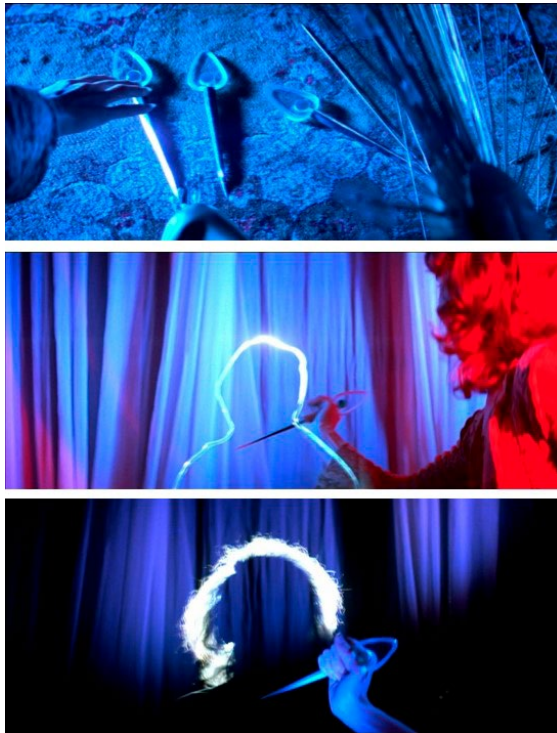
Source: Dario Argento, dir., *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo*, 1970, 93 m.

Figure 13. Art as a dangerous object



Source: Dario Argento, dir., *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo*, 1970, 93 m.

Figure 14. The Bird of Crystal plumage used to kill the Mater



Source: Dario Argento, dir., *Suspiria*, 1977, 99 m.





Figure 15. *The sculpture killing Peter Neal*



Source: Dario Argento, dir., *Tenebre*, 1982, 101 m.

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