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Riccardo Freda, Mario Bava and Dario Argento*

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Interacting with Horror: Archaeology of the Italian Horror

Genre from its Origins until the Eighties.

Riccardo Freda, Mario Bava and Dario Argento

Gianpiera Conti

Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy



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Interacting with Horror: Archaeology of the Italian Horror Genre from its Origins until the Eighties. Riccardo Freda, Mario Bava and Dario Argento

ABSTRACT

This research examines Italian horror cinema from its origins (1957) until the late 1980s, with particular focus on the productions of three Italian directors: Riccardo Freda, Mario Bava and Dario Argento. My research is divided into two distinct parts: theoretical and analytical. By adopting a variety of theories, which mainly follow three hermeneutic traditions – psychoanalytical (Freud, 1919; Abraham & Torok, 1994), pragmatist (Wiley, 1994) and social interactionist (Collins, 2000, 2004) – the first section of my project aims to outline three distinct phases of the circulation of horror symbols. The second part is devoted to a series of case studies, which function as exemplary illustrations of the elaborated theoretical framework. In order to define the field of analysis, my attention focuses on four thematic discourses: spaces, objects, identities and actions. A critical examination of selected films from Freda, Bava and Argento's productions delineate the directors' constant and extensive use of intertextual references to symbols already circulated at a first level.

The theoretical framework of this thesis, in conjunction with filmic analysis, will contribute to a more exhaustive understanding of the archaeology of the genre. After establishing that singular theories do not supply sufficient information on genre issues, this study aims to address the gap in critical knowledge, reviewing the potentiality of the Italian horror cinema through a multidisciplinary discourse. An interpretation of the Italian horror genre can only exist in relation to a series of interplays with a multitude of factors. Hence, discussing the genre through filmic and extra-filmic schemes (including editing and marketing processes, censorship and spectatorship issues and intertextual references to external and internal archives of horror), this work acknowledges interactionism as a space of debate, which, encompassing several perspectives at a time (psychoanalytic, pragmatist, sociologic, etc.) allows a dialogic and exhaustive investigation of the Italian horror genre.

Key terms: Italian horror cinema, interaction ritual chains, intertextuality, uncanny, gothic, genre, censorship, religion, mythology, natural and supernatural, gender role, exploitation, cinema industry, psychic phantoms, double, permanent and temporary visitors, internal conversation, archives of horror, visual art, identity, monster, victim.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is a record of work undertaken by myself, that it has not been the subject of any previous application for a degree, and that all sources of information have been duly acknowledged.

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INTRODUCTION

Designed to elicit fear and to affect the audience, both emotionally and physically, horror has been a popular genre since its origins. Interest in the horror genre continues to generate debates both in media and in academic contexts, and yet opinions diverge not only about its definition (Schatz, 1981; Altman, 1999; Neale, 2000; Jancovich, 2002), but also about its significance, reception and changes. Several scholars (Derry, 1977; Tudor, 1997; Carroll, 1990; Clover, 1992, among many others) have tried to formulate a definition of horror, in order to distinguish it from other similar genres, such as thriller and science fiction. Their attempt, however, has been problematic, highlighting the complexity of genre categorization. Horror, in fact, is a multifaceted genre, which is difficult to encompass in one univocal classification. The most accurate definition can be provided only by taking into consideration each of its categories and subgenres (Prohászková, 2012: 132).

Research into the horror genre has been extensive, involving investigations from disparate points of view: philosophical (see for example, Carroll, 1990; Hawkins, 2002; Fahy, 2010), psychological (Tudor, 1995, 1997, 2002; Freeland, 2000; Shaw, 2001), sociological (Jancovich, 2002; Hills, 2005), or feminist (Mulvey, 1975; Clover, 1992; Creed, 1993, 2005; MacCormack, 2008). However, the theoretical debate on the subject remains incomprehensive. The theories advanced, if taken singularly, are valuable and illuminating on certain features of horror texts, but they do not directly address the question of the archaeology of the genre, in terms of its birth, development and decline. In order to engage with these theoretical issues and solve the lack of an adequate investigation, this work seeks to address the following research questions:

How are horror symbols generated and how do they circulate? How can they be identified as national specific?

How do audiences internalize horror symbols and to what extent are these effective in the human mind?

How do interaction rituals affect the genesis, development and decline of the Italian horror genre?

To answer these questions and facilitate a more explicative knowledge of the genre, this thesis sets out to rework earlier methodologies and shape new dialogic propositions of analysis. Suggesting the limitations of the existing approaches to horror cinema studies, I argue the need to reconsider the common methods of reading and interpreting the genre. The use of a singular investigation is inexhaustive in its aim of answering genre issues in their totality. Hence, this study proposes an interdisciplinary approach which mainly focuses on three hermeneutic traditions: psychoanalytical (Freud, 1919; Abraham & Torok, 1994), pragmatist (Wiley, 1994) and sociological (Collins, 2004). The purpose of this position is to advance a theoretical framework that, acknowledging interactionism as a space of debate, informs a dialogic investigation of the birth, evolution and decline of the Italian horror genre from its origins (1957) until the 1980s.

To build my arguments, this work will be divided into two parts: theoretical and analytical. The division aims to establish a method for interpreting the dynamics of the Italian horror genre within a diachronic framework. The first part, discussed in three chapters, will introduce a review of the literature on horror cinema, setting the research methodology and providing, consequently, the fundamental basis for my discussion. The second part, discussed in four chapters, will involve a detailed investigation of specific thematic groups: spaces, objects, identities and actions. Their analysis will be conducted through case studies which are intended to identify the constants and diversities that recur in the genre. Films by Riccardo Freda, Mario Bava and Dario Argento have been chosen for three main reasons: the presence of innovative elements identifiable as national specific; the themes and horror archetypes adopted in their films; and the popularity of their productions and their consequent impact on the horror industry. The analytical section will support the elaborated theoretical framework, providing new reading strategies on Italian cinema studies.

By tracing the genesis of symbols and beliefs, which are pivotal in the origins and development of the horror genre, chapter 1 aims to answer the first research questions: How are horror symbols generated and how do they circulate? How can they be identified as national specific? In order to investigate this topic, I will discuss first the importance of social interactions and emotional engagement in the formation

of horror symbols. With regard to this, Emile Durkheim's (1912) and Erving Goffman's (1956, 1959, 1961, 1967, 2005) inferences about the interpersonal forces which generate social solidarity will offer an essential starting point in the discussion. While Durkheim focuses his attention on the social function of religion, Goffman demonstrates that his interpretative structure can be turned from the religious context to the micro-sociological one of everyday rituals. In other words, he shows that solidarity can be generated not only from formal rituals, such as religious ceremonies, but also from face-to-face informal exchanges, which involve a mutual focused attention and emotion. These encounters are defined by Goffman as interaction rituals (IRs).

Following the lines of Durkheim (1912) and Goffman (1956), Randall Collins (2000, 2004) moves a step further, adding that "interaction rituals can be linked together to produce long-term social bonding and emotional energy" (Rossner, 2011: 173). Collins identifies four main components necessary for a successful ritual: 1) group assembly; 2) a demarcation between insiders and outsiders, which provides participants a privileged position of inclusiveness; 3) a shared focus of attention; 4) and a shared common mood. The combination of these elements generates "collective effervescence" (Durkheim, 2011 [1975]: 151) and emotional energy (EE): a set of long-term feelings, which varies according to the outcome of interaction rituals. If the rituals are unsuccessful, the EE will decrease; conversely, if successful, the EE will increase, leading to the formation of solidarity and symbols of group membership that favour interactive continuities and the stability of the social structure. Symbols invested with strong values (EE) circulate in further rituals (creating interaction chains) and in private contexts (favouring an intimate third-order circulation in internal conversations).

The understanding of rituals as fundamental generators of symbols will support the idea of archives of horror. This concept refers to all those kinds of repositories (social, cultural, visual, artistic, and so on) which preserve a selection of symbols identified as horrific. It is difficult to provide a univocal comprehension of what is horrific and what is not, since the notion of horror encompasses diverse forms and meanings across the globe. However, to designate a general definition, horror is about fear, visceral disgust, revulsion and abnormal threatening monsters, which

include both supernatural (Carroll, 1990: 145) and natural entities (Freeland, 2000: 10). Thus, archives of horror have to be intended as dynamic systems, which, following the evolution of the genre, work as collectors of symbols able to elicit fear. The notion sheds light on the interactions between old and new symbols, past and present and our positioning within these interactions.

Two distinct archives of horror can be identified: external and internal. These will be discussed in chapters 1 and 3 respectively. While the “external archives” include a collective set of symbols and beliefs recognized and referenced as horrific by the society (darkness, death, blood, etc.), “internal archives” refer to personal configurations of symbols and values which, entertained in the human mind, differentiate individuals from one another. By tracing the genesis of external archives back to the primordial existence of humankind (Jung, 1964; Struck, 2004), I will discuss how their formation needs to be interpreted as a social factor, dominated by interpersonal rituals. As a matter of fact, social conventions partly designate aesthetic meanings of horror, according to a mutual sensibility. To put it differently, through interaction rituals, symbols are charged with emotional energy, assuming specific connotations and acquiring power and sacredness conferred and recognized by the collectiveness (Durkheim, 1965 [1912]: 215). These observations highlight that, collective archives offer information about the national context in which horror archetypes have been generated. Horror symbols are not the same across the globe. Each country develops specific local, regional or national sets of myths and legends, which circulate in their literature, cinema and arts in general. In line with this, chapter 1 will investigate a series of common cultural elements in the Italian social background, mainly identified in four sub-archives: Catholic religion, mythological traditions, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century gothic literature, and visual arts. These repositories of collective memories, documented as emblematic generators of fear, provided fundamental sources of inspiration for Italian horror cinema.

The analysis of archives/sub-archives of horror will lay out the dynamics of the genre as well as three levels of circulation of symbols, which will be investigated in chapters 1, 2 and 3. The first level will be individuated in the context of the primordial phases of the growth of humankind (this concerns the first social interactions from

which symbols emerged), the second in Italian horror cinema and the third in the privacy of internal conversations. The identification of these three stages of circulations will provide a broader understanding of how the genre constructs intertextual relationships, encouraging the development of horror subgenres.

To delve deeper into this aspect, chapter 2 will first frame genre issues, by outlining and extending Rick Altman's (1999) insights about the topic. The definition of genre is inherently complex. Conventionally, the term "genre" refers to a system of codes based on specific conventions of contents (motifs, settings) and forms (editing techniques, style) which are shared by texts/narratives/films. These codes enable "an audience to determine rapidly and with some complexity the kind of narrative they are viewing" (Turner, 2006: 119). Despite being one of the most popular, this simplistic definition does not pin down the epistemology of genres, their industrial position and their evolution. Altman criticizes the generality of previous studies in genre criticism (Propp, 1958; Frye, 1953; Bazin, 1971; Todorov, 1990), and, in an attempt to establish a more exhaustive theoretical grounding for the genre, proposes a combination of models, which simultaneously includes both semantics and syntactic discourses. This binomial approach highlights the dynamics of variations, repetitions and conflicts within the syntax and semantics of the genre. While the semantic approach refers to all of those conventional elements which define the genre (narrative, settings, characters, etc.), the syntactic discourse concerns the relationships between these elements and their position in the narrative structure (Altman, 1984: 10). As Altman argues, only a simultaneous use of both definitions can provide a solution to the genre issue. Moreover, in his debate on the filmic text, Altman points out that, in terms of genre identification, it is essential to consider not only the semiotics, but also other facets, such as distribution, audiences' expectations, the cinema industry, etc. (Altman, 1999: 210).

These considerations clearly strengthen the awareness of genre as a flexible system, which reacts to several factors, developing and changing over the course of time (Altman, 1999; Neale, 2000; Stam, 2000). The transit of elements from one category to another is an example of this flexibility. In the horror genre, for instance, some of the conventionalized features cross the boundaries of horror, and are integrated in films

belonging to other cycles (peplum, comedy, drama, fantasy, etc.). This phenomenon leads to the formation of hybrid subgenres, where old conventionalized elements are repeated, while new ones are introduced on the base of the audience's response. This allows a reinforcement of old symbols and the creation of new metaphors of fear that, circulated in further cinematic ritual chains, acquire new meanings and emotional energy.

To extend this topic, chapter 2 will examine a series of films in which horror archetypes interact with features of various natures (gothic, comedy, science fiction, thriller etc.). The way in which conventional elements are manipulated, decontextualized and reinvented (chapter 5) offers an attraction for the audience, affecting the economy of the genre. Between the late 1970s and the late 1980s, when the censorship constraints were more relaxed, the Italian film industry became a lucrative medium which exploited themes and moral taboos that were at the core of Italian society at that time: marriage (Bava's *Il rosso segno della follia*, 1970), homosexuality (Argento's *Quattro mosche di velluto grigio*, 1971), sexual freedom (D'Amato's *Emanuelle*, 1974), racism (Siciliano's *Scorticateli vivi*, 1978), consumerism (Fulci's *Zombie 2*, 1979), religion (Berruti's *Suor omicidi*, 1978), feminist movements (Argento's *Profondo rosso*, 1970) and political issues. Considerably more violent than their foreign counterparts, the Italian productions staged an explicit sexualization of violence. Merging sex and gore, the *giallo* tradition in particular engaged with themes related to gender issues, misogyny and sadism. These motifs, shocking and appealing at the same time, indulged the viewers' voyeuristic fantasies, achieving great success in both national and international markets.

This implies that a more comprehensive understanding of genres requires an attentive consideration of the dialogic dynamic between audiences' expectations and the cinema industry. In explaining this need Altman makes a distinction between ritual and ideological functions. While the ritual approach (Cawelti, 1971, 1976; Braudy, 1976; Sobchack, 1985; Wood, 1975; Wright, 1975; Schatz, 1981) focuses on the film industry's response to societal pressure and audiences' expectations, the ideological one considers the effects that the economic and political interests of the cinema industry have on audiences. These positions are opposed. Altman combines them, proposing that the

success of a genre depends not on its reflection of an audience ideal, nor on the cinema industry's agency, but on the ability to carry out both ritual and ideological functions simultaneously (Altman, 1999: 223). Thus, genres can extend their popularity only "when the audience's desire for ritual satisfaction intersects with the ideological drive for social control" (Grant, 2012: 48). It is evident that by suggesting a diachronic, historical and developmental approach, Altman attempts to establish a more exhaustive definition of the genre. Relying on such considerations and entertaining different perspectives, my research aims to investigate the birth, structure, evolution and decline of Italian horror cinema from its origins (1957) until the 1980s. Throughout the thesis, it will be demonstrated that the only way to define the genre and its dynamics in depth is to use a dialogic and multi-layered approach.

After exploring the importance of external archives of horror and the second-order circulation of symbols, chapter 3 aims at answering this research question: How do audiences internalize horror symbols and to what extent are these effective in the human mind? To answer this question I will examine the concept of internal archives. The investigation of these intimate repositories of fear will outline a third-order circulation of symbols, which takes place in the human mind. To delve into this aspect, the attention will focus first on the debates that have arisen in the inflection provided by Freud's theory of the uncanny (1919) and, in particular, by the models of repression (Wood, 1978), the abject (Kristeva, 1982) and surmounted beliefs (Schneider, 2000). The identification of these three groups will allow a better understanding of the effectiveness of horror on the viewers.

Discussing the paradox of horror, Robin Wood (1986) makes a distinction between two types of repression: basic and surplus repression. While basic repression, which is "universal, necessary, and inescapable", relates to self-control of our drives and desires, surplus repression, which is "culture-specific and contingent", refers to all those social norms and preconceptions which, oppressing our innate primordial nature, influence our agency in the social context (Wood, 1986: 70). This distinction explains the repression of desires that could be expressed but that are treated as a menace to the existing order. While Wood (1986; 2002) mainly grounds his theories on the first definition of the uncanny, related to the return of the repressed, Steven

Schneider (1999) makes the second definition, which is connected to surmounted beliefs, the main focus of his research. In the attempt to offer an account of how horror might be effective to our imagination, Schneider proposes a version of uncanniness, which delineates different personifications of our surmounted beliefs as conceptual metaphors of horror-film monsters. He distinguishes three main categories: that the dead can return to life (dead bodies and evil spirits); the omnipotence of thoughts (telekinesis); and the existence of doubles (robots, mannequins, etc.). According to Schneider, these personifications constitute the main success of horror-film monsters.

Another way to interpret the effectiveness of horror resides in the notion of abjection. The term has been taken up by many theorists (Douglas, 1966; Kristeva, [1982]; Creed, 1993; Crane, 1994) and it has become an influential concept in the field of horror cinema studies. The abject is “what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (Kristeva, 1982: 4). This unclear delineation blurs the boundaries that are necessary to define the self. In other words, it disturbs the line between human and non-human, the not-us and the subject, enhancing, therefore, a feeling of distress (Crane, 1994: 35). Extending the notion of the abject as delineated by Kristeva (1982), Barbara Creed (2004) [1993] provides a more comprehensive explanation of the attraction and effectiveness of horror in the human mind. Creed (1993) suggests the central source of horror in the viewer is provided by the female body, coded as “the monstrous-feminine”. Bearing this in mind, she explores various figures of female monstrosity, connected with concepts of impurity and marginality. The monstrous-feminine refers to societies’ conception of “what it is about *woman that is shocking, terrifying, horrific, abject*” (Creed, 1996: 35). In a standard male-dominated society, the feminine is perceived as other and monstrous. Hence, according to Creed, horror films show the feminine as castrating mother (Argento’s *Suspria*, 1977), witch (Bava’s *La maschera del demonio*, 1960) or demon (*Inferno*, 1980). Creed assumes that the central ideological project of popular horror films is the purification of the abject. In other words, in their attempt to cause a confrontation with the abject, horror films strive to trigger a process of purification and a restoration of the boundaries between human and non-human

(Creed, 1993: 14). Thus horror films become a form of social rituals, whereby viewers witness the abject in order to expel it.

The return of the repressed, the abject and the reconfirmation of surmounted beliefs, which show different features of the uncanny, favour a valuable understanding of the internalization and effects of the horrific in the human psyche. However, many aspects have been left unexplored. In fact, the uncanny does not provide a complete and exhaustive account of genre issues. Other aspects relevant to the comprehension of the potency of horror in the viewers' response require further examination. The effectiveness of horror is also related to subtle elements, which are undetectable to the human mind but are nevertheless effective to the Self. Traumas, gaps and secrets of others, for instance, affect the perception of horror and the circulation of its symbols at an unconscious level. To develop my arguments and fill the gap left unexplored in critical knowledge by the psychoanalytical approaches to the genre, chapter 3 will engage with Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok's (1987) theories of psychic phantoms and trans-generational transmission.

Abraham and Torok's definition of trauma contributes to the construction of key concepts such as trans-generational phantoms and intra-psychoic crypts. As they argue, the impossibility of introjecting the trauma leads to the formation of psychic phantoms (the experiential fragments of the traumatic event that are impossible to assimilate), which are preserved in isolated regions within the subject's ego named crypts. The preservation occurs at an unconscious level, through the process of incorporation. Inhabiting the ego like an internal other, the phantoms haunt the subject from the inside (Derrida, 1985: 57). The phantoms can be trans-generationally transmitted from one generation to another in the form of a gap, a silent presence incomprehensible to the individual who inherits it. Preserving this gap, the individual can develop symptoms that derive not directly from his own life but from the parents' or ancestor's psychic conflicts and traumas. In other words, the inherited gap does not derive from his own repression, but from "a direct empathy with the unconscious of the rejected psychic matter of a parental object" (Abraham, 1994: 181).

Abraham and Torok's theories of psychic phantoms and trans-generational transmission, never applied before in Italian horror cinema studies, provide new

perspectives of reading and interpreting the process of internalization of horror symbols in the viewer's mind. To gain further insights into the topic, the psychoanalytical framework of this thesis will be extended to include a pragmatist one, and in particular to the model of the internal conversation elaborated by Norbert Wiley (1994). Wiley's theory reveals that a third-order circulation of symbols takes place in the private dimension of internal conversations. In other words, individuals, in their solitude, re-elaborate thoughts and beliefs within their own mind, through inner speeches. Drawing on the works of Charles Sanders Peirce (1934), George Herbert Mead (1934) and others (see *The Chicago School of Pragmatism*, Shook, 2000), Wiley argues that the self can be interpreted as an internal conversation, or a triologue in which the present self (I) talks to the future self (You) about the past self (Me).

In addition to these three main components of the Self, Wiley introduces the concept of temporary and permanent visitors: internalized others that appear in our mind and are involved in the conversational dynamics between I, Me and You (Wiley, 1994: 54). While the temporary visitors occupy the Self in a transitory way, the permanent ones do it in a persistent way. They are images "sedimented into the Self as regulatory aspects", described in Mead's terms as "generalised others" (Mead, 1934: 155) or in Athens' terms as "phantom others" (Athens, 1994: 525). In the act of conversing with ourselves, in fact, we entertain external presences which draw from both linguistic and visual worlds. It is evident, then, that our inner speeches involve not just our Self but also the presences of others, which, becoming persistent in our mind, widely affect the dialogical dynamics of the Self.

With regard to this, horror cinema, with its fictional imageries, voices and sounds, exercises a strong power upon its viewers. The internalization of images, as will be discussed in chapter 7, also involves the interplay of senses, which can emotionally affect the perception of films in terms of inner speech. From these considerations, it follows that the triad I-Me-You is inhabited by third visitors, which belong to a sensorial world, parallel to the real one. By integrating Wiley's insights with Abraham and Torok's theories this thesis will demonstrate how the trans-generational phantoms can inhabit the channel of inner speech. In the form of silent and incomprehensible gaps, they can communicate, affecting the dialogic interactions

of the Self at an intimate level. The combination of psychoanalytical and pragmatist approaches will provide a more exhaustive explanation of the process of internalization of horror films in the human mind, thus contributing to the neo-pragmatist tendencies about the internal conversation.

As the outline above suggests, the first three chapters lay the methodological and contextual foundations of my thesis. The second part of my work will be devoted to a series of case studies aimed at exploring the dynamics that affected the development, circulation and reception of Italian horror cinema from its origin (1957) until the 1980s. The decades taken into consideration are fundamental in the history of Italian horror cinema. In this period, Italy was going through radical social changes (industrialisation, urbanization, women's emancipation etc.), which remarkably framed the symbolic domain of the horror genre (Ginsborg, 1990; Di Scala, 1995; Forgacs, 2007). To define the field of analysis, the attention will focus on the productions of three Italian directors: Riccardo Freda, Mario Bava and Dario Argento. In particular, I am interested in analysing their constant and extensive use of intertextual references to symbols already circulated at a first level (see chapter 1). Throughout this analytical section, the thesis will demonstrate how, drawing from multidisciplinary archives, such as folklore, literature, religion and art, Freda, Bava and Argento manipulate and decontextualize existing symbols, making them circulate at a second level. My discussion will address four thematic discourses – spaces, objects, identities and actions – pointing out the ways in which they interact across the genre's narrative structures. This examination will show how horror archetypes, motifs and themes intersect reciprocally, framed by the socio-cultural conditions of the Italian society of that time (1950s–1980s).

In the investigation of the thematic group of spaces, chapter 4 adopts Freud's concept of the uncanny (1919) and Michel Foucault's model of heterotopia (1967), providing new perspectives in the reading of horrific spaces in the cinematic context. A preliminary observation will argue that the uncanny is not a property of spaces, but an attribute evoked through practices and mental projections (Vidler, 1994). Meanings and attributes, in fact, are not intrinsic of spaces but have to be considered as the result of social acts, or, to put it better, of interaction ritual chains (Collins, 2004). Spaces,

then, exist because of people who make use of them, conferring to them special connotations (Durkheim, 2011 [1975]: 295).

To extend the meaning of spaces in terms of spatial shapes of fear, my analysis will take into consideration the Foucauldian concept of heterotopias (Foucault, 1967). Heterotopias are spaces/non-spaces which, functioning in a relationship to the usual spaces we are familiar with, act in a disturbing way, altering and subverting the common sense of things. Charged by qualities of otherness, they assume a different role and degree of uncanniness in each horror film. As a means of drawing them all together, several forms of spatial representation, from gothic to modern, from external to internal, will be discussed, illustrating how they evolve and circulate, often being depicted as symbolic versions of the human mind. In many horror films, in fact, environments and buildings are endowed with bodily characteristics. To extend this investigation, chapter 4 will concentrate on haunted houses and their anthropomorphic qualities. In particular, the analysis will focus on the residences of evil as depicted in Argento's *Suspiria* (1977) and *Inferno* (1980). Symbolically interpreted in terms of wombs, "which actively swallow, devour, rend and kill" (Neumann, 1983 [1963]: 171 – my plural), both residences present the dual function of killing and giving birth. Entering these womb-like heterotopias will be read, therefore, as a formative journey towards rebirth and regeneration.

Spaces can only be interpreted on the basis of the relations among objects, individuals, environments and actions. This consideration will initiate a discussion of the second thematic group of my research: objects of fear. Similarly to spaces, objects do not retain perturbing qualities. However, some of them elicit negative emotions, emanating a mysterious sense of uncanniness. In order to explain this feeling, chapter 5 will draw from concepts such as fetishes (Benjamin, 1930) and fossils (Deleuze, 1989), developing the definition of recollection objects. After exploring their symbolic meaning and their circulation in the horror genre, the attention will focus on two case studies: Bava's *Lisa e il diavolo* (1973) and Argento's *Profondo rosso* (1975). The first film will allow us to investigate the concept of the auratic (Benjamin, 1930), with particular reference to inanimate objects which come to life, while the second will emphasize the notion of radioactivity (Deleuze, 1989) and the importance of fossil objects (Deleuze,

1989) as essential repositories of truth. The two concepts present similar characteristics of uncanniness: they have the ability to reawaken memories and dreams, eliciting multisensory recollections that are difficult to decipher. The impossibility of grasping these memories evokes the feeling of being suspended between past and present, real and surreal. Only the ability to read the signatures (Agamben, 2009) of objects and go beyond their appearances will allow the limits of these boundaries to be overcome.

If these objects preserve the incommensurable weight of the past, others are introduced as new metaphors of fear. Cinema constitutes a reliquary, which preserves witness treasuries of the past. It is the place where all that we have tried to archive and set aside emerges disguised as the spectral remains of epochs that refuse to die. In this sense, horror cinema can be interpreted as “a special site for an irrational return of the repressed” (Orlando, 2006: 115). Drawing from a variety of archives, the horror genre brings to the screen the debris of the past, making it recirculate at a second level. Thus, the discarded, non-functional and superseded assume a new metaphorical status.

The recirculation of old symbols, imbued with strong emotional energy, affects the viewers’ perception at an intimate and incomprehensible level. While some objects are charged by negative connotations due to previous interactions, others acquire new perturbing meanings through further rituals. This occurs through a process of decontextualization, which, suspending the common sense of things, generates new metaphors of fear. The exploration of this process will underline the interrelation between old and new symbols as anticipated in chapter 2.

As will be constantly discussed throughout this work, the horror genre needs to be considered as a dynamic system, which draws from everyday fears and anxieties, assuming different connotations and shapes over time. Every change depends on a variety of factors: audiences’ expectations, cinema industry developments and, above all, social and historical mutations. The transformations that the society undergoes affect the evolution of the genre. In response to these changes, the cinema industry progressively shapes its ways of addressing audiences, through the use of new techniques, narrative ideas, film technologies, special effects etc. A fundamental period of transition between two distinct perspectives of horror in Italy, gothic and modern, can be identified in the 1970s. Chapter 6 will explore this transition, mainly focusing on

the analysis of roles and identities in Italian horror films from the late 1950s until the 1980s. This investigation will set down a plethora of monstrous figures (ghosts, witches, demons, vampires, psycho-killers, stalkers, slashers etc.) that circulate in the genre, undergoing evolutions over time.

Chapter 6 will start by considering the definition of monstrosity as delineated by Noël Carroll (1990). To understand his interpretation of the monstrous and art horror, I will use concepts such as otherness (Wood, 2002), abjectness (Kristeva, 1982) and interstitiality (Carroll, 1990). All these notions engage a certain grade of ambiguity and transgression of schemes, which the horror genre extends into a vast assortment of forms such as human/inhuman, natural/supernatural, masculine/feminine, victims/monsters, etc.). With regard to this, Bava's *La maschera del demonio* will be used as a case study to outline these ambiguities and their extensions in terms of doublings (Rank, 1971 [1914]), abjectness (Kristeva, 1982) and the monstrous-feminine (Creed, 1993). The figure of Asa, in the role of a vampire/witch, represents a concentration of thematic tropes (the centrality of the female character, the explicit sexualization of the main protagonist, the excessive visual graphics, etc.) which, subverting the traditional archetypes and mythological codes of vampirism, will become typical of the Italian gothic genre.

After this preliminary analysis, I will move a step further, considering other kinds of monstrosity which have not been included in Carroll's categories. In attempting to map them out, Charles Derry (1977), David Russell (1998) and Brigid Cherry's (2009) works will be helpful in delineating new shapes and categories of horrific identities, which will supply a more exhaustive frame to my study. Monsters do not have to be impure, supernatural or physically repugnant to be included in the horror genre. Some types can be explained as *real* individuals who transgress norms, behaving *monstrously* (Russell, 1998). This typology of monsters, defined as "deviant", includes psycho-killers, stalkers and slashers. In the 1970s in particular, these new forms of naturalistic and realistic monsters took shape. The supernatural took on human dimensions, giving monsters an appearance that not only terrified, but also gave them credibility.

If, on the one hand, the individuation of these assorted categories aims at outlining a variety of monstrous representations in the Italian cinematic panorama, on the other it aims at illuminating the dynamic nature of these groups. Being constantly subject to changes, categories are not static: they undergo evolution over time, as do typologies of monsters. It follows that limiting the categorization of monsters to a number of groups is reductive and inadequate. However, to frame and develop my discussion, the attention will focus on two main groups: supernatural and psychotic. The analysis of Bava's *La frusta e il corpo* (1963) and Argento's *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo* (1970), despite drawing from these two different categories, will reach similar conclusions about the ephemeral illusion of integrity. The investigation, in fact, will point out that otherness and doubles can be read as an attempt to reconstruct subjectivity. In other words, they are revealed to be complementary figures of the Self: other faces of the same individual. By extending these considerations, I will argue that the boundary between monsters and victims is a subtle one. Observations on this argument will bring out the interrelations of "I" and "non-I", of "self" and "other", as inseparable parts of the construction of personality. Identity is not immutable, but a process of growth that is never completely accomplished. Thus, monsters and victims will be interpreted as two faces of the same individual.

If monsters are essential components of the horror genre, another pivotal role is played by actions, which aim to capture the attention of and elicit fear in audiences. In order to broaden the understanding of this topic, chapter 7 will focus on the effects graphic actions have in the human mind. Two case studies will be considered: Bava's *Operazione paura* (1966) and Argento's *Opera* (1987). The first draws from the supernatural gothic tradition, while the second is inspired by the Italian *gialli* cycle. The investigation will introduce different ways of interpreting the protagonists' *modus operandi*, with a major interest in the motif of trauma. In order to delve into this aspect, I will adopt two main theoretical approaches: psychoanalytical (Abraham and Torok, 1994) and pragmatist (Wiley, 1994).

In the first part of chapter 7, the application of Abraham and Torok's theory of the psychic phantom to Bava's *Operazione Paura* (1966) will be useful in understanding the psycho-dynamics of the film and in exploring the concept of the double-phantom

as a result of the unspoken and of trauma. In the second part, by recalling Tom Gunning's (2006) concept of the cinema of attractions, I will develop the idea of the horror of attractions. Here the term "attraction" is used to refer to cinema's ability to attract viewers through action-images, which function indeed as pieces of performance art. Considering the recurrent violations of classic norms and the hyper-sensorial aesthetic of Argento's films, his productions can be included in this definition. Argento's *Opera* (1987), for instance, interpreted as a performative form of art, is able to entertain and shock the audience at the same time. Its visual aestheticization of violence acts as an element of the horror of attraction, which traps the viewer's gaze, causing a traumatic pleasure (Mulvey, 1989). This analysis allows a better understanding of the relationship between spectator and film in terms of affect and body reflexivity (Sobchack, 1992). In the act of watching, the viewers perceive the filmic experience with their entire bodily being (Sobchack, 2007: 63). Moreover, they do not simply identify with the characters and the affect they display, but also draw on personal and cultural experience as they respond to cinematic elements. This makes the visual experience even more effective, enhancing a dialogic interaction in the viewer's perception.

The theoretical framework of this thesis, in conjunction with filmic analysis, will contribute to a more exhaustive understanding of the archaeology of the genre. After establishing that singular theories do not supply sufficient information in relation to genre issues, this study aims to address the gap in critical knowledge, reviewing the potentiality of Italian horror cinema through a multidisciplinary discourse. As will be argued throughout my work, an interpretation of the Italian horror genre can only exist in relation to a number of interactions, each with a multitude of factors social and historical mutations, distribution, audiences' expectations, cinema industry, etc.). Hence, presenting a very practical and applied approach, interactionism will be acknowledged as a space of debate, which, encompassing several perspectives at the same time (psychoanalytic, pragmatist, sociological, etc.) will allow a dialogic and exhaustive investigation of the birth, evolution and decline of the Italian horror genre from its origins (1957) until the late 1980s.

CHAPTER 1

ARCHIVES OF HORROR

We are *en mal d'archive*: in need of archives. [...] It is to have a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement.

J. Derrida, 1996: 91

Introduction

The main focus of chapter 1 is to trace the genesis of symbols and beliefs, which are pivotal in the origins and development of the horror genre. After outlining the interactive nature of the first phase of generation and circulation of symbols, I will propose the concept of archives of horror, suggesting religions, mythological traditions, literatures and cultures in general as fundamental repositories of horror symbols. These repositories work as multidisciplinary archives, which involve a wide range of concepts, both intuitive and counter-intuitive. Having once acquired an emotional significance, these concepts circulate in chains of interaction rituals and in private contexts, creating symbols that affect the collective and individual perception of horror. To broaden this study, sociological concepts and ideas from Emile Durkheim (1912), Erving Goffman (1956) and Randall Collins (2000, 2004) will be adopted, proving that emotional energy and interaction rituals are leading forces in the first-order circulation of symbols, and consequently in the formation of horror archives. Two kinds of archives of horror can be identified: external and internal. While the former includes all those symbols recognized as horrific by the collectiveness, the latter

refers to a personal re-elaboration of these symbols. This chapter will focus on the first category, discussing how the external archives develop, following the evolutions of society.

1.1 Archiving horror. Interaction ritual chains and emotional energy

The technical structure of the archiving archive also determines the structure of the archivable content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future.

J. Derrida, 1996: 17

Before developing my arguments about the archives of horror, I would like to introduce first the notion of archives as delineated by Carolyn Hamilton (2002):

archives are the product of a process which converts a certain number of documents into items judged to be worthy of preserving and keeping in a public place, where they can be consulted according to well-established procedures and regulations (Hamilton, 2002: 20).

This elementary definition points out some important elements related to the act of collecting data. The process of archiving requires a procedure of selection, which involves documents of both inclusion and exclusion, determining, therefore, a boundary between what is inside and what is outside the archive. But what exactly are archives of horror? What are the selection criteria to define their boundaries? What is inside the archives of horror and what is not? To give an answer to these questions it is necessary first to explore the meaning of horror. It is difficult to provide a comprehensive and univocal definition of the term, since the notion encompasses a variety of forms and meanings across the globe. However, to offer a general

description, horror is about fear, visceral disgust, revulsion and abnormal threatening monsters, which include both supernatural (Carroll, 1990: 145) and natural entities (Freeland, 2000: 10).¹

This current definition builds upon others provided in the philosophical (Carroll, 1990; Hawkins, 2002; Fahy, 2010) and psychological (Freeland, 2000; Shaw, 2001) literatures on horror. Several scholars (Gaut, 1993; Carroll, 1999; Yanal, 1999; Smuts, 2007, among many others) have advanced theories to explain the idea of horror and its paradoxes and impact on human minds. These interests have brought to light the kaleidoscopic aspects and forms that the term involves. Designed to scare and unsettle the audience, horror as a genre draws out the vulnerabilities that lie deep within the human mind. The roots of these vulnerabilities can be traced back to the origins of man. The unknowable mysteries of life, birth, dreams and death, for instance, caused individuals to gather together around a mutual interest and to build up concepts and beliefs which, once they had acquired a strong emotional significance, led to the creation of horror symbols. These symbols circulated in a variety of discourses identifiable as archives of horror.

The concept of archives of horror helps us to understand the dialectical nature of the interactions between old and new, past and present, and our own positioning within this. In other words, it provides relevant perspectives in the comprehension of the evolution of the genre and our response to it. It is possible to distinguish two main kinds of archives of horror: external and internal. The former can be recognized in all those discourses that work as collective containers of horror symbols, while the latter refer to internal and personal storages, preserved within the human mind. In order to proceed logically, the following pages will analyse the external archives, while the internal ones will be investigated in chapter 3. However, it will be necessary first to discuss the main forces that serve to generate these archives: interaction ritual chains and emotions.

¹ As will be covered in more detail in chapter 5, Noël Carroll (1990) considers monsters to be all those fictional characters whose existence is scientifically impossible and who represent “disturbances of the natural order”, arousing fear and disgust. For Cynthia Freeland (2000) monsters are all those evil beings which arouse moral indignation.

With regard to this, Emile Durkheim's (1912) inferences about the interpersonal forces that generate social solidarity will provide an essential starting point in the discussion. In his book *The Elementary Forms of Religion* (1912), the French sociologist focuses his attention on the social function of religion, pointing out its predisposition to create collective cohesion. By pulling people together, both mentally and physically, religion establishes a community of believers, reaffirming and reinforcing beliefs in the mind of each member. This implies that, religion, intended as a "unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things [...]", unites into "one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them" (Durkheim, 1965 [1912]: 62).

Durkheim's analysis of religious rituals as a source of social solidarity has influenced the thoughts of several theorists (Parsons and Shils, 1951; Goffman, 1956, 1959, 1961, 1967, 2005; Collins, 1998, 2000, 2004, among many others) and inspired in particular the theoretical perspectives on emotions. Erving Goffman and Randall Collins, for instance, have derived the key insights of their theories from Durkheim. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1956), Goffman demonstrates that Durkheim's interpretative structure can be turned from the religious context to the micro-sociological one of mundane interactions. In other words, he shows that solidarity can generate not only from formal rituals, such as religious ceremonies, but also from face-to-face informal exchanges, which involve a mutual focused attention and emotion. These exchanges are named by Goffman as interaction rituals (IRs).

Following the lines of Durkheim (1912) and Goffman (1956), Collins (2000, 2004) moves a step further, arguing that the consequence of social encounters is the generation of symbols and interactive continuities, identified as interaction chains (Collins, 2004: 152). This definition attempts to connect and extend Durkheim's and Goffman's ideas, emphasizing the endurance and stability of social structures. Collins lays out four main components necessary for a successful ritual and its consequent development of social cohesion: 1) group assembly; 2) a demarcation between insiders and outsiders, which provides participants with a privileged position of inclusiveness; 3) a shared focus of attention; 4) and a shared common mood (*Ibid.* 49). The combination of these elements generates initiating emotional arousal – in Durkheimian

terms “collective effervescence” (Durkheim, (2011) [1975]: 151) – which develops into emotional energy (EE): a set of long-term feelings, that motivates or de-motivates individuals during their interaction rituals, contributing, therefore, to the emergence of social solidarity. If the interaction rituals are unsuccessful, the emotional energy in the group will decrease. Conversely, if they are successful, the level of emotional energy will increase, leading to the formation of symbols, which circulate as emblematic representations of group membership and solidarity. Successful rituals invest symbols, objects and individuals with values that circulate in further rituals (creating chains) and in private contexts (favouring a third-order circulation in internal conversations).² These dynamics allow a better understanding of the generation of symbols as well as their circulation.

As mentioned above, the genesis of early symbols can be traced back to the primordial birth of humankind (Jung, 1964; Struck, 2004). In an attempt to find an answer to the unknowable mysteries of life, individuals gathered together in interaction rituals. The symbols that emerged represented sacred emblems with which the group could identify: they were the focal objects upon which components of the same group of interest had focused their attention. Hence, bound around a common interest, individuals created and sustained emblems with which they felt collectively associated.

Beliefs can be divided into two categories: natural and non-natural. The former are supported by intuitive theories that make them “comprehensible and easily communicable”; the latter, which are not compatible with intuitive ontology, are more difficult to communicate. However, both natural and non-natural beliefs play an important role in the development of symbols which widely affect our perception of horror. Charged by a high level of emotional energy, these symbols circulate as representation of group membership.

A key role in the transmission and archiving processes is played by emotional engagement and memorability. One of the main conditions necessary to the effective success of a belief, in fact, is the impressive and mnemonic power of the belief itself

² The third-order circulation of symbols will be introduced in chapter 3 and investigated in more detail in chapter 7.

(Sperber, 1996). In other words, to be easily transmittable a concept should first be easily memorable. The level of memorability often increases when natural and non-natural beliefs are mixed together in the same context. Minimally counter-intuitive concepts are more memorable and transmittable than intuitive or too counter-intuitive ones (Boyer, 1992: 29). This occurs because, though they are more difficult to communicate, if minimally present in a context, non-natural beliefs constrain a major attention involving a stronger emotional engagement that positively weighs upon memory.

It follows that, violating our cognitive expectations, minimally counter-intuitive concepts strike our attention, rendering the belief set in which they are embedded more impressive and memorable. On the other side, common-sense beliefs are “supported by everyday experience and intuitive theories” and for this reason easier to believe in: “the former draw interest, the latter ensure recall over time” (Norenzayan and Atran, 2004: 14, 22). With regard to this, outstanding examples can be found in folktales, legends, myths and religions. All of these archives contain minimally counter-intuitive concepts, which slightly violate the ontological system. Through interaction rituals, these concepts and beliefs circulate, charged by emotional energy, which leads to the formation of symbols.

Emotional engagement and memorability are fundamental components in the formation of horror archives. Two different categories of archives can be distinguished: collective and private. The collective archive is the whole set of symbols and beliefs that are recognized and referenced as horrific by the collectiveness (darkness, death, blood, etc.), while private archives are personal sets of symbols and values, which differentiate each individual from everyone else. Collective and private emotional engagements produce two different outcomes in the origin of horror archives. While the first allow the formation of collective external archives of horror, the second lead to the creation of private internal archives. In order to develop my arguments on this topic, the following pages will proceed by exploring the first category.

1.2 External archives of horror

[The archive] is the border of time that surrounds our presence, which overhangs it, and which indicates it in its otherness; it is that which, outside ourselves, delimits us.

M. Foucault, 2013: 147

Horror symbols have entered into the mass culture, being absorbed and circulated over time. The concept of horror is linked not only to the cinematic world, but to the whole history of literary and representational art in general. Examples such as Dante's *Inferno* (1308–1320), Alfieri's tragedies (1775–1798) and Caravaggio's (1571–1610) paintings demonstrate how the concept is recognizable in a variety of forms of art and entertainment.³ Following the multiple and evolutionary representations of the horrific, archives of horror have enlarged their horizons to include a wide variety of symbols. Archives, then, have to be considered dynamic repositories, able to follow the development of the genre – a development that, as previously pointed out, is formed by interaction ritual chains. Interacting in specific situations, individuals engender the motivating emotional energy essential in the generation of new symbols and in the reinforcement of old ones. Previous conditions provide the basis for innovation. It follows that, around any change process, there are groups of interest whose previous social interactions have created a strong emotional engagement that refers to a particular emerging symbol.

Hence, the formation of external archives needs to be interpreted as a social factor dominated by interpersonal rituals. Social conventions and habits partly shape aesthetic meanings of horror according to a communal sensibility. That is, through interaction rituals, symbols are charged with strong emotional energy, acquiring power and sacredness conferred and recognized by the collectiveness. Symbols of horror are

³ None of the plots of Alfieri's tragedies are of his own invention. His narrations are mainly based on historical and mythological accounts. *Cleopatra* (1775) and *Filippo* (1783) are among the most popular of Alfieri's tragedies.

therefore stored in collective external archives, according to a mutual sensibility created by a shared emotional engagement. Religions, mythologies, arts and literatures are fundamental containers of horror. They offer important archival possibilities, able to release essential information on the genre's evolution. With regard to this, the following pages will focus on the three main forces which contributed to the initial circulation of horror symbols: religion, folklore and literature.

1.2.1 Religious archives

The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown.

H. P. Lovecraft, 2004 [1927]: 102

Interacting with others in conditions where the need for solidarity is stronger, individuals generate the motivating emotional energy which leads to the formation of symbols. Religious non-natural beliefs in particular induce a sense of solidarity and intense emotional engagement. One plausible reason can be found in the fact that these kinds of beliefs may be "psychologically privileged under conditions where everyday common sense fails" and the need for solidarity is stronger (Norenzayan & Atran, 2004: 165). The primitive fear of death, for instance, is the unknowable mystery with which human beings have lived since the beginning of time. Trying to find an answer to mortality and other existential problems of humankind, individuals created a realm that, surpassing the ordinary, "appealed to the extraordinary" (*Ibid.* 165). In other words, the innate desire to overcome the fear of death created "a need for the invention of afterlife and the belief in the afterlife" (Simms, 2006: 3).

In this circumstance, a new system of beliefs emerged, as an expression of social cohesion, apt to provide a response to the inexplicable quandaries of life (Norenzayan

& Atran, 2004: 165). The main result of these primordial ritual interactions was the birth of religions, which favoured the proliferation/circulation of symbols, able to give spiritual comfort in everyday life (Pritchard, 1965). Concepts such as the return of the dead, embodied in the forms of ghosts, angels and spirits, for instance, ensured continuity between the earth world and the netherworld, confirming that death is not the end but the opening of a new world and a new life.⁴

During the course of human evolution, other behaviours besides religions arose, dictating new rituals. These mainly derived from superstitions.⁵ Superstitions date back to early man's attempt to explain Nature. Originally humans believed that animals and objects were connected to spirits. These beliefs engendered symbols (including, among others, amulets and charms), which, often perceived as fetishes, were believed to reject the negative forces.⁶ What is worth observing in this background is the level of power attained by symbols that emerged from both religions and superstitions. The power of symbols, in the sense of their value and ability to increase emotional energy, depends on the outcome of the rituals in which they are the central focus of interest.

Religious symbols and beliefs are usually inherited and transmitted by family. In other words, people who follow a religious doctrine are initially attracted to it because they are influenced by their family, friends or acquaintances (Collins, 2004: 96).

⁴ The return of the dead is a concept that has been widely exploited by the horror genre, mainly represented by the figure of the zombie.

⁵ Religions constitute a system of beliefs concerning the causes of and reasons for humankind. They are mainly based on faith. Superstitions are irrational attitudes or beliefs about supernatural causality, in other words that events lead to other events without any physical or logical connection between the two events. They are mainly based on myth, magic and irrational thoughts. The term superstition is often charged with negative value, when referring to folk beliefs considered irrational. However, religion is often considered as a set of superstitions. To read more about superstitions see Stuart (2000).

⁶ The origin of the term fetish can be traced back to discourses on religious practices around objects. The modern meaning was popularized in Europe, by Charles de Brosses, in 1760. De Brosses used the term to describe the religious ritual of worshipping inanimate objects, a practice common in West Africa (Pietz, 1993: 134; Simpson, 1982: 127). The contemporary word fetish is associated with the Latin words *factitius* (manufactured) and *facere* (to make). However, semantically, the term seems to derive from the Portuguese word *fetiço*, originally used by Portuguese sailors to refer to "little glass and metallic amulets sold by the natives of the Guinea shores. The local villagers believed that these objects had magical power to protect their owners" (Verma, 1999: 138). *Fetiço*, then, became the name for charms, amulets and all of those inanimate objects that were believed to possess mystical properties capable of repelling negative forces.

Moreover, the transmission and the circulation of religious beliefs develop in relation to cult activities that see people gathering together, sharing the same interests. Social interactions, in fact, offer the opportunity to take part in rituals where these symbols circulate, inducing a strong emotional energy. With regard to this, Durkheim (1912) has advanced remarkable considerations. Emphasizing the social function of religion, the French sociologist breaks with the traditional theories – above all animistic and naturistic - that considered religion strictly related to individual experiences and beliefs. According to his model, religion is a social factor dominated by interpersonal rituals. This means that, rituals play a predominant role, compared to the subordinate one of beliefs. Durkheim explains this concept through a basic example. From the moment of their birth, individuals are immersed within ritual groups that are already constituted: society, culture, religion and family. As they grow up, they follow the order-givers' rules, entertaining concepts and thoughts already existent and strongly rooted in these surrounding contexts.⁷ Hence their behaviour is influenced by the attitudes and thoughts of people around them. When they get older, they acquire a major awareness of this already established system and eventually develop their own set of beliefs, which will be solidified through further interaction ritual chains.

Logically, archetypes of fear grow and circulate differently, according to the disposition of the interaction rituals. Societies use different symbols to distinguish their own concepts and beliefs. Thus, the same symbols can elicit dissimilar responses and emotions across the globe. A significant difference can be noted, for instance, between Western and Eastern countries, which have developed an array of religious belief systems, practices and symbols in order to characterize themselves and their proper faith. Hence, an individual's response to specific concepts, objects or symbols depends on the personal experiences and belief system developed within their own socio-cultural background and within interaction ritual chains. Therefore, horror films with Catholic contents, such as Bava's *La casa dell'esorcismo* (1974) or Soavi's *La Chiesa* (1989),

⁷ The transmission occurs directly and indirectly. The first process develops consciously. The indirect transmission, defined by Abraham and Torok (1972, 1980, 1994) as "trans-generational transmission", occurs at an unconscious level. This process will be explained in more detail in chapter 3.

might be frightening for Western audiences merged into the Christian culture, but ineffective for Eastern people with a different doctrine and religion.⁸

The fear of being possessed by evil spirits and the power of spirits that are able to control human bodies are strongly grounded in Catholicism. The same occurs with symbols, such as crosses and holy water, which, emblematic (charged with a sacred meaning) in the Western culture, are irrelevant in the Eastern set of religious beliefs. These symbols acquire even more energy for those who take part in the rituals constantly, manifesting a deep interest to the mutual focus. They become sacred membership symbols. These considerations are not intended to suggest that Western horror films are incomprehensible to or ineffective for audiences belonging to countries other than the national context of their production. Many Italian horror films, such as Bava's *La maschera del demonio* (1960) or Argento's *Suspiria* (1977), have been very popular in Eastern countries. This demonstrates that the contents and forms of horror can appeal across cultural boundaries. However, what these pages have pointed out is the presence of different levels of emotional engagement and response across the globe. In conclusion, the perception of religious symbols varies according to the particular sets of beliefs established in the human mind. Some are more effective on a specific category of audience as a result of the outcomes derived from interaction ritual chains.

1.2.2 Folklore: myths, legends and fairy tales

Folklore, legends and cultural mythologies represent some of the most thriving repositories of horror symbols. These archives involve a wide range of concepts which have entered the common and private sense of humankind. However, it is relevant to note that this system of beliefs is nationally specific. Each country develops specific local, regional or national myths and legends, which affect arts, literature and cinema

⁸ Furthermore, the effects may be different again for people who have grown up in a non-religious context. See McDannell (2008).

in their local productions. The following pages aim to explore the way in which myths, legends and fairy tales developed, establishing sources of inspiration for a second-order circulation of symbols in horror cinema.

In the not-too-distant past, people gathered together and entertained themselves with mythological and legendary tales. The origins of these stories can be traced back to the innate human desire to explain and understand the unknown (Dégh 2001). As Timothy Tangherlini (1990) suggests, originally transmitted in oral form, myths, legends and folktales circulated

in a conversational mode, reflecting on a psychological level a symbolic representation of folk belief and collective experiences and serving as a reaffirmation of commonly held values of the group to whose tradition [they belonged] (Tangherlini, 1990: 385).

In other words, supported by collective beliefs, folk tales symbolized the fears of the community (Harris, 2008: 5). In this sense, they have to be considered as fundamental sources able to provide information about a specific social condition in a particular time (Twitchell, 1985: 85). Involving accounts of supernatural intrusions in the ordinary world, myths and legends suggest a sense of threat. As Linda Dégh (1995) notes,

The legend tells us we can never be safe because extranormal powers may interfere with our lives at any time. The earth we know as our home is not entirely ours, the logic which guides our thinking may be uncertain or invalid; we cannot trust our senses, and even scientific instruments are unreliable (Dégh, 1995: 124).

Therefore, the interference of the supernatural in the ordinary world subverts the natural system of things. This intrusion creates symbols which, charged by strong emotional power, are easily circulated and reinforced over time. While many folk legends are unique to a specific geographical area, others are spread all over the world and adapted according to the beliefs and aesthetic principles of each particular region.

The uncanny figure of the bogeyman represents, for instance, a relevant example to be taken into consideration. Often used by parents to scare children who misbehave, the bogeyman is an amorphous imaginary being that is commonplace in the folklore of different countries (Figure 1).⁹ In the child's mind, the legends around this figure are extremely believable; on one level, folk tales aim to induce children to follow behavioural rituals in order to escape the fear that haunts their mind.



Figure 1 – The ogre in Charles Perrault's *Petit Poucet* (1697)
Illustration by Gustave Doré

Fairy tales are another interesting narrative form that constitute repositories of horrific symbols. Adopting characters and motifs which are usually simple and archetypal – such as witches, ogres, magicians, dragons, talking animals and enchanting atmospheres – fairy tales draw from folklore. However, unlike legends, which as explained above involve communal beliefs related to real people encountering supernatural beings or events, fairy tales are folk tales in which the magic and marvellous are introduced without any hesitation (Harris, 2008: 23).¹⁰ In other words,

⁹ The bogeyman is a nearly universal concept which has an equivalent in many countries: *Le croque-mitaine* in France, *El ogro* in Spain, *Baboulasin* in Greece and Cyprus, *Der schwarze Mann* in Germany, *Boeman* in the Netherlands, *Bavbav* in Slovenia, *Mörkö* in Finland, *Bøhmanden* in Denmark and Norway, *Bau-bau* in Romania, *Monstret under sängen* in Sweden, *Babay* (бабай) in Russia, *Jin Baba* in Pakistan, *Bonhomme Sept-Heures* (7 o'clock man) in Quebec, *Lulu* in Persian culture, *Abu Rigl Maslukha* (ابورجلمسلوخة) in Egypt, *Namahage* in Japan, *Dokebi* in Korea, and so on. The Italian equivalent of the bogeyman is the *Uomo nero* (literally the *Black Man*). In Italy, there is a popular lullaby that mentions the *Uomo nero* keeping children with him for a whole year.

¹⁰ Folk tale is the folkloric definition of a fairy tale.

filled with the marvellous, they are set “in an unreal world without definite locality or definite characters” (Thompson, 1977: 8).

As Jamie Tehrani (2013) argues, over time, folk tales have evolved into locally distinct forms, adapting to different cultural contexts.¹¹ The conventional European version of *Little Red Riding Hood*, for instance, introduces a wolf masquerading as the title character’s grandmother. In the Chinese version the wolf is replaced by a tiger. In Iran the story features a boy rather than a little girl. It is evident how the same tale, circulated across the globe, changes slightly in contents and details. This phenomenon persisted until the first written forms appeared in the seventeenth century.

After a long oral tradition, fairy tales were collected by the folk writers and transcribed in the seventeenth century (Payne, 2010: 259). The first cycle written in Europe was that of the Neapolitan writer Giambattista Basile (1575–1632), mainly remembered for his collection titled *Lo Cunto de li Cunti overo lo trattenemiento de peccerille* (1634) or *Pentamerone* (Canepa, 1999).¹² Predating Charles Perrault by at least fifty years, the collection, composed of fifty fairy tales in Neapolitan dialect, was “since its appearance, the veritable storehouse, the inexhaustible mine from which all other authors of fairy tales have drawn their series” (Taylor, 1912: vi).¹³ Gradually circulated in Europe, *Lo Cunto de li Cunti* influenced the productions of many writers, including Charles Perrault (1628–1703) and the Brothers Grimm, offering interesting repositories of symbols, ranging from the marvellous to the supernatural, but also including the ghoulish and the macabre. *La Gatta Cenerentola* (I, 6), a variant of Cinderella, for instance, begins with the death of Princess Zezolla’s mother and the arrival of a cruel stepmother. Enticed with the promise of happier times and guided by her governess, who wants the prince for herself, Zezolla executes the governess’ plans, killing her stepmother by dropping the lid of a chest on her neck. Another terrifying example can be found in *La vecchia scortecata* (I, 10), where an old woman dies after ordering a barber to shave her skin off. These are just a few examples, but fairy tales, beyond the

¹¹ To read more about the topic, see Tehrani (2013).

¹² *Lo Cunto de li Cunti* was published posthumously in three volumes by Giambattista’s sister Adriana in Naples, Italy (1634–1636), under the pseudonym Gian Alesio Abbatutis.

¹³ Due to the Neapolitan dialect the collection of tales was not that popular until John Edward Taylor translated it into English in 1847.

magic and marvellous, represent, indeed, important archives of horror. Many of them contain cruel and brutal elements of violence and even cannibalism, which are able to induce the development of strong beliefs during childhood.¹⁴

Through the presence of ghosts, evil spirits and monsters, these tales capture children's attention, entertaining their imagination, with the paradoxical aim of educating through fear.¹⁵ They are effective in the memory because of the minimally counter-intuitive concepts that render the stories easily transmittable. Moreover, being more memorable than everyday natural concepts, they are culturally successful and very widespread. Fairy tales influenced the cinematic productions of many Italian horror directors. Dario Argento, for instance, re-created the atmospheric fantasies of dark fairy tales in *Suspiria* (1977). The positive audience response to the film demonstrated how this formula could affect adults in the same way that fairy tales affect children, by being fascinating and scary at the same time.

¹⁴ The Brothers Grimm's tales, for instance, are an extraordinary example: *The Juniper Tree* (cannibal character: the stepmother who serves her husband a special homemade black pudding made from her stepson's body), *Hansel and Gretel* (cannibal character: the witch who loves to eat kids, enticing children with her house made of sweets and candy), *Snow White* (cannibal character: the stepmother who demands to eat her stepdaughter's heart), *The Robber Bridegroom* (cannibal character: the bridegroom and his band of robbers), *Red Riding Hood* (cannibal character: the wolf).

¹⁵ Fairytales have demonstrated how fear can teach children about the potentially dangerous outcomes of their actions. They have changed over time. Many original versions, in fact, were particularly cruel and brutal and were subsequently adapted to fit the child's common sense better. Carroll (1990, 1996, 1998) discusses the urge to correlate horror with the appearance of a monster figure. He problematizes this assertion by arguing that although all horror films have monsters, not all monsters signify horror; fairy tales and science fiction texts, for instance, contain monsters as well, but Carroll does not consider those texts as horror because they are not necessarily intended to evoke art-horror. My approach is more relativistic. Horror texts have to be evaluated only according to their historical and cultural contexts. Thus, fairytales, mainly addressed to a young audience, can be considered as mere containers of horror symbols that are strongly effective for a specific audience.

1.2.3 Literary archives: fantastic, gothic and mystery

As previously mentioned, besides religion and mythology, literature constitutes another fundamental source of inspiration for horror cinema. Most of the horrific elements found in horror narratives, in fact, take inspiration from literary sources. In order to develop my arguments and explore this archive, the following pages will take into consideration three remarkable literary sources: the fantastic, the gothic and the mystery. This study will demonstrate how these traditions are interrelated with those previously investigated. As outlined earlier in this chapter, traditional folklore produces a variety of beliefs able to create “objects of invisible terror”. In other words, by means of the unseen and the mysterious, folklore generates atmospheres of uncanniness and suspense.

The traditional lore of old, heathen Europe, the richness and splendor of its mythology and superstitions, its usages, rites, and songs, in short everything wild and extravagant, was rediscovered by scholars about the middle of the eighteenth century and was immediately recognized as a source of powerful material by contemporary writers (Varma, 1966: 24–25).

Exploring the mysterious world of the fantastic and supernatural, gothic writers drew a wide range of symbols from folklore and religion. This allowed them to grasp the reader’s attention, through archetypes already constituted. The origins of the gothic tradition date back to the second half of the eighteenth century, when the English writer Horace Walpole published his novel *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). As the title suggests, the castle is the predominant motif of the narration. Interpreted as a repository of the past, it embodies the family’s history and hidden secrets. The castle’s structure, as will be developed in chapter 4, favours the presence of supernatural occurrences. Hence, characterized by a hunting nature, the castle becomes a backdrop for horror and fear. In the gothic tradition the settings were particularly influential in terms of moods and atmospheres. The decadent and dilapidated sceneries portrayed

the dissolution of the contemporary world, which was plagued by wars and economic crisis. Devoted to stories of the irrational and of supernatural forces representing the dark side of human nature, gothic novels were mainly grounded in ancient writings that dated back to the Middle Ages. This favoured the circulation of ancient archetypes, such as the opposition between the gothic hero and the villain.

Contemporary to the gothic tradition that originated in England, parallel Romantic literary movements developed in France and Germany (Marrone, 2006: 684). Compared to the northern European countries, the culture of fantastic and gothic literature in Italy appeared late. Its first appearance can be dated back to the second half of the nineteenth century, when *I racconti fantastici* (1869) by Igino Ugo Tarchetti (1839–69) was released. A basic reason for the belated appearance of the fantastic and gothic genre in Italy can be traced to the predominance, in the beginning of the nineteenth century, of literary productions dominated by realistic, nationalistic and ideological veins. In a period of socio-political turmoil, in the context of the *Risorgimento* (1815–1871), these kinds of works had the task of supporting the war as a means of national unification.¹⁶ Thus, irrational ideas, and beliefs in supernatural and fantastic imageries, did not find much space in the Italian literary context. Works such as *I Promessi sposi* (1827) by Alessandro Manzoni (1785–1873) and *Le ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis* (1798) by Ugo Foscolo (1778–1827) were more popular among readers.

However, in the second half of the nineteenth century, tastes started changing and Tarchetti, with his collection *I racconti fantastici* (1869), opened up a new era in the Italian literary tradition: the era of the fantastic. Characterized by socio-political denouncement on one side and the taste for the supernatural, the grotesque and the macabre as metaphors of corruption on the other, Tarchetti's tales, written between 1867 and 1869, highlight both the innovation and the literary commitment of the *Scapigliatura* movement (Del Principe, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2006). The *Scapigliatura* (1858–95), (meaning “dishevelled”), was indeed the most representative movement of the fantastic and gothic tradition in Italy. In addition to Tarchetti, other central figures of this artistic movement were Emilio Praga (1839–75), Giovanni Camerana (1845–1905),

¹⁶ The *Risorgimento* is a nineteenth-century movement that culminated in Italian unification with the establishment of the Kingdom of Italy in 1861.

Camillo Boito (1836–1914) and Arrigo Boito (1842–1918). Their interest in foreign writers such as Mary Shelley (1797–1851), Ann Radcliffe (1764–1823), E. T. A. Hoffmann (1776–1822), Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849) and the French symbolists (Stéphane Mallarmé; Paul Verlaine) promoted a wider vision of the fantastic to Italian readers (Caesar, 2007: 116). Other groups bound by the same style of writing and interest were the *crepuscolari* and the *decadenti*, both fascinated by themes such as occultism, reincarnation (Fogazzaro's *Malombra*, 1881) and spirituality (Marrone's *Le gemme e gli spettri*, 1901).¹⁷

The northern European traditions provided new fictional models which represented alternatives to those proposed by the fixed realist narrations peculiar to *verismo* (Luigi Capuana; Giovanni Verga; Federico di Roberto). Thus the foreign literary tradition became a model of inspiration, rich in themes and motifs to imitate and rewrite (Billiani, 2007: 15). As Fausto Gianfranceschi points out in the introduction to the *Enciclopedia fantastica italiana* (1993), Italy has a long heritage of ancient hermetic traditions, enigmatic archaeological presences and strong religious beliefs. All these components created symbols which offered innovative perspectives to the fantastic and gothic tradition of foreign derivation. The peculiarity of the gothic and fantastic in Italy, in fact, was characterized by these symbols, which, mixed with the European imagery of obscurity and the grotesque, offered a distinctive interpretation of the genre.

In 1960 Feltrinelli published *I Vampiri tra noi*, an anthology of gothic tales which, amongst others, included names such as Guy de Maupassant (1850–1893), Théophile Gautier (1811–1872), John William Polidori (1795–1821), Luigi Capuana (1839–1915), Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849), Nikolai Gogol (1809–1852) and Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu (1814–1873). As I will explore in more detail in chapter 2, in those years many Italian

¹⁷ The term *crepuscolarismo* (from *crepuscolo*, “twilight”) was coined in 1910 by Giuseppe Antonio Borgese, to identify a group of early-twentieth-century Italian poets whose work was characterized by disillusion, nostalgia and a taste for simple things. The group reflected the influence of European Decadence (*Decadentismo*) and was a reaction to the florid ornamental rhetoric of the Italian author Gabriele D'Annunzio (1863–1938). The *Decadentismo*, partially derived from the French and English Decadence, was an Italian artistic movement that flourished at the end of the nineteenth century. Writers of the *Decadentismo* rejected positivism and rationalism in support of instinct, the irrational and the subconscious. To read more about *Decadentismo* see Bruno (1998).

directors took inspiration from this anthology, which, as the title suggests, engaged with vampiric narratives. The vampire figure had its roots in folkloric and mythological traditions. The motif was successfully popularized in poetry (Robert Southey, 1797; Lord Byron, 1813) and literature (John William Polidori, 1819; Sheridan Le Fanu, 1872; Bram Stoker, 1897). Vampirism found a strong position in the cinema industry, especially after the vampire superstitions spread into Western Europe (Summers 1928, 1929; Dundes, 1998). It became one of the most recurrent figures of the gothic horror genre, appearing on the wide screen from the time that the first shorts in the silent era were released.¹⁸

Taking its cue from the gothic and fantastic tradition, a new narrative model became popular with readers in the nineteenth century: crime fiction. In addition to being one of the main representatives of the gothic literary tradition, Edgar Allan Poe was credited as the creator of crime fiction (Lloyd-Smith: 2004: 32). In 1841, his short story *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* introduced the character of C. Auguste Dupin, an amateur investigator who attempts to solve the mystery of the brutal murder of two women. Dupin established some of the main conventional traits that would characterize future detective protagonists, such as Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot. However, if Poe is credited as the inventor of the detective novel, the merit for establishing the mystery cycle as a popular literary genre must be attributed to Arthur Conan Doyle, who in 1887 published *A Study in Scarlet*. Sherlock Holmes and his friend Dr John Watson, the main protagonists of the novel, later became two of the most famous characters in literature, featuring in four novels and 56 short stories (Lad Panek, 2006: 211).

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, crime fiction achieved great success in many countries. In Italy, except for some early attempts by Francesco Mastriani (*Il mio cadavere*, 1851; *La cieca di Sorrento*, 1852), Cletto Arrighi (*La mano nera*, 1883) and Emilio De Marchi (*Il cappello del prete*, 1887 [1858]), consistent production of crime fiction did not appear until 1929, when the publisher Mondadori promoted a

¹⁸ F. W. Murnau's *Nosferatu: eine Symphonie des Grauens* (1922) was an unauthorized adaptation of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). The film established a new era of vampire-themed feature films, which are still popular nowadays.

series of books based on translations of American and British murder mysteries, especially stories by Edgar Wallace (1875–1932), Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859–1930) and Agatha Christie (1890–1976) (Prandini Buckler, 2014: 8). Due to their yellow cover, these books were named *I libri gialli*, which means *yellow books*. Hence, the term *giallo* became a synonym for the crime fiction genre, and was later related to thriller and suspense motifs and, in the cinematic form, to explicit violence.

One of the pioneers of *giallo* stories in Italy was Augusto de Angelis (1888–1944). De Angelis, considered the father of the Italian mystery novel, was the first author who identified in the *giallo* formula remarkable potential that could be developed beyond the stereotypical translations circulated in those years (Somigli, 2005). Between 1935 and 1943 he wrote about twenty books which featured Commissario Carlo De Vincenzi (*Il banchiere assassinato*, 1935) as the main protagonist. In 1943 De Angelis was persecuted by the fascist regime, accused of being antifascist and of producing works which contained unpleasant aspects of the society (Rushing, 2007: 135). Arrested in the same year, he died after a few months. As will be examined more closely in chapter 2, the censorship under the fascist government (1922–1943) was very strict, and they exercised severe control over cultural products. Any content which could upset or create malcontent in society was censored and banned. This censorship did not apply to detective novels of foreign derivation. Since the criminal acts were set, and described as occurring, in other countries, the books were not subject to the same censorship. Thus, Italian writers began to set their novels abroad; Ezio d’Errico (1892–1972) set his stories in France (*Il fatto di via delle Argonne*, 1937), Giorgio Scerbanenco (1911–1969) picked Boston (*Venere privata*, 1966) and many others chose foreign settings for their detectives. In a period of repression such as that under fascism (1922–1946), it is understandable that crime fiction did not find favourable ground in which to emerge. However, once the censorship was more relaxed, other writers dealt with mystery stories, and immediately after WW2, the Italian *giallo* expanded with names such as Franco Enna (*Preludio alla tomba*, 1955), Sergio Donati (*Il sepolcro di carta*,

1955), Carlo Emilio Gadda (*Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana*, 1957) and Laura Grimaldi (*Il sospetto*, 1989).¹⁹

Despite these remarkable examples, the most popular writer of *gialli* was Leonardo Sciascia (1921–1989), author of important stories such as *Il giorno della civetta* (1961) and *A ciascuno il suo* (1966). The main particularity of Sciascia's writings is the polemical and critical view of society. This is an overt aspect of most of his novels. *Il giorno della civetta*, for instance, is the first Italian detective novel centred on the mafia phenomenon (Sollars, 2008:715). The text provides a political critique of the authorities and their inability to handle investigations within a corrupt system. Sciascia's novels break with the conventional detective formula, which presents a happy ending where justice is done (Ambroise, 2004a). His *gialli* identify the culprits but do not punish them. Thus, Sciascia's heroes are eventually disillusioned, and so are the books' readers.

The *giallo* still receives a positive response from the public, and is appreciated in all of its forms: *giallo poliziesco*, *giallo politico*, *giallo erotico* (Wood, 2005: 53). With the advent of television, some *gialli* found success in adaptations. This is the case for Andrea Camilleri's novels featuring Commissario Montalbano as the protagonist, which have been translated into more than thirty languages; the TV series based on the books has been broadcast in many countries across the world. Another interesting factor which favoured the circulation of the *giallo* is the development of crime fiction in the comics formula, anticipating the visual graphics of the cinematic *gialli*. With regard to this, the following page will investigate the pictorial archives, leading us towards a universe of horror made of images.

¹⁹ Laura Grimaldi wrote under male pseudonyms, including Alfred Grim (*Attento, poliziotto!*, 1960) and Alfred Pomarick.

1.2.3 Visual archives: horror through images

Only a real artist knows the actual anatomy of the terrible or the physiology of fear – the exact sort of lines and proportions that connect up with latent instincts or hereditary memories of fright, and the proper colour contrasts and lighting effects to stir the dormant sense of strangeness.

H. P. Lovecraft, 2011 [1926]: 380

The proliferation of visual arts led to an increase in image-based archives. With regard to this, the following pages analyse the importance of visual sources in the construction of horrific metaphors of fear. As Angela Dalle Vacche (1996) notes in her work *Cinema and Painting: How Art is Used in Film*, many directors have drawn from pictorial archives to give emphasis to their films. The use of visual sources facilitates a game of intertextuality, favouring the interactions between the arts and the cinematic narrative. The reactions, when experiencing frightening pictorial art, can be horrific in themselves. This effect can be explained with reference to *Stendhal syndrome*: a psychosomatic disorder which causes physical and psychological effects (fainting, nausea, confusion, hallucinations) when confronted with works of immense beauty (Margherini, 1989).²⁰ If this reaction occurs when art is beautiful, it seems evident that the same response can happen with works of art which represent the horrific.

A relevant concentration of paintings which represented frightening illustrations appeared in the visual arts of the Italian Renaissance.²¹ Many painters took inspiration from mythological, religious and literary archives. With its tales of wars,

²⁰ The syndrome is named after Stendhal (1783–1842) who, while visiting Florence, saw a Giotto fresco for the first time and was overcome with emotion.

²¹ The Italian Renaissance refers to a period of cultural changes which developed in Italy (Tuscany) during the fourteenth century and lasted until the sixteenth century. To read more about the Italian Renaissance, see Burke (1999).

sacrifices and death, the Bible constituted one of the richest sources of inspiration. Caravaggio (1571–1610) seemed particularly obsessed by the motif of decapitation as described in both the Old and the New Testament.²² Inspired by the Holy texts, he visually reproduced some sequences from the Book of Judith (*Judith and Holopherne*, Gdt 13, 8), Matthew (*John the Baptist*, Mt 14, 10; Mc 6, 16–29; Lc 9, 9) and Samuel (*David and Goliath*, 1 Sam 17, 51) (Figures 2, 3, 4).



Figures 2, 3, 4 – Three paintings depicting three different moments of decapitation in Caravaggio’s works.
Judith and Holopherne (1599)²³ *John the Baptist* (1607) *David with the Head of Goliath* (1606/07)

The dramatic contrast between dark backgrounds and strong light emphasizes the main details of the narration and gives the paintings their emotional intensity. This technique, named *chiaroscuro*, which literally means light-dark, creates the illusion of three dimensions in a bi-dimensional medium. Prior to the Renaissance, paintings were characterized by flat colours. By introducing *chiaroscuro*, Caravaggio gives realistic effects to his works of art, inspiring the painters to come. A similar effect is achieved in Italian horror cinema by directors such as Bava and Argento. Their use of primary colours and contrasts in light and shade are hallmarks of their style.²⁴ As stated in Ernest Mathijs and Xavier Mendik’s *The Cult Film Reader* (2007), “Bava is a superb

²² In the Old Testament the practice of decapitation of battle victims was common (1 Sam 31, 9; 2 Sam 4, 7; 20, 22). Caravaggio, inspired by this practice, reproduced the moment of decapitation in many of his paintings (*Sacrifice of Isaac*, 1596; *Medusa*, 1597; *David and Goliath*, 1599; *Salomè with the Head of Saint John the Baptist*, 1606; *Beheading of Saint John the Baptist*, 1608; *David with the Head of Goliath*, 1610).

²³ *Judith and Holopherne* is exhibited in Rome at the Galleria Nazionale d’Arte Antica. The widow Judith saved her people first by charming the Assyrian general Holopherne, and then by decapitating him in his tent, using his own sword.

²⁴ It is worth pointing out here that Mario Bava’s first ambition was to become a painter (Pezzotta, 1995: 16).

painter on celluloid, electrifying otherwise routine films by his color and compositions” (Mathij, 2007: 426). This interplay of light and colours is particularly evident in Bava’s *I Tre volti della paura* (1963). A scene from the episode *I Wurdalak* suggests, for instance, the effects of the *chiaroscuro* technique (Figure 5). Gorca, proudly holding the decapitated head of the Turkish bandit Alibeq, is reminiscent of David showing Goliath’s head in Caravaggio’s painting. The focus of the frame is illuminated by low-key lighting which, coming from the left side, accentuates the contours of Alibeq’s head, leaving the rest of the frame in darkness (frame 00:43:59).



Figure 5 – Gorca showing Alibeq’s head – Episode *I Wurdalak*
Bava’s *I tre volti della paura* (1963)

As Susan Hayward (2000) notes, the use of contrasting tones of light and shade “is predominantly associated with film noir, horror, psychodramas and thrillers” (Hayward, 2000: 225). In line with these observations, one could say that Caravaggio’s technique anticipated the visual narratives of the cinematic horror genre. Lighting effects are known to play an essential role in setting the mood and atmosphere of a film. Many other painters besides Caravaggio provided sources of inspiration to the Italian horror productions. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, for instance, saw a proliferation of visual representations of the horrific in many works of art (Henry Fuseli’s *The Nightmare*, 1782; Caspar David Friedrich’s *The Abbey in the Oakwood*, 1809–10; Edvard Munch’s *The Scream*, 1893). Some of the most perturbing images of that period were Goya’s *Black Paintings* (1819–23), a series of 14 paintings which provided

several illustrations of evil in both natural and supernatural forms.²⁵ The most popular and perhaps the most frightening of the series is *Saturn Devouring his Son* (1819–1823). Directly inspired by Greek mythology, the painting shows Saturn in the act of committing the terrible crime of devouring his son (Figure 6). The painting, which overtly suggests a moment of cannibalism as well as an explicit case of infanticide, can be interpreted as a critical allegory of the wars and revolutions in Spain, which were consuming its own children.



Figure 6 – From Goya's *Black Paintings: Saturn Devouring his Son* (1819–23)

Over time visual arts developed into a broad range of forms. One of the most recent (mid twentieth century) is the comics format, a visual medium that communicates through images, often combined with words or visual information (Kukkonen, 2013: 4). This graphic form has frequently constituted a foreground for horrific archetypes.

²⁵ These paintings were made after France declared war on Spain (the Napoleonic Wars 1803–1815). During that period Goya was undergoing a physical and mental breakdown, which is reflected in his works of art. They represented scenes of war as well as drawings inspired by mythological archives of witchcraft (*The Great He-Goat*). Goya painted the *Black Paintings* directly onto the walls of his home. As will be argued in chapter 5, Goya's *Black Paintings*, especially *Two Old Men Eating Soup* (1819–23), inspired Dario Argento's *Profondo rosso*. The long hallway in Marta's house is full of portraits with distorted faces which are suggestive of the works of Munch and Goya.

Italian adult comics, known as *fumetti neri*, provided interesting sources of inspiration for the cinematic *gialli*.²⁶ As Louis Paul (2005) notes,

the popularity and wealth of adult Italian comic strips [...] caused some directors to look to these sadistic, sexy and violent illustrated stories for their inspiration (Louis, 2005: 24).

The birth of *fumetti neri* can be dated back to 1962, when the first Italian *fumetto*, *Diabolik – Il Fumetto del Brivido*, created by Angela and Luciana Giussani, was published.²⁷ The protagonist is a cynical masked anti-hero who steals from criminals and commits acts of violence (Figure 7).²⁸ Even his girlfriend, Eva Kant, is a criminal. She embodies a new interpretation of the female: more masculine, emancipated and transgressive. This innovative representation of the feminine seems to reflect the new predominant role of women in Italian society. As will be further explored in chapter 2, the 1960s represented radical changes in terms of autonomy and freedom and these changes affected the portrayal of women in cinema.

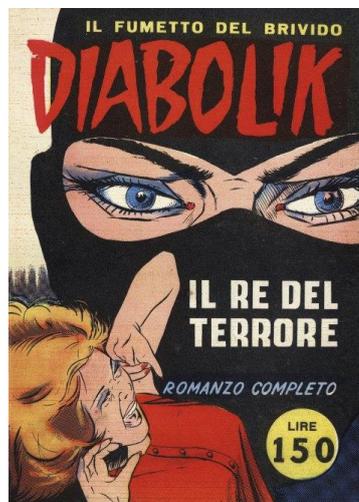


Figure 7 – Cover *Fumetto nero: Diabolik. Il re del terrore*.

²⁶ The term *fumetto*, which literally means “puff of smoke”, refers to the graphic speech balloons present in comics. The word *nero* means black, and refers to the content for adults. *Nero* is an adjective that is commonly used to describe crime content. An example is the notion of *cronaca nera*, which refers to crime news.

²⁷ Illustrators such as Luigi Marchesi, Enzo Facciolo, Glauco Coretti, Sergio Zambinoni and Franco Paludetti contributed to *Diabolik*.

²⁸ Mario Bava’s adaptation of *Diabolik*, *Danger: Diabolik* (1968) is considered a Pop Art classic. The use of primary colours gives the film a remarkably similar visual quality to its comic antecedent.

Gialli and *fumetti neri* presented similar thematic frameworks. Similarly to the *gialli*, the *fumetti neri* did not engage with the supernatural. They explored themes from daily life, representing the society of those years (Piselli, 2000: 16). The main environment was the modern city, with its violence, crimes and sexual transgressiveness.²⁹ *Diabolik* (1962), for instance, reflects on a certain malcontent in the consumer society of that time. The protagonist is very determined to obtain what he wants and by any means, but who are his real victims? As Mario Gomboli (1998) explained in *That's Fumetti, Diabolik's* readers

...realised that most of the victims of his ruthless dagger, even though they wore a suit and tie and not *Diabolik's* black, hooded suit, were even greater villains than he was: corrupt politicians, drug-pushers, usurers, tycoons, who would stop at nothing to amass ever greater wealth (Gomboli, quoted in Gravett, 2012: n.p.).

Gomboli overtly criticizes the capitalist system, the political corruption, the injustices, the economic differences, the selfishness and the violence of his time. The protagonists of the first *fumetti neri* were inspired by several characters from popular French prose fiction, such as the gentleman thief Arsène Lupin (1905) by Maurice Leblanc, the hooded gangster *Zigomar* by Léon Sazie (1910) and *Fantomas*, created by Marcel Allain and Pierre Souvestre in 1911. Most of these characters appeared in comic formats, but *Fantomas* in particular enjoyed public success, influencing the comics to come. Striving to replicate the popularity of *Diabolik*, other authors used the same formula, publishing new crime comics. These included, amongst others, Gino Sansoni's *Sadik* (1965) and *Zakimort* (1965, 115 issues), Giorgio Pedrazzi's *Oltretomba* (1971–86, 300 issues), Renzo Barbieri's *Terror* (1969–87, 216 issues), *Terror Blue* (1969–87, 216 issues), *Il Vampiro* (1972–80, 122 issues) and *Lo scheletro* (1973–78, 79 issues). However, the most popular were *Kriminal* (419 issues) and *Satanik* (231 issues), both created by Magnus and Max Bunker in 1964.³⁰

²⁹ Italian *gialli* engaged with elements of horror and eroticism, motives which would find more emphasis in the cinematic form of the genre.

³⁰ A common particularity in each protagonist was the presence of a K in their nickname.

The new *fumetti neri* presented some novelties: more perverse anti-heroes and anti-heroines and explicit sado-erotic motives. *Kriminal* in particular introduced a protagonist who appeared to be more violent and vengeful compared to his predecessor in *Diabolik*. With his skull-masked costume, *Kriminal* became more successful than *Diabolik*. The success of the series derived from the decision to integrate sexual and violent elements in order to emphasize the immoral nature of the anti-hero. The main protagonist, *Kriminal*, is a brutal, pitiless killer who murders his victims in a spiteful way.³¹ He seduces provocative women and then kills them without any regret. As Carlo Dumontet (1998) notes,

Each issue [of *Kriminal*] abounded in scantily attired young ladies, who frequently ended up as half-naked subjects of brutal homicides (Dumontet, 1998: 9).

The sexualized violence was an essential element that attracted readers. This component became prevalent above all in the 1970s, when censorship was more relaxed and the soft-core industry increased its public success. In those years, comics such as Gaspare De Fiore and Sergio Rosi's *Jacula* (1969–82, 327 issues), Renzo Barnieri's *Sukia* (1977–86, 150 issues) and Giuseppe Pederali's *Zora* (1972–85, 235 issues and 12 specials) enjoyed a consistent number of readers. *Jacula* is considered to be one of the first and most successful Italian porno-horror comics. The protagonist, modelled on Italian singer Patti Pravo, is an attractive vampire who can survive in daylight thanks to some strange sorcery.³² The intertextuality with the literary tradition is recurrent throughout the series. *Jacula* meets protagonists such as Jack the Ripper, Dr Frankenstein and the Invisible Man. These references provide a fundamental link with the original sources that inspired the *fumetti*: gothic and crime novels.

In the period between the mid-1960s and 1970s, other remarkable forms of comics for adults developed: the *Photostories for Adults* (Pino Ponzoni's *Killing*, 1966, 62 issues) and the *cineromanzo*. Through this graphic medium, the stories were told not by

³¹ Taking inspiration from the comics' eponymous character, Umberto Lenzi directed the film *Kriminal* in 1966.

³² The phenomenon of modelling the protagonists on real actresses or singers was recurrent. *Sukia*, for instance, is based on the Italian actress Ornella Muti, while *Zora* is modelled on Catherine Deneuve.

drawings but by photography. The *cineromanzo* consisted of sequential pictures which followed a script, often an adaptation of contemporary films of that time. The stories featured “the same dramatic and erotic elements characterizing Italian pulp fiction such as romance, corruption, jealousy, sadism, fetishism, sex and death” (Piselli, 2000: 50). Due to the use of photography, the effect of the *cineromanzo* was more realistic and consequently had a greater impact on readers’ minds compared to the conventional *fumetti*.

The study of these different forms of visual art has allowed us to follow the evolution of the horrific in a variety of representations. The analysis of the horrific in pictorial arts should be taken into consideration with regard to the impact it has on the human mind. Apparently mute, paintings, crime comics and visual graphics in general have instead an echoing voice that is able to accompany viewers for a long time. Silent images, in fact, appeal to the spectators behind the surface of the images, compelling them to use their imagination in order to fill in the unknown.³³

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a cultural/historical backdrop outlining the significant conditions that gave rise to the development of archives of horror. After outlining the presence of two different archives, external and internal, the attention has focused on the development of the first category. The analysis has identified four main sub-archives: religions, mythological traditions, literature and visual arts. These repositories work as multidisciplinary archives which involve a wide range of concepts, both intuitive and counter-intuitive. Having acquired an emotional significance, these concepts have been embedded in a collective memory, creating an external archive of horror.

³³ This topic will be covered in more detail in chapter 3 and chapter 7.

The individuation of collective archives of horror allows us to understand and interpret the national context in which horror archetypes have been generated. Throughout this chapter I have explored a series of common cultural elements that, as will be examined in more detail in chapter 2, provide fundamental sources of inspiration for Italian horror films. The Catholic religion, mythological traditions and eighteenth- and nineteenth-century gothic literature have generated emblems of fear which have circulated throughout European cinematic productions. However, although the aim of the horror genre is universal, these pages have pointed out that the resources adopted to provoke fear in audiences differ from one country to another. Horror symbols are not the same across the world. It is obvious, then, that the effectiveness of horror varies according to different systems of beliefs.

CHAPTER 2

ARCHAEOLOGY OF A GENRE

Truly the universe is full of ghosts, not sheeted churchyard spectres, but the inextinguishable and immortal elements of life, which, having once been, can never die, though they blend and change and change again forever.

H. Rider Haggard, 2013 [1885]: 131

Introduction

The horror genre is characterized by a vast assortment of narrative elements which revolve around the main topic of fear. As chapter 1 highlighted, many of these elements can be traced back to religious, mythological, literary or visual archives. By entertaining these considerations, the present chapter discusses how symbols recirculate on a second level in the cinematic context. Blending together symbols of various natures, horror cinema manifests itself in different forms. It is from the overlap and mixing of these elements that a contamination of genres derives, giving birth to new metaphors of fear. As a result of this, it will not be surprising to find, in the following pages, a plethora of themes and symbols which have been encompassed by the horror genre. To extend this topic, the attention will focus on the Italian cinema industry, which, between the late 1960s and the late 1980s, became a lucrative medium through which staple themes and moral taboos of the society of that time, were staged (women's emancipation, homosexuality, political issues and consumerism among others).

Shifting the attention to the fandom system, this section will investigate the extent to which interaction chains give the horror genre the power to bind individuals around a common interest. Together, fans exercise their performativity, interacting with the filmic materials. Exploring their ritualistic practices, this analysis will highlight their active agency, establishing the pleasure of horror as an evident sign of their performativity. This discussion will be further extended to authorship issues, reinforcing the debate on dialogic interactionism as the comprehensive solution in the understanding of the genre and its dynamics.

2.1 Framing genre issues

The problem is that horror is not a genre, it is an emotion. Horror is not a kind of fiction. It is a progressive form of fiction that continually evolves to meet the fears and anxieties of its time.

D. Winter, 1984: 5

Before being able to start any analysis of the origin and development of the Italian horror genre, it is necessary first to define the term “genre” and its position in film studies. Conventionally, the term “genre” refers to a system of codes based on specific conventions of contents (motifs, settings) and forms (editing techniques, style) which are shared by texts/narratives/films. This system of codes “enables an audience to determine rapidly and with some complexity the kind of narrative they are viewing” (Turner, 2006: 119). Despite being the most popular, this simplistic definition does not pin down the epistemology of genres, their industrial position and their evolution. The definition of genre is inherently complex.

Film scholar and theorist Rick Altman (1984, 1999) individuates and criticizes a list of problematic points which plague genre criticism (Propp, 1958; Frye, 1953; Bazin, 1971; Todorov, 1990). In order to engage with these theoretical issues and solve the lack of an adequate theory, he proposes a dualistic approach, which simultaneously involves semantic and syntactic models (Altman, 1984).³⁴ This binomial perspective highlights the dynamics of variations, repetitions and conflicts within the syntax and semantics of the genre. While the semantic approach engages with the conventions of the genre related to the similarities of narrative, settings, characters, and other signifiers (the genre's "building blocks themselves"), the syntactic discourse investigates the relationships between the semantic elements and the structure into which they are arranged (Altman, 1984: 10). Syntactic analysis provides information about the societies in which the films are produced and consumed. Altman claims that only a simultaneous use of both definitions can offer a better understanding of genre. However, other aspects need to be taken into account. The perception of genres, in fact, may vary according to a different recognition of semantic and syntactic elements. It is necessary, therefore, to consider multiple users and their particular forms of interpretation. To face this issue, Altman integrates pragmatics (Altman, 1999: 208) into his semantic/syntactic approach. This results in a triadic perspective of analysis which considers not only the semiotics, but also aspects, such as distribution, audiences' expectations, the cinema industry, etc., which are all essential in genre construction and identification (Altman, 1999: 210).

Traditionally, genres were considered as fixed forms. Structuralist theories developed between the 1960s and the 1980s (McConnell, 1975; Wright, 1975; Brady, 1976), disregarded the historical progress and evolution of genres. However, subsequent studies - post-structuralist (Schatz, 1991, Neale 2000), Russian Formalists (Pudovkin, 1949; Lotman, 1976 [1973]) - have emphasized their dynamic nature, demonstrating that, even when canonically established, they continue to evolve in contents and forms. An interesting aspect of this evolution engages with the transit of elements from one category to another. In the horror genre, for instance, some of the

³⁴ The terms semantic and syntactic derive from linguistic studies. See Saussure (1998). Semantic refers to meaning, while syntactic involves structure and ordering.

conventionalized elements cross the boundaries of the genre, as they are integrated in films belonging to other cycles.³⁵ Examples can be found in films such as Steno's *Tempi duri per I vampiri* (1959) and Marino Girolami's *Il mio amico Jekyll* (1960), where horrific elements are blended with comedy. From the combination of elements of different natures, the horror genre branches out into subgenres.³⁶ The genre, then, as John Cawelti (2004) notes, needs to be conceived as a macrotext from which all the subgenre films descend:

[...] an abstract of the most significant characteristic or family resemblances among many particular texts, which can be accordingly analyzed, evaluated, and otherwise related to each other by virtue of their connection with the supertext (Cawelti, 2004: 97).

The macrotext involves, therefore, the common images, motifs and forms that "transit from one film to another" (Lake, 1994: 23). Certain conventionalized elements are repeated, while new ones are introduced on the basis of the audience's response. Steve Neale (1980) argues that repetition and difference are essential to the industry of genres (Neale, 1980: 48). In other words, the way in which conventions are manipulated attracts the audience, affecting the economy of a genre. This phenomenon, termed the "Producers' Game" by Altman, relies on the identification of a winning formula which will be repeated with some changes (Altman, 1999: 38). This process explains the structure, evolution, death and birth cycle of films. Bearing this in mind, it is evident that a dialogue between the cinema industry and the audience's expectations is essential in the understanding of a genre's evolution. According to Neale's post-structuralist analysis,

³⁵ Responding to the debate on film genres, Linda Williams (1991) argues that horror, melodrama and pornography all belong to the "body genre" category. All three types of film are designed to elicit a strong physical response in the viewers. Horror is designed to elicit fear and terror, melodramas to make viewers cry and pornography to elicit sexual arousal.

³⁶ Many subgenres, or cycles, are characterized by a certain instability which derives from the combination of themes drawn from a variety of cycles. To read more about this topic, see section 2.3.

genres do not consist only of films: they consist also, and equally, of specific systems of expectation and hypothesis that spectators bring with them to the cinema and that interact with films themselves during the course of the viewing process (Neale, 2012: 179).

With regard to this, Altman makes a distinction between ritual and ideological functions of genres. While the ritual approach (Cawelti, 1971, 1976; Braudy, 1976; Sobchack, 1985; Wood, 1977; Wright, 1975; Schatz, 1981) focuses on giving the ultimate authorship to the audience (the film industry responding to societal pressure and audiences' expectations), the ideological approach considers genre as an instrument of control. In other words, it demonstrates how audiences are manipulated by the economical and political interests of the cinema industry. These approaches are opposed. Altman attempts to combine them, assuming that:

the successful genre owes its success not alone to its reflection of an audience ideal, nor solely to its status as apology for the Hollywood enterprise, but to its ability to carry out both functions simultaneously (Altman, 1999: 223).

Therefore, to be successful, genres need to entertain both ritual and ideological functions at the same time. That is, they can extend their popularity only "when the audience's desire for ritual satisfaction intersects with the ideological drive for social control" (Grant, 2012: 48).

Considering all these observations and the constant changes and evolution of genres, it is understandable that a simplistic synchronic approach is inadequate and incomprehensive in its attempt to establish an exhaustive definition of genres. By combining the synchronic and semantic models into a unifying theory, Altman's "dual approach" provides a solution to this issue. His model criticizes the synchronic, ahistorical semiotic approach, suggesting a diachronic, historical and developmental view of genre. This discussion, then, points out the flexibility of genres and their interactive nature with other genre categories. The constant processes of evolution and

development demonstrate that the interpretation of genres needs to be extended to incorporate more approaches at the same time.

2.2 The Italian gothic tradition: the Golden Age (1957–1966)

The Italian horror films of the sixties were both baroque and romantic, always steeped in a deep ancestral past of depth, family secrets, images of power. Loss, forbidden cravings and desires. They addressed our unexpressed side. They were metaphors for our repressed fears and the forbidden, bestiality, necrophilia, and incest. They carried with them a sense of fate. They moved in a private dreamscape. They filled you with a psychic dread rooted in the past. And finally they addressed the soul.

B. Steele, 1996: 7

The Italian horror genre developed in the cinematic gothic tradition in the late 1950s, about 10 years later than other countries. This happened partly because in those years it was necessary to explore means of distribution, market potential and the nature of demand. A dialogue between filmmakers and audiences, in terms of offers and expectations, then, was necessary to obtain a conspicuous profit from the cinema industry. Another fundamental reason for this belated development was the fact that Italy lacked the depth and breadth of gothic and fantastic culture enjoyed by other European countries, such as Great Britain and Germany. As Andrea Bini (2011) quotes in *Horror Cinema. The Emancipation of Women and Urban Anxieties*, Mario Bava himself used to point out that,

vampires and other supernatural monsters do not exist in Italian folklore. Instead there are the *fattucchiere* or powerful witches. Although *fattucchiere* are not necessarily malevolent, they represent an alternative culture and are therefore a menace to a patriarchal society whose values are symbolized above all by the Catholic Church (Bini, 2011: 58).

Bava's words emphasize the fact that Italian folklore had developed an autochthon system of beliefs which was characterized by horrific creatures that were slightly different from those of other traditions. To obtain a favourable response from audiences and to let Italians metabolize the iconographic gothic features of foreign derivation, directors integrated international sources with motifs and atmospheres linked with Italian culture. From this attempt at integration, the main peculiarities of the Italian horror genre developed. In order to analyse their evolution, the following pages will investigate the different dynamics which affected the genre from its origins until the 1980s.

Early opportunities to introduce gothic and fantastic elements in Italian cinematic productions emerged in the silent era (1895–1925). The stardom films system, named *divismo* in Italy, introduced elements that were typical of the gothic tradition: atmospheres of mystery and suspense, settings haunted by the past, occult and supernatural occurrences, and the theme of the double.³⁷ Carmine Gallone's melodrama *Malombra* (1917) represents a remarkable example of this. The film is based on the novel of the same name by Antonio Fogazzaro, which, as Ann Hallamore Caesar (2007) points out, is "a perhaps unique example of an Italian novel of the period whose inspiration comes primarily from the English Victorian novel and the late gothic" (Hallamore, 2007: 100). The story is set in a castle where Marina di Malombra, played by Lyda Borelli, lives with her uncle before getting married. During her stay in the castle, Marina discovers a family secret: by reading some letters written by her ancestor Cecilia, she finds out that the woman was segregated and maltreated by her jealous

³⁷ The term *divismo* identifies a specific moment in Italian cinema prior to World War I and to the introduction of sound to film.

husband and eventually driven to commit suicide. Marina identifies with Cecilia and takes revenge on her behalf by murdering her uncle, before committing suicide.

As Marcia Landy (2004) suggests, “*Malombra* dramatizes the conflict between rationalism and the supernatural” (Landy, 2004: 30). This conflict emerges in Marina’s theatrical gestures, which give emphasis to the whole drama. In the *Diva* films, the emphatic method of acting gives power to the narration, without the emotions necessarily being articulated with words. “Through her body, Lyda Borelli has the ability to make you *feel* what is happening *with* her, *to* her, *in* her” (Campisciano, 2000: 67). Her languid poses hint at her struggles and sufferings (Figure 8).



Figure 8 – Lyda Borelli in Carmine Gallone’s melodrama *Malombra* (1916)

By referring to *Malombra* as one of the first cinematic transpositions of gothic novels, I want to demonstrate how archetypes of horror had already circulated in Italian silent cinema. Another aspect that I would like to point out is the predominant role of the female protagonist in the *diva* films. Gallone’s *Malombra*, in this respect, introduces a relevant element which will influence the future cinematic gothic tradition: the centrality of the female character. The stardom films launched the new figure of the *diva*, the *femme fatale*, directly inspired by the Scandinavian model of the vamp, or woman-vampire.³⁸ This woman, “willful, restless, passionate” and emancipated, was set apart from the model of the damsel in distress, a staple of the gothic literary

³⁸ The Italian *femme fatale* was mainly inspired by actresses such as Asta Nielsen (1881–1972) and Else Frölich (1880–1960). Nielsen’s name and way of being became a trademark of emancipated femininity in innumerable countries. These women represented emancipation, anticipating the social changes that would affect Italy in the 1960s. Asta Nielsen was the first European actress to become a film star.

tradition, and gave life to the new emblematic role of a tempting woman, able to attract and lead the man to ruin (Landy, 2004: 30).

Extending this innovative interpretation of the female character, Nino Oxilia's *Rapsodia satanica* (1917) proposed a feminine variation of the Faust myth, embodied by the diva Lyda Borelli. Nostalgically yearning for her past years, old countess Alba d'Oltrevita makes a Faustian deal with the devil: she gives up love to have her youthful beauty back forever. In the same year, Enrico Vidali's *La vergine dei veleni* (1917) gave birth to the *giftmadchen* myth: a young girl transformed into a woman poisoner (Curti, 2011: 21). The silent era was rich in *femmes fatales* who struggled in an excess of sentiments. Even a noble sentiment such as love was subverted into something catastrophic and extreme.

These peculiarities of the diva film found more emphasis in the early Italian gothic productions. Aside from these pioneering examples, the intense use of gothic motifs as well as the centrality of the female character did not develop until the late 1950s.³⁹ Influenced by the success of horror productions of foreign derivation, especially British (Hammer Film Productions) and American (Universal Picture Co. Inc.) films, Italian filmmakers thought that a local attempt on the genre could represent a new area of potential growth for the Italian cinema industry.⁴⁰ In 1957 *I Vampiri* by Riccardo Freda was released, ushering in a new era in the gothic tradition.⁴¹ The film, which will be examined in more detail in chapter 6, did not enjoy significant success at the time; however, it represented a fundamental starting point for the new genre. Although exploiting the archetype of the fantastic vampire, *I Vampiri* introduced important narrative novelties, such as the centrality of the Italian female figure, as perturbing elements.

³⁹ *Il Caso Haller* (1933) is a remake of the 1930 film *Der Andere* by Paul Wiene.

⁴⁰ The main exponent of the productions of Hammer Films was Terence Fisher, notable in particular for *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957) and *Dracula* (1958). In America Roger Corman established the popularity of the horror genre through films based on novels by Edgar Allan Poe, including *House of Usher* (1956) and *The Pit and the Pendulum* (1961).

⁴¹ A sculptor and newspaper art critic in his early adulthood, in 1937 Freda began his cinematic career as a screenwriter and production supervisor (Palmerini, 1996: 80). He moved to film direction in 1942, beginning a career that lasted over forty years.

Based on the legend of Elizabeth Bathory, remembered as the “Blood Countess”, the film was grounded in the horror mythology related to vampirism. The myth, as interpreted by Freda, was definitely innovative. No monsters, no drinking of blood, no crosses appeared in the film. “The undead creatures invented by Bram Stoker hold no interest for me,” Freda said. “I believe that, if modern vampires exist, they must survive by stealing away the youth of others” (Lucas, 2007: 172). Thus, the desire for eternal youth became in the film the pivotal theme, replacing the archetypal images of the male vampire thirsty for blood. This original vision provided new perspectives in the cycle of vampirism: it created innovative interpretative readings of the myth, proving that Italian filmmakers could excel even in the gothic realm.

If *I vampiri* was a flop at the box office, the national fame and success of the gothic genre arrived in 1960 with Mario Bava’s *La maschera del demonio*. The film was a hit in Italy and abroad and launched Bava’s directorial career as well as that of actress Barbara Steele.⁴² Bava’s editing techniques and his skills in creating special effects with low budgets, which will be examined in the analytic part of my work, caught the attention of many critics (Pezzotta, 1995; Cozzi, 2001; Howarth, 2002; Lucas, 2007) and became a major inspiration for a number of other directors. Bava’s use of light and shade, to emphasize the tension in his films, was influenced by German Expressionism (1920s to 1930s), which, in terms of visual design and lighting, heavily affected the early productions of the gothic era.⁴³ Indoor settings in particular provided a good opportunity to build gloomy atmospheres. This is visible, for example, in a sequence from *La maschera del demonio* (1960), where Gorobec is in Prince Vajda’s castle (Figure 9). Generating contrasting tones of highlights and shadows, the high-key lighting gives depth to the interiors. The visual is particularly stylized due to the sharp symmetry of the composition, with Gorobec’s silhouette and the shadows of the pillars filling the emptiness of the space.

⁴² Bava’s *La maschera del demonio* (1960) will be analysed in more detail in chapter 6.

⁴³ The first film of German Expressionism was *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1929), directed by Robert Wiene. The visual distortion of the style, the eerie graphics and the uncanny atmospheres are characteristic of the movement.



Figure 9 – The interior of Katia’s castle – *La maschera del demonio* (1960)

In addition to Freda and Bava, many other Italian directors were dragged into the gothic horror tradition in the 1960s (Antonio Margheriti’s *Danza macabra*, 1963; Giorgio Ferroni’s *Il mulino dalle donne di pietra*, 1963; Camillo Mastrocinque’s *La cripta e l’incubo*, 1964; Mario Caiano’s *Amanti d’oltretomba*, 1965), contributing to the national and international success of horror films made in Italy. During this phase of expansion and conquest, contracts with foreign distributors, first of all with British and American ones, included massive acquisitions of films (Shipka, 2011: 26–29). This rapidly allowed the Italian horror industry to capture an enormous international market. In many cases foreign distributors acquired exclusive rights to sell, screen and rent Italian productions in their countries. For many years Italian films were purchased without being screened, nonetheless overwhelming the financial competition.

In order to achieve major success, Italian directors were asked to cast stars who were popular in foreign countries. Hence, many Italian horror films began to feature actors such as Christopher Lee (Antonio Margheriti’s *La vergine di Norimberga*, 1963), Boris Karloff (Mario Bava’s *I tre volti della paura – I Wurdalak*, 1963) and Vincent Price (Ubaldo Ragona’s *L’ultimo uomo della terra*, 1964).⁴⁴ The presence of popular names in the cast helped to ensure that the films made a profit. Already admired in the foreign distributions, these actors acquired new popularity in the Italian films. This phenomenon can be interpreted in terms of interaction rituals. As explained in chapter

⁴⁴ This phenomenon led to a second circulation of actors. We are faced in this case with a process of intertextuality which involves actors.

1, rituals invest symbols, objects and individuals with values (Emotional Energy) that circulate in further practices (chains) and in private discourses (third-order circulation). As a result of this, one could suggest that Lee, Karloff and Price, recirculating in new cinematic contexts (the Italian distributions), renewed and increased the values acquired in previous rituals, and were therefore charged with further emotional energy.

While old symbols are reconfirmed, new ones acquire power and sacredness and become established as new archetypes of horror. Barbara Steele represents an interesting example of this phenomenon. Launched by Mario Bava's *La Maschera del Demonio* (1960), she became one of the most popular cult icons of the horror genre. Her role as actress was firstly imposed by the director's will (order-giver of the primordial ritual) and then confirmed by the audience's appraisal. Reinforced over time, her iconic role was recognized and accepted by each new generation of fans, and she is still popular nowadays. These dynamics prove how relevant interaction rituals are in their ability to attribute special value (EE) to individuals/symbols. These considerations can be extended to all of the components of the genre. In order to extend this argument, the following pages will discuss how the combination of elements of different types can generate new hybrid subgenres and consequently new metaphors of fear.

2.3 Horror subgenres between hybridism and intertextuality

Any text that has slept with another text (...) has necessarily slept with all the texts the other text has slept with.

R. Stam, 2000: 202

As discussed thus far, culture and traditions are fundamental archives of horror. Directors draw symbols from these repositories of fear and, after a process of manipulation, impose them on audiences. In many cases these symbols are already constituted and accepted by the collectiveness, while in others they are new ones. If they are old, we are faced with *sacred objects* carried out and established before by previous generations; if they are new, we are faced with ordinary things, in Durkheimian terms *profane* (Durkheim, 1965 [1912]: 37), which still need to be converted into *sacred* ones, or symbolically changed and intensified, through new interaction rituals. Through rituals, in fact, simple things of everyday life acquire power and sacredness, conferred and recognized by society (second-order circulation) and by individuals in their privacy (third-order circulation). The power of symbols fades over time; hence, it is necessary to regenerate it through new rituals. With regard to this, the horror cinema reinforces this power, making these symbols recirculate on a second level and transforming them into new metaphors of fear.

The process of decontextualization of objects, which will be further discussed in chapter 5, represents an important practice in the construction of new shapes of horror. Another relevant manner in which symbols are built up derives from the blending of elements drawn from different discourses. The combination of horror motifs with elements belonging to other cycles – such as gothic and supernatural, thriller and science fiction, and fantasy and eroticism – led to the generation of hybrid subgenres (*filoni*), which, as mentioned before (section 2.1), radiated out from the main subject

matter of horror.⁴⁵ These can be traced back to early attempts to introduce fantastic and gothic elements to typically Italian genres: the *peplum* and the lowbrow comedies.⁴⁶ The overlaps of these cycles launched intriguing forms, like the horror *peplum* (M. Bava's *Ercole al centro della terra*, 1961; Giacomo Gentilomo's *Maciste contro il Vampiro*, 1961; Riccardo Freda's *Maciste all'Inferno*, 1962) and the horror comedy (Steno's *Tempi duri per i vampiri*, 1959; M. Girolami's *Il mio amico Jekyll*, 1960). The first cycle took inspiration from the Italian historical epic of the silent era, while the second was grounded in the *commedia all'italiana*.⁴⁷

Merging the horrific with the traditional motifs of the *commedia all'italiana*, the horror comedy satirized the growing success of horror films. *Thrilling* (1965), for instance, directed by Gian Luigi Polidoro, Ettore Scola and Carlo Lizzani, extended the parody of the genre by employing elements derived from the *fumetti neri* formula.⁴⁸ The film is split into three distinct episodes: *Il vittimista*, *Sadik* and *L'autostrada del sole*. The second one, *Sadik*, in particular, introduces all the stylistic traits of the comics. The segment features Walter Chiari in the role of Renato Bertazzi, a stressed businessman married to a woman with erotic fantasies and a compulsive obsession for comic strips. She asks Renato to dress up as "Sadik" and pretend to rape her just like the protagonist does in the adult comics of the same name. The stylized black-and-white scene, the lighting and the camera angles suggest the visuals of a comic strip. Moreover, the

⁴⁵ For a detailed discussion of the Italian term *filone*, see Bondanella (2001: 374) and Totaro (2011).

⁴⁶ The *peplum*, also known as sword-and-sandal, is a genre that dominated the Italian film industry from 1958 to 1965. The origins of this genre can be traced back to the Italian historical epics of the silent era, among which *Quo Vadis* (1912), *Gli ultimi giorni di Pompei* (1913) and *Cabiria* (1914) were the most successful. The *pepla* (plural for *peplum*), then, were Italian adventure or fantasy films, which were set in Biblical times and classical antiquity and had plots loosely based on mythology and Greco-Roman history. Most of them featured a muscular hero as the central character.

⁴⁷ The term *commedia all'italiana* refers to a period (1958–1975) in which the Italian industry produced a remarkable number of comedies, characterized by common features such as satire, comic contents, bourgeois settings, elements of sadness and a persistent eroticism. *La commedia all'italiana* dates back to 1958, when *I soliti ignoti* by Mario Monicelli was released. Over the years, the term has occasionally acquired negative connotations, being associated with a genre aimed at amusing the audience through gags. However, it is worth pointing out that its evolution finds its origins in the portrayals of Italian culture and society depicted in late *neorealism* (1944–1952). Amongst others, some of the most influential figures of the *commedia all'italiana* are Alberto Sordi, Monica Vitti, Vittorio Gassman, Walter Chiari, Ugo Tognazzi and Claudia Cardinale.

⁴⁸ To read more about the *fumetti neri* formula, see chapter 1.

visual is emphasized by the use of balloons instead of oral dialogues (Figure 10). This creates a sarcastic undertone which, rather than being frightening, amuses the spectator.



Figure 10 – A stylized scene from *Thrilling* – Episode: *Sadik* (1965)

Another hybrid subgenre produced by the combination of motifs of different types is the science fiction horror. Paolo Heusch's *La morte viene dallo spazio* (1958), Freda's *Caltiki - il mostro immortale* (1959) and Bava's *Terrore nello spazio* (1965) are the most noteworthy examples.⁴⁹ Bava's film in particular captured the attention of critics and foreign filmmakers, who paid homage to the Italian director. The English title for Bava's film, *Planet of the Vampires*, is totally misleading, since the film does not engage with vampires at all. The choice of this title may have been due to a marketing strategy which tried to capitalize on the popularity of the vampire films released by Hammer Film Productions in those years. As will be explained later, this was a recurring phenomenon designed to obtain good profits at the box office. However, what I wish to explore here is the blend of horror and science fiction elements in the film.

Terrore nello spazio, partially inspired by Renato Pestriniero's short tale *Una notte di ventuno ore* (1960), tells the story of two spaceships, the Galliot and the Argos, that have crash landed on the mysterious planet of Aura (Acerbo, 2007: 141). The planet seems to harbour a malevolent force that is able to resurrect the dead and to turn the crew members against each other.⁵⁰ The use of primary colours, especially red and blue, gives the entire film a surreal pop-art look. This visual spectacle is particularly

⁴⁹ *Caltiki - il mostro immortale* was influenced by Christian Nyby's *La cosa da un altro mondo* (1951).

⁵⁰ The return of the dead to life will be examined in more detail in chapter 3.

evident when the crew members who have died during the crash come back to life, rising out of their metallic graves as evil space zombies. Their resurrection is shot in slow motion to heighten the suspense and give the sequence a horrific hallucinatory glow. The neon-hued Technicolor visuals, as well as the persistent smoke, which obscures the surroundings, were used to enhance the eerie atmosphere and to hide the low-budget set (Figure 11). The small budget available, in fact, forced Bava to create visual effects by simple means. Bava's strategies to valorize the setting included the use of mirrors, multiple exposures and Schüfftan process shots on miniatures.⁵¹ Through these techniques, in addition to the sound effects and the electronic score by Gino Marinuzzi, Bava managed to create a surreal futuristic world.

In terms of conceptual design and imagery, the film was a source of inspiration for Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979) and *Prometheus* (2012) (Monell, 2006). The sequence (00:44:19 – 00:45:15) in which the crew members face the skeletons of giant alien creatures, for example, was imitated by the American director (Figure 11). Nowadays, *Terrore nello spazio* continues to inspire sci-fiction filmmakers, demonstrating that even a low-budget film can be a reserve of insightful ideas (David Twohy's *Pitch Black*, 2000; Brian De Palma's *Mission of Mars*, 2001) (Lucas, 2007: 600).



Figure 11 – The crew members discover the skeletal remains of the alien creatures – Bava's *Terrore nello spazio* (1965)

The combination of disparate elements, in this case horror and sci-fiction, generates a dialogic intertextuality across the cycles. This phenomenon was even more noticeable in the Italian exploitation films released in the 1970s. In order to develop this topic, the

⁵¹ The Schüfftan process is a film special effect coined and popularized by German cinematographer Eugen Schüfftan. This process involves the use of a scale model and a mirror.

following page will focus on the wide range of subgenres which conquered the national and international market in the 1970s and the 1980s.

2.3.1 Exploiting fears and moral taboos: the sexualization of violence

In the 1960s Italian cinema dominated the national film industry and achieved success in the foreign market. However, American productions represented a constant threat. In order to face this menace, the government approved a law that was designed to increase the potential of the local film industry. In 1965 a new law, *Legge corona*, increased subsidies, providing credit advantages for national filmmakers (Wagstaff, 1992: 251). Through this law Italy achieved significant success and in the 1970s the Italian horror genre was at its peak at the box office. In order to minimize the commercial risk of a drastic financial collapse, Italian directors started producing mass quantities of whatever was popular and could be exported for a quick financial profit. As a result of this, a plethora of films were released to gain a wide market share. In this framework, Italian directors exploited socially provocative themes, giving birth to a series of films known as exploitation films or B movies. As Ephraim Katz (2005) suggests, these productions, targeted at a mass audience,

were made with little or no attention to quality or artistic merit, but with an eye to a quick profit, usually via high-pressure sales and promotion techniques emphasizing some sensational aspect of the product (Katz, 2005: 446).

In other words, these films were the consequence of an interactive dialogue between filmmakers and potential audiences' expectations. The viewers have to be considered as active agents apt to establish a fundamental contribution in the process of distribution and negotiation of films (Weaver, 1996). Their agency, in fact, plays a relevant role in the dynamics and development of horror subgenres (Doherty, 1988: 16–17). The awareness of viewers' expectations created, therefore, a mutual interaction

between directors and audiences (Hope, 2005: 122). Horror directors exploited what they knew about the viewers' expectations (Doherty, 1988: 6). Thus, the exploitation was the manipulation of spectators' demands.

One important strategy that was used to obtain a good profit at the box office was the imitation of winning formulas of foreign derivation. When a particular film was successful, Italian directors produced similar versions of that film. This phenomenon was one remarkable effect of the exploitative manner in which the films were promoted. The repetition of titles represented a means of attracting audiences and gaining commercial success. Once a specific trend was conventionalized in terms of content and form, producers followed the tested formula, imitating the original source. However, as Kim Newman argues:

While it is undoubtedly true that many Italian genre films 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 (Newman, 1986: 20).

The inevitable result of these productions was a remarkable level of intertextuality across the cycles. Although not all exploitation films can be strictly included in the horror genre, a significant number of them belong to this group, and the following pages aim at exploring these productions.

As Robert Allen and Douglas Gomery note in their book *In Film History: Theory and Practice* (1985), films are echoes of predominant social norms: "that is, they derive their images and sounds, themes and stories ultimately from their social environment" (Allen and Gomery, 1985: 158). In this sense, we can assume that Italian horror films, as representations of the Italian society, provide information about specific social conditions in a particular time. Between 1958 and 1963, Italy experienced a period of extraordinary growth, which is usually referred to as the *Economic Miracle* (Ginsborg, 2003 [1990]: 212–213). The country overcame radical changes, which favoured the transformation of "an old, 'traditional' or peasant society of low consumption [...] [into] a 'modern' society of mass consumption" (Forgacs and Gundle, 2007: 4). However,

after this initial phase of growth and economic development, Italy was plagued by social unrest. In 1968, violent student protests took place in Paris and quickly spread to many other countries of Western Europe, including Italy and in particular Italian university towns such as Trento, Milan, Turin and Rome (Ginsborg, 2003 [1990]: 303–304). As Sylvia Harvey (1978) notes, the sources of such discontent were disparate: “dissatisfaction with bureaucratic and authoritarian structures of university; a critic of the alienated and isolated character of student life; a suspicion of all organisation, all hierarchy, and of the traditional Left (in particular the PCF); and an at once powerful and confused equation of social and of sexual repression” (Harvey, 1978: 3–4). These conflicts broadened outwards, extending to a series of movements of diverse forms: political, social and economic, among others.

Filmic productions were particularly affected by this context of social changes, battles and mistrust. Italian filmmakers, subject to social pressures, produced films as a reflection of the social phenomena of that time (Allen and Gomery, 1985: 158). The concerns for the social turmoil, if not directly expressed through explicit references to specific events, were manifested through recurrent motifs, which reflected this historical moment and the socio-cultural environment in which they were developed. These motifs represented Italians’ fears and vulnerability emerging out of the discomforts of everyday life. The horror productions were mainly based on significant issues that were at the core of Italian society at that time: marriage (Bava’s *Il rosso segno della follia*, 1970), homosexuality (Argento’s *Quattro mosche di velluto grigio*, 1971), sexual freedom (Joe D’Amato’s *Emanuelle*, 1974), racism (Mario Siciliano’s *Scorticateli vivi*, 1978), consumerism (Fulci’s *Zombie 2*, 1979), religion (Giulio Berruti’s *Suor omicidi*, 1978), feminist movements (Argento’s *Profondo rosso*, 1970) and political issues.

Embracing a variety of subgenres, the Italian exploitation industry became in a short time a lucrative space in which filmmakers could stage a kaleidoscopic range of themes. It is possible to identify several thematic groups related to moral taboos and vulgar subject matter: shock documentaries (Paolo Cavara’s *Mondo cane*, 1962), slasher (Bava’s *Reazione a catena*, 1971), splatter (Lucio Fulci’s *E tu vivrai nel terrore! L’aldilà*, 1981), supernatural (Argento’s *Suspiria*, 1977), torture porn (Joe D’Amato’s *Porno Holocaust*, 1981), rape and revenge (Joe D’Amato’s *Emanuelle e Françoise – Le sorelline*,

1975), erotic horror (Filippo Walter Ratti's *La notte dei dannati*, 1978) and Nazi exploitation (Liliana Cavani's *Il portiere di notte*, 1974). One of the most recurrent elements in all of these thematic groups was the excess of violence and sex.

Considerably more violent than their American counterparts, European productions, and above all Italian ones, were characterized by their peculiar style, which included copious amounts of gore and sex. Featuring outrageous imagery characterized by a high degree of violence and cruelty, directors showcased general antisocial behaviours, broaching the viewers' vulnerabilities. In the second half of the 1970s in particular, Italian horror productions presented narrative elements that drew from gore and splatter exploitation.⁵² One of the most popular subgenres was that of cannibal films, often interpreted by critics as a metaphor for capitalist consumption (Galliano, 2003). The cannibal cycle was launched in Italy by Umberto Lenzi, who in 1972 released *Il paese del sesso selvaggio*.⁵³ Blending horror/adventure features with explicit sequences of eroticism, the film opened up a new era in the Italian cinema industry.

A prominent example of this subgenre is Ruggero Deodato's *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980). Advertised with a cover which featured a man eating human entrails, the film, seemingly a documentary, was widely criticized for the extreme sequences of gore and violence presented. *Cannibal Holocaust* uses subjective shots which allow the viewers to watch from the character's point of view. The footage is distorted, the camera movement deliberately rough and the sounds missed in some sequences. The use of 16mm hand-held cameras, in the scene featuring the film team, provides an impressive sense of realism in a *cinéma-vérité* style.⁵⁴ As Patricia Aufderheide (2007) notes, this filming technique breaks with the standard documentary practices, which involved "scripting, staging, lighting, reenactment and interviewing" (Aufderheide, 2007: 44). As a result of its deceptive pseudo-natural construction of reality, *Cannibal Holocaust* was censored and Deodato arrested for making a real snuff film. Although Deodato

⁵² The term "splatter cinema" was coined by George A. Romero to describe his film *Dawn of the Dead* (1978).

⁵³ The presence of sexual components is often suggested by the film titles themselves, e.g. *Il paese del sesso selvaggio* (1972).

⁵⁴ The term *cinéma vérité* was coined by Jean Rouch to describe his work *Cronique d'un été* (1960).

was later cleared, the censorship banned the screening of the film in Italy and many other countries, due to the excessive visualized brutality. Throughout the film, in fact, many sequences show images of sexual assault and animal violence.⁵⁵ One of the most iconic scenes shows a woman being impaled (Figure 12). The scene was examined by the courts to determine whether the special effects were genuine. Although the film was released in a heavily censored form, it achieved remarkable notoriety, enjoying great economic success abroad and becoming very popular with those who were passionate about the genre.



Figure 12 – The impaled woman – Ruggero Deodato's *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980)

The overt phallic symbolism is perceptible in this scene. The wooden pole, entering the protagonist's genitals and exiting her mouth, is a clear reference to the masculine penetrating the feminine. This motif, persistent in the horror genre, will be discussed further in chapter 5 through the analysis of decontextualized objects.

As is obvious from these preliminary examples, horror and sexuality were blended with a variety of topics. This combination allowed a multifaceted intertextuality that exploited audiences' fears and moral taboos. In subtle or explicit forms, sex became a persistent element that was merged with mystery and gore. Early attempts to introduce sexual ingredients to the genre appeared in the early 1960s within the gothic vampire tradition. The canonical archetypes of the vampire's narrative were, in fact, enriched with subtle notes of sexuality. In Renato Polselli's

⁵⁵ Due to the brutality involving animals – during the shooting of the film, seven animals were killed – the film was targeted by animal activists.

L'amante del Vampiro (1960), for instance, gothic motifs are blended with a strong erotic symbolism, according to which the vampire tradition of blood-sucking is symbolic of the exchange of bodily fluids during sex.

Eroticism provided a wide range of themes that could be exploited by the horror genre: necrophilia⁵⁶ (Freda's *L'Orribile segreto del dottor Hichcock*, 1962), nymphomania (Mariano Gariazzo's *L'ossessa*, 1974), incest (Leopoldo Savona's *Byleth – Il demone dell'incesto*, 1972), sexual depravity (Bava's *La frusta e il corpo*, 1963), sadomasochistic orgies (Renato Polselli's *Riti, magie nere e segrete orgie nel trecento*, 1973), lesbianism (Fulci's *Una lucertola con la pelle di donna*, 1971), bestiality (D'Amato's *Emanuelle in America*, 1976), paedophilia and child abuse (Fulci's *Non si sevizia un paperino*, 1972).⁵⁷ These themes were widely used in the cinematic productions of the 1970s, giving birth to the subgenre category of sex-exploitation. Sexuality, sadism and perversion, crossing the threshold of soft-core pornography, afforded the audience promiscuous spectacles that were designed to be both shocking and voyeuristic (Staiger, 2000).⁵⁸ The pleasure derived from these films can be interpreted in Laura Mark's terms of haptic visuality (Marks, 2000). The notion refers to the ability of the camera to bring the viewers closer to an experience of touch or movement. The act of seeing calls up multiple senses, which makes the experience more tactile than visual.

Joe D'Amato (*La morte ha sorriso all'assassino*, 1973) was one of the most prolific directors of the erotic subgenre.⁵⁹ Devoting a large part of his cinematic career to this trend, he combined sex and horror, embracing a variety of motifs. Conventional censorship, as well as Catholic censorship, ensured these films were banned for many years, but, especially from the beginning of the 1980s, with the gradual rise of the pornographic industry, the constraints of censorship were relaxed. This phenomenon

⁵⁶ The indissoluble binomial of Eros and Thanatos played an impressive role in many productions, including, amongst others, Antonio Margheriti's *Danza macabra* (1964) and Luciano Ricci's *Castello dei morti vivi* (1964).

⁵⁷ The first ever lesbian scenes in Italian cinema appeared in Antonio Margheriti's *Danza macabra* (1963), but were drastically excised by the censorship system.

⁵⁸ To read more about the concept of perversion, see Cormack (2004).

⁵⁹ Joe D'Amato's sex-exploitation films are mainly remembered for the whole *Emmanuelle* cycle of films, starring Laura Gesmer as the main protagonist. *Emanuelle's revenge* (1975), *Emanuelle e gli ultimi cannibali* (1977) and *Emanuelle: perché violenza alle donne?* (1977) are just a few of the titles from this large cycle.

led to a wide circulation of erotic motifs which spread in many Italian horror productions, gaining resonance with the audience. Along with the sex-exploitation cycles, sexuality became a significant component of many other subgenres.

Sexual overtones were introduced, for instance, into religious-themed horror films, opening up a new trend defined as nun-exploitation (Gianfranco Mingozzi's *Flavia la monaca musulmana*, 1974).⁶⁰ However, one of the most controversial subgenres was that of Nazi exploitation. Set against the backdrop of the Second World War, this cycle exploited criminal acts, abuse of a sexual nature, depravity, homosexuality, sadism and many other Nazi atrocities. Liliana Cavani's *Il portiere di notte* (1974) and Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma* (1975) are notable titles from this subgenre. Cavani's film explores the psychological condition of Stockholm syndrome in the relationship between a former Nazi SS officer, Aldorfer, and his female victim, Lucia. Stockholm syndrome is a phenomenon in which victims feel empathy for their oppressors. In other words, it refers to "strong emotional ties that develop between two persons whenever one person intermittently harasses, beats, threatens, abuses, or intimidates the other" (Dutton, 1981: 139). According to Freud, this reaction is a response to trauma: the victim identifies with his aggressor as a defence mechanism for his Ego. In one sequence, Lucia, half naked in a combination of an S&M and a Nazi outfit, sings and performs a dance in a nightclub (Figure 13). The cold blue light and the smoky air imbue the scene with a claustrophobic effect. The camera follows her movements and the voyeuristic gazes of the spectators around her. The sequence culminates with an unexpected gift for Lucia: the decapitated head of a camp guard who had persecuted her. This scene has echoes of the biblical story of Salomé and Herod, when the woman received the head of John the Baptist.⁶¹

⁶⁰ For a further reading of the nun-exploitation cycle, see Fentone's book *Antichristo* (2000).

⁶¹ The biblical story of Salomé and Herod has already been mentioned in chapter 1 with regard to Caravaggio's visual art.



Figure 13 – Lucia performs a song in a Nazi cabaret
Liliana Cavani's *Il portiere di notte* (1974)

This film, as well as many other exploitation productions engaging with sexual themes, met with fierce protests because of their explicit violence and cruelty (Marrone, 2000: 107). Despite this, exploring sexual psychologies, repressed desires and suppressed obsessions, they resonated with audiences. All of these aspects would be further extended in the *giallo* tradition. In order to investigate their development and evolution, the following pages will explore psychological horror and its employment of sex and violence.

2.3.2 Psychological horror: the *gialli*

As Barbara Creed (2000) notes in her essay *Film and Psychoanalysis*, “psychoanalysis and cinema were born almost in the same period, at the end of the nineteenth century” (Creed, 2000: 75). The circulation of psychoanalytical theories, especially Freudian and Lacanian ones, led film theorists (Metz, 1975; Deleuze, 1986; Mulvey, 1989; Žižek, 1999; Copjec, 2000; Creed, 2000) to explore how psychoanalysis influenced cinema. However, if on one side it is relevant to observe how scholars drew on psychoanalytic assumptions to analyse cinema, it is also important to evaluate how cinema influenced psychoanalysis, aiding its circulation. As will be examined in more detail in chapter 6,

the 1970s represented a period of crucial changes and evolutions in the history of Italian horror cinema; it marked the transition between two different perspectives of horror: gothic and modern. The main element of novelty in this transition relied on the assimilation of psychoanalytical discourses in the horror genre. Thus, from the combination of psychoanalysis and gruesome imageries a new cycle of films was born: the *giallo*. As Gary Needham (2007) remarks in his introduction to *giallo, Playing with Genre*, the cinematic *giallo*, in terms of genre, is more difficult to categorize compared to its literary counterpart, as previously analysed in chapter 1. While the *giallo* in its written form presents fixed conventions, which are easier to identify, the cinematic *giallo* presents

highly moveable and permeable boundaries that shift around from year to year to include outright gothic horror (*La lama nel corpo*, Emilio Scardimaglia, 1966), police procedurals (*Milano, morte sospetta di una minorenne*, Sergio Martino, 1975), crime melodrama (*Così dolce, così perversa*, Umberto Lenzi, 1969) and conspiracy films (Needham, 2007: 295).

Gialli, then, resisting generic definitions, have to be considered as a series of films rather than a genre (Needham, 2007: 295). As Koven (2006) suggests, they constitute a subgenre of horror:

With their focus on the more exploitative aspects of crime fiction, namely the graphic depiction of violence and murder, these *gialli* films are often linked directly with the horror genre, despite the absence of any supernatural agency (Koven, 2006: 9).

Despite the difficulties in defining the *giallo* in terms of cinematic genre, it is possible to recognize some thematic motifs which recur as constants in the whole tradition: “murder, mystery, detection, psychoanalysis, tourism, alienation and investigation” (Needham, 2007: 295). The first examples of cinematic *gialli* in Europe developed in Germany, through the adaptation of Edgar Wallace’s works into films. These films, known as *Krimi*, represented an early source of inspiration for the *gialli*. In 1959, the

Danish company Rialto Film produced *Der Frosch mit der Maske*, based on Wallace's *The Fellowship of the Frog* (1925), which was very successful with the public. Rialto then decided to acquire the exclusive rights to Wallace's novels and adapt the stories into a series of 32 films. The cycle of *Krimi* lasted for more than a decade, ending in 1972 with *Das Rätsel des Silbernen Halbmond*.

In Italy, the *giallo* in its cinematic form dates back to 1962, when Bava's *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* was released (Gelder, 2000: 330).⁶² Bava would further define the genre one year later, in 1964, with *Sei donne per l'assassino*. This film, setting the principles for the following *gialli*, introduced some iconic elements of the tradition, such as the excessive graphic violence and the presence of an unknown masked killer with a black-gloved hand (Figure 7). The killer's disguise is an essential motif of the *giallo* formula. As will be discussed in chapter 6, this iconic outfit, comprising a black hat, coat and gloves, allows the murderer to hide his/her identity and gender. The *camouflage*, then, creates ambiguity, heightening the suspense. In *Sei donne per l'assassino*, for instance, the killer wears a creepy faceless mask, which affords him a sort of inhumanity (Figure 14). His formless and unidentifiable figure incarnates terror and death. The viewer, in his inability to identify the killer's identity, is forced to entertain other clues in order to solve the case and reach the truth.

⁶² It is interesting to observe that the title *La ragazza che sapeva troppo*, translated in English as *The Girl Who Knew Too Much*, alludes to Alfred Hitchcock's film *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1956). Another remarkable aspect to note, in terms of intertextuality, is Bava's awareness of a literary tradition which preceded the cinematic one. In many cases, Bava pays homage to this literary tradition of murder mystery stories. An example is the opening sequence of *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* (1963), which introduces Nora, the main protagonist, as an avid fan of written *gialli*. The young woman is introduced while reading a *giallo* entitled *The Knife*.



Figure 14 – The faceless killer wearing the conventionalized outfit –
Bava's *Sei donne per l'assassino* (1964)

Although Bava's early *gialli* had a fundamental role in establishing the subgenre's traditions, the most significant contribution to the subgenre must be credited to Dario Argento. As Peter Bondanella (2001) notes, Argento established *gialli* as a commercial success, both making and influencing a rapid succession of *gialli* productions (Bondanella, 2001: 381). His first *giallo*, *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo* (1970), introduced components of novelty value which set up the new era of the psychological thriller. Argento's productions represented, in fact, a radical break with the *giallo* tradition defined by Bava. While in Bava's early *gialli* the driving motive for murders was economic profit, in Argento's films it mainly derived from traumas. As will be pointed out later in the analytic section of my work, most of Argento's films present protagonists affected by past traumas. The killers usually possess the dual nature of victims and victimizers. As Needham (2007) notes, the majority of Argento's female protagonists

are either in therapy, have had therapy or are told that they need therapy. The *giallo* is a paradigm case in defense of psychoanalysis. It solicits psychoanalytic interpretation and stages every oedipal scenario literally and spectacularly (Needham, 2002: n.p.).

The *giallo* represented, indeed, the best formula to develop the psychoanalytical discourse. Concepts like the unconscious, subjectivity and sexuality were further developed, in order to explore dynamics such as the return of the repressed, the Oedipus complex, narcissism, the fear of castration and hysteria. The *gialli*, then,

requiring a psychoanalytic investigation, attempt to explore the repressed and violent nature of the protagonists' psyches. The mental conflicts, cinematically represented in the form of nightmares, dream sequences and flashbacks, are usually explained at the end of the film.⁶³ Most of Argento's films, for instance, end with a final psychoanalytic elucidation of the killer's deviancy and *modus operandi*. From these observations, it is evident how the introduction of psychoanalysis, through themes such as madness, trauma and paranoia, takes the horror genre further away from the gothic trend of the previous era. Far from the supernatural sceneries of the gothic productions, in fact, the psychological horror is mainly set in the modern ambiances of everyday life. This allows directors to discuss a variety of themes through innovative and modern representations.

The *giallo* formula turns around some pivotal points, both in form and content, which persistently recur in the whole tradition: the presence of an unknown killer, the foreign protagonist suspected of murder, the ambivalence of the audience's identification with the victim and murderer, and above all the sexualization of explicit violence. In the *giallo* productions released in the 1970s, violence and sexuality became increasingly explicit, generating the foundations for the gruesome slasher films that would follow. The transgressive images of "sex, violence and graphic gore", as suggested by Koven, often involved concepts such as misogyny, sadism and sado-masochism (Koven, 2006: 137).

Blending sexual content with gore, the *gialli* were enriched with sadistic motifs which had women as the main victims. The female bodies were often depicted as disfigured, abused and mutilated. Amongst others, Freda's *Un'iguana con la lingua di fuoco* (1971) and Lucio Fulci's *Una lucertola dalla pelle di donna* (1971) featured explicit disfigurements of the female body. In a peculiar sequence (00:04:51 – 00:05:00) in Freda's *Un'iguana con la lingua di fuoco* a young woman is brutally murdered by a maniac.⁶⁴ The killer throws acid on her face and then slits her throat with a razor. Due to the effects of the acid, it is impossible to identify the victim, until an anonymous

⁶³ The use of flashback sequences is further explored in the analysis of *Opera* (1987) in chapter 7.

⁶⁴ *Un'iguana con la lingua di fuoco* is loosely based on the novel *A Room Without a Door* by Richard Mann.

parcel containing her passport is sent to the police. An extreme close-up on the victim's face shows the irreversible consequences of the acid (Figure 15). The skin ripples, looking like plastic. The hapticity of the texture makes this image palpable, stimulating the viewers' senses.



Figure 15 – The effects of acid on the victim's face –
Freda's *Un'iguana dalla lingua di fuoco* (1971)

The horror genre has often been conceived as a sadistic and masculinized genre (Mulvey, 1975; Clover, 1992; Creed, 1993), a characteristic frequently underlined by its explicit sadism against women. As Peter Hutchings (1993) suggests,

The pleasure of horror [...] involves the film's compensation for feelings of inadequacy on the part of the male spectator, and this process is usually linked with the terrorization and/or killing of one or several female characters (Hutchings, 1993: 84).

The sadistic pleasure, then, is grounded in the (male) spectator's identification with the monster who tortures and kills his victims (female). As Carol Clover (1992) argues, this identification is even more evident in the slasher subgenre, where the POV shot (assaultive gaze) favours the viewer's identification not with the victim/heroine archetype of the final girl, but with the sadistic position of the assaultive killer (Clover, 1992: 18).⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Clover's arguments are based on American slasher films.

Sadism and misogyny were signs of the increasing anxiety over growing female power (Creed, 1993). In 1946 Italian women got the vote, and their role in society began to improve. In 1960 they obtained more rights and emancipation. From these changes, concerns over feminine control emerged, which were expressed through cinematic devices. In the horror genre, women are often depicted as menaces to the patriarchal social order. One sign of their upsetting nature is their irresistible perverse sexuality, which is interpreted as monstrous (Jancovich, 1992). Women's sexuality, in fact, makes them attractive and desirable, but also threatening to men. As Bini (2011) suggests:

In the patriarchal Catholic culture which views female sexuality as a mysterious force drawing men toward temptation and damnation [...] a woman is accepted only as a virgin or a mother. Even though the mother figure is fundamental in Italian society, the legitimacy of the role is not recognised unless the woman represses her own sexuality and limits her sphere of power to domain of the family (Bini, 2011: 58).

Hence, in a standard male-dominated society, and in such a strict vision of the female condition, it is evident that the feminine, in terms of sexuality and eroticism, is perceived as other and monstrous. This reflection suggests the need of a punishment. The monstrous-feminine assumes different possibilities of representation in the Italian horror tradition. As will be explored more fully in chapter 6, the female protagonist, in her provocative role of monster, embodies threatening forces such as castrating mothers, witches or demons (Creed, 1993). With regard to this, the *giallo* formula provided a valuable scenario to promote the different faces of the monstrous-feminine.

In the 1970s, a period of intense proliferation of this subgenre, many Italian *gialli* were acquired by American B-market distributors, becoming important sources of inspiration for the productions of several directors (Shipka, 2011: 26–29). Their style and peculiarities, in fact, influenced the next generation of filmmakers, who paid tribute to Italian directors. George Romero, Brian De Palma (*Raising Cain*, 1992),⁶⁶ David Cronenberg (*Videodrome*, 1983), Quentin Tarantino (*Kill Bill Vol 1&2*, 2003, 2004),

⁶⁶ The final sequence of the film has been staged exactly like the corresponding moment at the end of Argento's *Tenebrae* (1982).

James Wan (*Saw*, 2004) and Eli Roth (*Hostel*, 2005), for instance, are just a few names from a long list.⁶⁷ The recurrent intertextuality in the *gialli* films witnesses a further circulation of symbols related to the subgenre. The *giallo* tradition began to fade in the 1980s, although a few directors (Argento, 1993, 1996, 2001, 2004, 2009; Lado, 1992; Avati, 1996, 2007) continued to produce traditional thrillers even later, in the 1990s. The reasons for this decline are almost certainly ascribable to the subgenre's rapid expansion in the 1970s. Developed to replicate the financial success of international countries, the invasive production of the Italian *gialli* led to overexposure, which exhausted audiences' interest and caused them to look to new formulas, such as the American slasher films.

Another important factor in the decline is the general crisis which, during the 1970s and 1980s, heavily affected the Italian cinema industry. The overall number of national productions declined from 250 to 100. (Brunetta, 2007: 612). The industrial pillars which had supported the productions during the golden age slowly collapsed. Moreover, the advent of television, as well as the increase of private broadcasters, provided new forms of distribution which kept audiences away from the cinema (Wood, 2005: 184). In this period of changes, uncertainty and general discontent, Italian cinema declined.

2.4 Horror fandom and rituals

As pointed out in chapter 1, social interactions play a pivotal role in the circulation of symbols and beliefs that are relevant to our perception of the horror genre. By extending these preliminary considerations, the following pages explore how interaction ritual chains give the horror genre the power to bind individuals around a common interest. Interaction rituals require four main initiating conditions: a gathering of people, a distinction between participants and outsiders, a mutual awareness of and

⁶⁷ The creepy puppet behind which Jigsaw hides in *Saw* is inspired by those shown in Argento's *Quattro mosche di velluto grigio* (1971) and *Profondo rosso* (1975).

attention on a common event, and a shared mood. These dynamics lead to four outcomes: social solidarity, formation of group emblems and symbols in which the community can recognize itself, development of emotional energy and, finally, a sense of morality in adhering to the group of interest (Collins, 2004: 49). Different reasons lead individuals to take part in a ritual gathering with interest. These factors could depend on culture, beliefs or habits. However, an outstanding starting element in the initiation of the ritual is that participants share a common action and a common emotional experience (Collins, 2004). In order to extend these observations, my attention will focus on horror fans and their interaction rituals.

The concept of fandom entails an emotional involvement and an intense enthusiasm focused on a focal object. Driven by a strong interest, fans concentrate most of their attention on a particular area: in this specific case, the horror genre. This mutual focus creates a community of people jointly assembled and isolated from other groups of interest, or simply from non-fans. What arises is a feeling of unity among the ritual group: a sense of solidarity which distinguishes active participants from outsiders. Interaction rituals start with transient emotions that in the outcome are converted into enduring ones, described in Collins' terms as emotional energy (EE). The former refer to temporary feelings such as joy, fear and embarrassment, while the latter refer to long-term emotions such as personal strength, commitment and eagerness to initiate interactions (Summers, 2002: 42).

Individuals are emotion seekers and consequently motivated to heighten their level of emotional energy (Barbalet, 2006: 3).⁶⁸ This process occurs in two different ways: through solidarity experiences and through hierarchical interactions, which derive strictly from the participants' personal attachment to membership symbols. Logically, the intensity level of involvement with the focal object differs between individuals. This influences the outcome of interaction rituals in terms of whether they are successful or unsuccessful. Every symbol, in fact, is charged with unequal intensity and perceived differently according to the level of attachment to it. For neophytes, for

⁶⁸ As pointed out in the previous chapter of this thesis, Marvin Zuckerman (1996), in his book *Sensation Seeking and Risky Behavior*, has delineated a wide range of activities and experiences (e.g., bungee jumping, driving fast, etc.) that sensation seekers enjoy carrying out in order to heighten their emotional excitement. It deals with experiences that are often intensified within the solidarity of the same group of interest.

instance, attachment to membership symbols is definitely lower compared to that of horror fans.⁶⁹ Fans enjoy an intense sense of belonging to membership symbols, and hence their emotional energy is positively heightened. It follows that the dissimilar degrees of concentration on the focal object generate a variety of interaction dynamics that influence the success of the ritual and, consequently, the circulation of its membership symbols.

Interaction rituals develop the formation of sacred symbols with which the group can identify. They deal with the focal objects upon which the components of the same group of interest have focused their attention. Bound around the common interest of the horror genre, fans create and sustain emblems, such as films, magazines, gadgets, etc, with which they feel collectively associated. As Jung (1961b) suggests, referring to archetypes, these symbols are

[...] at the same time both images and emotions. One can speak of archetypes only when these two aspects coincide. When there is only an image, it is merely a word-picture, like a corpuscle with no electric charge. It is then of little consequence, just a word and nothing more. But if the image is charged with numinosity, that is, with psychic energy, then it becomes dynamic and will produce consequences. [...] it is a piece of life, an image connected with the living individual by the bridge of emotion (Jung, 2014 [1961b]: 257).

To put it differently, images and objects are dumb and void without the voice of emotions.⁷⁰ It is, therefore, the emotional energy charged by them that confers meaning and power to their primordial nature. Moreover, through interaction ritual processes, not only are symbols converted into sacred entities, but even the participants of the ritual itself assume a quality of sacredness. Acquiring a collective identity, horror fans are charged with a sacred power that distinguishes them from groups of non-fans.

⁶⁹ Moreover, as they are charged with a different value across the globe, it is clear that the effectiveness of symbols changes among people all over the world. For Asian viewers, for instance, long black hair is scarier than a knife stuck in a human body. The reason for such disparate reactions is to be found within interaction ritual chains.

⁷⁰ To read more about this concept, see chapters 2, 3 and 5.

Thus, being “chosen people”, they are the sacred members within the collectiveness of the ritual and, in order to maintain their membership, they need to respect the group they belong to and the sacred objects that represent it. This occurs through ritual behaviours that mark their nature as fans.

2.4.1 Fans’ performativity and censorship issues

Building upon Mark Kermode’s (1997) and Matt Hills’ (2005) theories of fan culture, I will discuss fans’ practices as performative expressions of the pleasures of horror. Horror fans’ interest in externalizing their emotional involvement in the genre is a manifestation of their performativity. Fans mainly want to display their expertise and authority in relation to horror. This attitude aims at establishing a difference between *real* fans and occasional spectators or neophytes of the genre; while the former are knowledgeable connoisseurs, aware of horror’s conventions and representations, the latter are simple viewers, scared by the genre itself. From these observations it follows that, the act of being scared is related to a non-fandom position. Fans, in fact, are only scared of not knowing enough about the genre, and are not scared of the genre itself (Kermode, 1997: 58). Mark Kermode (1997) further outlines this distinction, noting that:

The horror fan ... is ... not only able but positively compelled to read rather than merely watch such movies. The novice, however, sees only the dismembered bodies, hears only the screams and groans, reacts only with revulsion and contempt. Being unable to differentiate between the real and the surreal, they consistently misinterpret horror fans’ interaction with texts that mean nothing to them (*Ibid.* 61).

In other words, novices are not literate in or knowledgeable about the genre. Their pleasure is more linked to the representation contained in the texts. As Noël Carroll (1990) suggests, their pleasure derives from “the transgressiveness of monsters”,

which, perceived as repulsive because of their abnormal nature, constrain attention and elicit curiosity in the audience (Carroll, 1990: 195).⁷¹ Conversely, for horror fans the pleasure of horror is a cultural act: an articulation of their agency and performativity as expert consumers or connoisseurs (Butler, 1999b: 123). Their connoisseurship secures a distinctiveness and uniqueness that differentiates them from groups of non-fans.

Driven by the desire to intensify their knowledge, horror fans are eager to acquire films and material related to their area of interest. This wish is sometimes hard to satisfy. Many horror films, in fact, have been censored or banned in several countries and thus are not widely available. Foreign distributions of cinematic productions in the late 1950s, for instance, played an important role in the circulation and diffusion of Italian horror films. Because of the excessive visual graphics, several films suffered censorship excisions in many countries. This is true of Mario Bava's *La maschera del demonio* which, in 1960, was released in a cut version.⁷² In her work on *La maschera del demonio*, Carol Jenks (1992) cites the sequence of the "mask penetration" (Figure 16), labelling its violated-point-of-view shots as an example of what she calls "textual sadism", described as

An extreme violence towards the audience, an aggressive desire to wound the very site of vision, the eye. The unspoken agreement of the cinematic contract is broken: the spiked mask of Satan is carried forward and into the camera to pierce the gaze of the spectator. There are then two further shots of the mask, but these are marked as being from the witch Asa's point-of-view and punctuated by a reverse close-up of her huge-eyed terror. Asa is thus presented as the owner of a violated gaze, one which she shares with the spectator (Jenks, 1992: 154).

⁷¹ Carroll's cognitive approach to the pleasure of horror excludes other important factors that are responsible for an audience's pleasure and for this reason is limited.

⁷² *La maschera del demonio* is analysed in more detail in chapter 6.



Figure 16 – The mask of Satan hammered on Princess Asa’s face –
Mario Bava’s *La maschera del demonio* (1960)

As will be discussed in more detail in chapter 6, the sequence of the mask penetration on Princess Asa’s face represents a

The censorship drastically affected a number of films, such as Antonio Margheriti’s *Danza Macabra* (1963), Mario Bava’s *Ecologia del delitto* (1971), Paolo Cavara’s *La tarantola dal ventre nero* (1971), Lucio Fulci’s *Una lucertola con la pelle di donna* (1971) and many others, which remained unavailable for several years, attracting many fans due to the mystery surrounding them. However, it is interesting to observe that, if on one side the censorship constraints damaged the diffusion and circulation of horror productions, on the other side they played an important role in increasing their reputation and consequently the fans’ interest in them. Edits and bans, in fact, represent to horror fans captivating challenges to be overcome. Eager to reinforce their status as knowledgeable connoisseurs, fans are motivated to dig deeper into the genre.

In the late 1950s the intervention of censorship caused foreign distributors to release unclear versions of the Italian films, creating confusion in audiences for many years. Thus, through their agency and performativity, fans elect themselves as spokespersons of truth. Investigating a variety of horror archives and battling the limits imposed by censorship, they attempt to recirculate the original versions, in the process offering a new and truthful voice to the genre. As Matt Hills (2005) notes:

Despite horror fans’ frequent opposition to forms of censorship, the distinctiveness of their sub-cultural identity [...] depends on

those meanings that censorship and effects debates confer on the horror genre. Horror fans may well oppose censorship, but they are also semiotically and sub-culturally indebted to it (Hills, 2005: 92).

It follows that, without a system of censorship to battle against, the distinctiveness and uniqueness of horror fans would be widely decreased (*Ibid.* 9). To acquire the films in the original version it is necessary to broaden personal social interactions. A good opportunity to do this is offered by multimedia devices. With its blogs and detailed websites, the internet has greatly enhanced the opportunities to widen the social dialogue within the horror community, thus facilitating the localization and acquisition of the material of interest. Hence, in keeping fans updated about the evolution of the genre, media devices play an outstanding role in creating and maintaining new contacts among the ritual group. In addition to this effective communication chain, which overcomes the boundaries of distance, face-to-face meetings, conventions and festivals represent other good opportunities to strike up new relations in order to discuss and exchange opinions about the genre. New acquaintances and friendships arise, strengthening the solidarity within the group of interest and broadening the circulation of symbols related to the genre. These dynamics enable old symbols to be spread and new ones to be acquired, connecting, in this way, “previous interaction rituals to future ones” (Goodman, 2001: 95).

The film-watching experience represents a remarkable opportunity to develop social interactions with other horror fans. This occurrence can take place in the private context of a house or in a public space like the cinema. Moreover, a film can be attended alone or in small groups. However, it has been proven that viewing a horror film in a group, and even more within the cinema context, provides different emotions than watching it alone at home.⁷³ Individuals interact better when they are gathered together (Durkheim, 2011 [1975]: 151). In other words, when they share the same space and live in the same situation, a strong interactional process occurs and emotional energy arises. Thus, focusing their attention on the same horror film, and being aware

⁷³ Vivian Sobchack (1992) outlines the differences between seeing a film in the cinema and watching it at home. To read more about the topic, see Sobchack (1992).

of each other's emotions, fans are connected to each other on an energetic level that is heightened while the ritual of the exposure occurs. Every participant in the ritual provides his personal energy, which becomes strengthened as it is circulated among the viewers through a contagious process. The shared excitement that arises is defined in Durkheim's terms as "collective effervescence", and it is carried across situations by symbols that have been charged by emotional circumstances (Collins, 2005: 105). This power helps symbols to be circulated, renewed and strengthened with a deeper intensity. When gathered in groups, individuals transmit to each other sensations and energy that it would be impossible to get if they were alone. It follows that the film-watching experience promotes a collective solidarity that plays a key role in the generation of emotional energy, affecting the outcome of the ritual in terms of whether it is successful or unsuccessful.

The recurrence of rituals over time reinforces the ties within the collectiveness and emphasizes the sacredness of symbols. Thus, being widely charged with strong feelings of membership, horror films become powerful emblems of the ritual. Furthermore,

symbols which are sufficiently charged with feelings of membership carry the individual along certain courses of action even when the group is not present. Well charged symbols become emblems to be defended against desecrators and outsiders; they are boundary markers of what is proper, and battle flags for the precedence of groups (Collins, 2000: 23).

To put it differently, if during the rituals symbols have been charged by an intense emotional energy, their effectiveness in the present will be more successful, affecting individuals not only in their collectiveness but even in their own privacy. With regard to this, the third chapter will elucidate how horror symbols circulate in the spectator's mind, in the private world of inner conversations. However, before opening this investigation, I would like to discuss first the importance of the signature as a core element in a film's reception and distribution.

2.4.2 Signature and auteurism

The following pages will look at other issues besides fans' performativity that are essential to the circulation and affirmation of Italian productions in the cinema industry: the auteur's signature and its rules. Auteur theory was introduced in the 1950s by French film director François Truffaut, who, highlighting the director's contribution to the forms and contents of a film, stated:

A true film auteur is someone who brings something genuinely personal to his subject instead of producing a tasteful, accurate but lifeless rendering of the original material [...] the auteur transforms the material into an expression of his own personality (Buscombe, 1973: 23).

In other words, an auteur is a filmmaker who has a distinctive signature style which permeates his body of work.⁷⁴ At this point some questions arise. How important is the signature in its aim of creating relations between film and auteur and film and spectator? How does the signature influence the perception of a film and its circulation? What happens when we watch a film that we know has been directed by a specific director/auteur and not by anyone else? In order to answer these questions, it is necessary first to introduce the concept of the signature. As Michel Foucault (1981) argued, the perception of an auteur's signature enables the spectator to "explain the presence of certain events within a text, as well as their transformations, distortions and various modifications" (Foucault, 1981: 143).

The signature is a distinctive trait which allows the viewer to recognize a specific director. Without any signature, the materiality and property of the film would remain unchanged. However, its presence establishes a fundamental relation between the film and the director's name. Moreover, it introduces a relation between the film and the audience, affecting, therefore, the perception and the circulation of the film itself. Hence, this relation plays an important role in its capacity to change the way we watch the film. If the signature belongs to someone we know to be a famous

⁷⁴ To read more about *auteurs* and authorship, see Andrew Sarris (2008).

filmmaker, our approach to his cinematic production will be participative; conversely, if we know it belongs to an unpopular name, our reception of it will be biased.

In an era of authorial copyright, the signature is fundamental, as it designates the legal effects of the product, consequently influencing its function in society. Thus, a specific film belongs to a precise director and not to anyone else because of its signature, which marks the filmmaker's authority and confirms the uniqueness and power of his product (Agamben, 2009: 40). Signature therefore affects the reception and the circulation of films. During the period between the late 1950s and the late 1970s the Italian horror genre and the exploitation subgenres became very popular, enjoying important economic success. A great part of this success came from abroad, where the censorship was more relaxed and where foreign countries were more open-minded in relation to horror productions. Italian audiences, not having a substantial fantastic and gothic tradition (compared to other European countries such as Britain, France and Germany), had some difficulties in welcoming local interpretations of the genre. As Freda observed,

Seeing an Italian name, they (Italians) all made ugly faces because they found the very idea preposterous. They were of the opinion that Italians didn't know how to make these kinds of films (Freda).⁷⁵

For this reason Freda's second cinematic attempt at horror, *Caltiki - il mostro immortale* (1959), was released under the anglicized pseudonym Robert Hampton.⁷⁶ The film achieved great success.

Many other Italian filmmakers adopted aliases.⁷⁷ This phenomenon allowed them to appeal to audiences and, consequently, affected the reception of their

⁷⁵ Lucas, Tim (2001), *I Vampiri* DVD liner notes, Image Entertainment.

⁷⁶ Riccardo Freda adopted different pseudonyms, such as Robert Hampton (*Caltiki - il mostro immortale*, 1959), George Lincoln (*La morte non conta I dollari*, 1967) and Willy Pareto (*L'iguana dalla lingua di fuoco*, 1971).

⁷⁷ Antonio Margheriti became Anthony Dawson (*I lunghi capelli della morte*, 1964); Mario Bava used the names John Foam (*Caltiki - il mostro immortale*, 1959) and John M. Old (*La strada per Fort Alamo*, 1964) for many of his films; Camillo Mastrocinque was Thomas Miller in *La cripta e l'incubo* (1964); Luciano Ricci was Herbert Wide in *Il castello dei morti viventi* (1964) and Renato Polselli was Ralph Brown in *Delirio caldo* (1972).

productions in Italy and abroad. These observations point out how significant the relations established by the signature are to the dynamics of circulation. As a result of this, in order to understand the horror genre and its dynamics of production, it is necessary to decipher the signature and its corpus of relationships. Our perception on auteurism, in fact, would be incomplete if interpreted in its singularity. To be understood, auteurism needs to be interpreted on the basis of the director's technical competences and distinctive style, but also bearing in mind a certain awareness of audiences' expectations, the dynamics of distribution and censorship constraints (Corrigan, 1998: 40). As is evident from what has been discussed up to this point, my position in relation to authorship issues suggests a dialogic and interactive analysis which involves more aspects at the same time. Only through interactionism can the horror genre and its dynamics be understood in their totality.

Conclusion

This chapter has investigated the development of the horror genre in Italy, from its origins (1957) until the 1980s. After engaging with the issue of genre, the chapter has discussed how horror symbols recirculate on a second level in cinematic and social contexts. From my analysis, it is evident that horror directors drew symbols from a variety of discourses and, after a process of manipulation, imposed them on audiences. This phenomenon led to the reinforcement of old symbols and to the creation of new ones which, circulated in further cinematic rituals, acquired new meaning and emotional energy.

The combination of elements of different types encouraged the proliferation of new hybrid subgenres, which attracted audiences and ensured the films were profitable. This phenomenon became more evident between the late 1970s and the late 1980s, when the censorship constraints were more relaxed. During that period the Italian film industry became a profitable medium which exploited themes that were at the core of Italian society at that time. Considerably more violent than their foreign

counterparts, the Italian productions staged an explicit sexualization of violence. Merging sex and gore, the *giallo* tradition in particular engaged with themes related to gender issues, misogyny and sadism. These motifs, shocking and appealing at the same time, indulged the viewers' voyeuristic fantasies, achieving great success in both national and international markets.

In order to develop my arguments, the last part of this chapter has explored two fundamental linchpins: authorship and the fandom system. This analysis has highlighted the fan's performativity and the importance of their agency in the dynamics of distribution and in the reception of the horror genre. In the end, promoting a dialogic and interactive debate, the chapter has suggested a multilayered approach in order to interpret the films and their intertextuality.

CHAPTER 3

THE POWER OF SILENCE: INTERNAL CONVERSATIONS AND THE CHORAL VOICES OF THE SELF

Your silence will not protect you.

A. Lorde, 2007: 41

Introduction

This chapter attempts to answer the following questions: why do people react in a different way to the same stimuli from horror cinema? Why do people respond to certain symbols and not others? Why are some symbols more effective than others in eliciting fear? And, moreover, how do symbols circulate in the minds of viewers? After investigating the origins and development of the internal archives of horror, I will adopt two main theoretical approaches to explore these questions: psychoanalytical, taking inspiration from Freud's theory of "the uncanny" (1919) and Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok's theories of psychic phantoms and trans-generational transmission (1994); and pragmatist, based on Norbert Wiley (1994, 2006) and Margaret Archer's (1988, 1995, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2007) concept of internal conversations. The first approach will allow us to broaden our understanding of the effectiveness of horror by exploring the different representations of the uncanny. The second will facilitate our comprehension of the Self and of its dialogical intra-dynamics. The combination of these two approaches will supply new elements in the understanding of the internalization and third-order circulation of symbols in the viewers' minds. Moreover, by examining the horror genre from a new angle, this chapter will provide new insights into the dialogical dynamics of the Self and new perspectives on Italian horror cinema.

3.1 Internal archives of horror

Does not everything depend on our interpretation of the silence around us?

L. Durrell, 2000 [1957]

After discussing the external archives of horror in chapter 1, this study will now examine the concept of internal archives. The analysis of this concept will allow us to investigate the ways in which individuals' sensibility favours the internalization and circulation of the horrific in the human mind. At this point some questions arise:

What drives the formation of internal archives?

How do external archives affect the internal ones?

In what way do horrific symbols circulate in internal archives?

In attempting to answer these questions, it is necessary to take into consideration the influence of emotions once again. Emotional engagement, in fact, as explained in relation to the construction of external archives (chapter 1), is the most relevant component in the archiving process. External archives greatly influence the internal ones. Creating inputs which weigh upon our memory bank, they play a fundamental role in circulating horror symbols at an internal level.

According to Freud, the psyche is structured in a way that includes a variety of places where information is kept. Hence, it can be considered as an internal archive which preserves all the traces of what has emotionally affected the individual. The preservation is determined by our memory and broadly depends on the impact that symbols, images or situations have had on our mind. In other words, our psyche works as a kind of emotional filter, selecting what is impressive for us and rejecting what is not. The destruction of some memories is very difficult due to the psyche system, which stores the data (Glannon, 2013: 169). The more detailed the memory, the longer the moment seems to last. Therefore, symbols which heavily affect our memory are more difficult to erase. As will be examined in more detail later, even what has been forgotten or repressed can reappear in the mind.

While discussing internal archives and individual memories, it is necessary to bear in mind that, although the term individual refers to a singular/personal interpretation of things and events, this perspective is not the only one contributing to their formation. The society in which the individual has grown plays a fundamental role in shaping his memory and, consequently, in affecting the process of inclusion and exclusion of the horrific in his internal archives. As Maurice Halbwachs (1992) argues, “no memory is possible outside frameworks used by people living in society to determine and retrieve their recollections” (Halbwachs, 1992: 43). The social background, including all of its components, in fact, is the first framework in which people acquire their memories. Thus, when

individuals call recollections to mind, they do it by relying on the frameworks of social memory. In other words, the various groups that compose society are capable at every moment of reconstructing their past (Halbwachs, 1992: 182).

However, it is relevant to note that the process of recollection deconstructs the past. As Jacques Derrida (1996) suggests, “the archivization produces as much as it records the event” (Derrida, 1996: 17). This means that the internal elaboration of external data leads to the formation of other records, determined by a process of emotional selection. Tales, images and sounds are therefore archived, creating new information according to the emotional impact they have on our mind. Re-elaborating what they have acquired and assimilated in society, individuals generate personal archives. The method of selecting the horrific changes according to different factors (belief system, religion, education) and their levels of inculcation in each mind.

As explained in chapter 1, emotional engagement and interaction ritual chains play a fundamental role in the formation of external archives of horror. While collective archives involve archetypes which have been established by the collectiveness, the private ones engage with unique shapes of fear which vary from individual to individual. External archives heavily influence the internal ones. Private archives are a kind of mental elaboration of what we have filtered from external archives of horror. In the collective archives, in fact, there are elements which affect our

imagination more than others. Once emotionally re-elaborated they are preserved in our mind, affecting our fear response in everyday life. What I have outlined thus far is an introduction to internal archives of horror. In order to extend my arguments about this concept, the following pages will adopt two different approaches, pragmatist and psychoanalytic, which will provide a better understanding of the topic.

3.2 Uncanny presences as monstrous Others

The otherness in ourselves lurks just beneath the normal human veneer and threatens to resurface some day with all its horrors.

J.P. Telotte, 1985: 34

Several theories (philosophical, sociological, and feminist, among others) have been proposed to investigate the success, paradoxes and pleasure of horror films. However, psychoanalysis is the discourse that has been most commonly adopted to interpret and explore the dynamics of the genre and its effectiveness in the human mind. One of the leading psychoanalytical sources adopted in the analysis of horror is Freud's essay *The Uncanny*.⁷⁸ This essay, published in 1919, "constituted the *lingua franca* of horror criticism", providing an outstanding starting point for pro- and anti-Freudian debates (Tudor, 1997: 24). Though the uncanny is an influential concept employed in the investigation of the genre, psychoanalytical approaches have not been limited to it. Rival accounts have drawn on other theories, such as those grounded in Lacanian

⁷⁸ For a more thorough comprehension of the notion of the uncanny it is helpful to start from the analysis of the semantic content of the German word *Unheimliche*, translated in English as *uncanny*. Freud claims that *Unheimliche* is the opposite of *Heimlich*, which means familiar, homely. The phoneme *Heim* stands for house – an intimate, familiar place to hide away from the outside and to feel safe. It seems obvious that something *Unheimliche* should be frightening because it is felt to be unknown and unfamiliar.

(Mulvey, 1975; Žižek, 1999; Copjec, 2000), Jungian (Kaminsky with Mahan, 1985; Lucanio, 1987; Iaccino, 1994; Hockley, 2001) and Kleinian (1952) works (Hills, 2005: 57). Despite this, the main focus of the first part of this chapter will be on the debates that have arisen out of Freud's theory of the uncanny and, in particular, around the models of repression (Wood, 1978), abjection (Kristeva, 1982) and surmounted beliefs (Schneider, 2000).

The uncanny is "undoubtedly related to what is frightening – to what arouses dread and horror" (Freud, 1990a: 139). In other words, it is recognizable in that class of frightening things which cause a perturbing sensation of uneasiness and anxiety. In exploring this concept, Freud provides a wide range of evidences able to evoke these feelings and, in doing so, he identifies two main sources: repressed infantile beliefs revived by strong impressions and primitive beliefs surmounted and then reconfirmed. Characterized by the potential to have a strong impact on the viewers' minds, horror films draw out the human vulnerabilities that lie deep within the unconscious, and, enacting a belief-revival process, lead to a return of the repressed or to a reconfirmation of our surmounted beliefs (Smuts, 2008: 509). With regard to this, by using horror cinema as the main frame of the investigation, the following part of this chapter will explore the first definition of the uncanny related to the return of the repressed.

Uncanniness is a feeling. It derives from something which was "familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression" (Freud, 1955: 244). It is something which "ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light" because it has been brought from the unconscious into the conscious mind by a strong impression (Freud, 2003 [1919]: 51). Desires, beliefs and repressed infantile complexes which reappear belong to this affective category. During the phase of growth the individual keeps these complexes hidden within his subconscious. Although being faintly perceptible they are cause of uncanniness, affecting the individual in a way that he cannot explain himself.

Mario Bava's *Il Rosso segno della follia* (1970) engages with this first definition of the uncanny. The main protagonist of the film, John Harrington, is a grown man

trapped in an Oedipus complex.⁷⁹ As a young boy, John loved his mother. However, things changed when his mother decided to get married for the second time, after her first husband's death. Enraged over this decision, John committed a crime, killing his mother on her wedding night. The trauma deriving from this event haunted him, through a series of blurred flashbacks, which pushed him to kill until the truth was revealed.⁸⁰ Whenever he murders a young woman in a bridal gown, John brings back to his mind the terrible childhood trauma of killing his mother, unlocking, each time, a new piece of the long-repressed memory (Figure 17). The act of killing stimulates in his mind the return of the repressed which, functioning as a kind of therapeutic act, helps John to make the faintly perceptible remembrance of this trauma more clear.



Figure 17 – John Harrington wearing a bridal veil before committing the hatchet murder of his wife – Mario Bava's *Il rosso segno della follia* (1970)

The strong Freudian subtexts of the uncanny and repression distance *Il rosso segno della follia* from the narratives of the previous gothic traditions. As discussed in chapter 2, the wide circulation of psychoanalytic texts significantly influenced the horror

⁷⁹ *Oedipus* complex is a psychological term coined by Freud to denote the emotions which, kept in the unconscious, focus on the child's desire to sexually possess the parent of the opposite sex (i.e. males being attracted to their mothers, females to their fathers). This phase occurs during the phallic stage of psychosexual development (age 3–6 years). The term came from Oedipus, a mythological hero who eventually married his mother, fulfilling a prophecy. To know more about the concept of the *Oedipus* complex, see Freud (1956).

⁸⁰ As will be examined more closely in chapter 7, flashbacks are techniques which easily allow the exploration of traumas and shocks in the protagonists' lives.

productions released in the 1970s. Many horror films, then, lent themselves to being read under the Freudian model of repression. In the late 1970s, post-Freudian theorists such as Marcuse Horowitz (1977) and Robin Wood (1986; 2002) extended the basic definition of repression, introducing the concept of *surplus repression*. As Wood (2002) explains,

In terms of our own culture, [...] basic repression makes us distinctively human, capable of directing our own lives and co-existing with others; surplus repression makes us (if it works) into monogamous heterosexual bourgeois patriarchal capitalists [...] (Wood, 2002: 25).

To put it differently, while the basic repression, “universal, necessary, and inescapable”, stands for self-control of our drives and desires, the surplus one, “culture-specific and contingent”, refers to all those social norms which, oppressing our innate primordial nature, influence our agency in the social context (Wood, 1986: 70). By entertaining these considerations one could argue that, if horror deals with the return of the repressed, for Wood repression is not merely the basic form, as postulated by Freud, but also the surplus, which determines our role in society.

Linked to the idea of surplus repression is the concept of the Other, where the Other consists of all those elements that provide a display on which to project what we have learnt to repress since our earliest childhood. In the case of horror films, these elements, dramatized in the figure of monsters/Others, represent a threat to normality and a multiplicity of repressed and oppressed groups in society (cf. Schneider, 2000a: 185).⁸¹ To broaden this concept, Wood identifies specific groups marginalized by the dominant social norms and usually depicted as monstrous in horror films (Wood, 1986: 74–6): women (Mario Bava’s *La maschera del demonio*, 1960), the workers (Mario Bava’s

⁸¹ Noël Carroll (1990) has argued that the figure of the monster is a necessary condition for horror. According to him, the appeal of horror derives from the “transgressiveness of its monsters”, which, perceived as repulsive because of their abnormal nature, constrain attention and elicit curiosity (Carroll, 1990: 195). Crossing over the boundaries of the natural and the conventional, horror, with its typical features of anomalies, distortions and deformities, creates interest, fascinating and distressing the audience at the same time. It follows that the appeal of horror derives from the disgusting and culturally impure violations of its monsters.

La goccia d'acqua, 1963), exotic cultures (Ruggero Deodato's *Cannibal Holocaust*, 1980), ethnic minorities within the cultures (Joe D'Amato's *Anthropophagus*, 1980), alternative ideologies or political systems (Riccardo Freda's *Caltiki - il mostro immortale*, 1959), bisexuality and homosexuality (Dario Argento's *Quattro mosche di velluto grigio*, 1971), and children (Mario Bava's *Shock*, 1977).

The depiction of these groups/monsters defines the social and political nature of the film as progressive or reactionary. In both cases the restoration of repression is accomplished. In progressive films, the pleasure of horror derives from "the monster's threat to dominant social norms, which satisfies the unconscious wish to return to a pleasurable period in infancy free of those norms" (Schneider, 2004: 71). In reactionary ones, the pleasure is merely due to the happy ending: if the monster is destroyed, normality is restored and the repression re-established.⁸²

3.2.1 Uncanny presences as abjects

We may call it a border; abjection is above all ambiguity. Because, while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it – on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger.

J. Kristeva, 1982: 9

Apart from the model of surplus repression previously described, another way to interpret the effectiveness of horror in terms of uncanniness resides in the notion of

⁸² Wood's notion of surplus repression has strong political implications. The pleasure and the effectiveness of horror, in fact, are not constructed in term of emotions and affects, but in terms of cultural-political frameworks. While being sustained by many critics, Wood's theory has been contested by several others who have mainly criticized the generalization of the genre and the abuse of socio-political connotations (e.g. Badley, 1995; Elliott, 2001; Hills, 2005: 50–52).

abjection. The term has been taken up by many theorists (Douglas, 1966; Kristeva, 1982; Creed, 1993; Crane, 1994), and it has become an influential concept in the field of horror cinema studies. As Julia Kristeva (1982) argues, the abject is “what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (Kristeva, 1982: 4). Moreover, the concept refers to all those ideas related to chaos and disorder, but also to pollution, contamination and impurity. The loss of distinction and integrity which derives from the abject threatens the symbolic order and stability, blurring the boundaries that are necessary to define the self. In other words, the abject disturbs the line between human and non-human, self and other, challenging our bodily identity and enhancing, therefore, a feeling of uncanniness (Crane, 1994: 35).

Introducing into the debate on uncanniness the notion of the abject, borrowed from Kristeva (1982), Barbara Creed ([1993] 2004) provides a more comprehensive explanation of the attraction and effectiveness of horror. Creed suggests that the central source of horror in the viewer is provided by the female body, coded as “the monstrous-feminine”. The concept of the monstrous-feminine calls attention to the predominant position of gender as the main component in the construction of monstrosity. Creed associates the woman with the role of monster instead of with the role of victim to a male monster. The feminine is therefore perceived as castrator rather than castrated. Due to its sexuality and reproductive abilities, the feminine body is categorized as abject. The woman’s monstrous nature “is inextricably bound up with her difference as man’s sexual other” (Creed, 1993: 83). Creed argues that, in a standard male-dominated society, this difference is perceived as menacing for the patriarchal order. This also explains the presence of the monstrous-feminine in horror films as the misogynistic projection of male anxieties in response to women becoming more emancipated in society.

The abject is frequently defined via rituals concerning religious taboos. In other words, it derives from the violation of these rituals. Examples of such violations relate to decay and death (Riccardo Freda’s *I Vampiri*, 1956), human sacrifice (Fulci’s *Non si sevizia un paperino*, 1972), murder (Argento’s *Non ho sonno*, 2001), the corpse (Argento’s *Due occhi diabolici*, 1990), bodily wastes (Bava’s *La casa dell’esorcismo*, 1975), sexual

perversion (Bava's *La frusta e il corpo*, 1963), corporeal alteration (Bava's *La maschera del demonio*, 1960), the female body (Argento's *Tenebre*, 1982) and incest (Savona's *Byleth, Il demone dell'incesto*, 1971) (Creed, 2000: 64). Creed explores seven archetypes of female monstrosity connected with concepts of impurity and marginality; horror films show the female as archaic mother (Argento's *Inferno*, 1980), monstrous womb (Argento's *Suspiria*, 1977), vampire (Freda's *I vampiri*, 1956), witch (Bava's *La maschera del demonio*, 1960), possessed body (Bava's *Operazione paura*, 1966), monstrous mother (Argento's *Phenomena*, 1985) and castrator (Argento's *Profondo rosso*, 1975) (Creed, 1993: i). Creed (1996) argues that:

The horror film brings about a confrontation with the abject (the corpse, bodily wastes, the monstrous-feminine) in order, finally, to eject the abject and redraw the boundaries between the human and nonhuman. As a form of modern defilement rite, the horror film works to separate out the symbolic order from all that threatens its stability, particularly the mother and all that her universe signifies (Creed, 1996: 46).

In other words, Creed assumes that the central ideological project of popular horror films is the purification of the abject. In their attempt to cause a confrontation with the abject, horror films strive to trigger a process of purification and a restoration of the boundaries between human and non-human – a re-establishment of order and purity that leads the viewers to a double pleasure:

a pleasure in breaking the taboo on filth ... and a pleasure in returning to the time when the mother-child relationship was marked by an untrammelled pleasure in playing with the body and wastes" (Creed, 1993: 13).

Thus horror films become a form of social ritual whereby viewers witness the abject in order to expel it.

3.2.2 Uncanny presences as reconfirmation of surmounted beliefs

We – or our primitive forefathers – once believed in the possibility of these things and were convinced that they really happened. Nowadays we no longer believe in them; ... but do not feel quite sure of our new set of beliefs, and the ones still exist within us ready to seize upon any confirmation.

S. Freud, 1976: 639

Many post-Freudian theorists (Marcuse Horowitz, 1977; Robin Wood, 1986; 2002) have grounded their accounts on the first definition of “the uncanny” related to the return of the repressed, while the second definition, based on surmounted beliefs, has been less frequently discussed. Surmounted beliefs are usually concerned with superstitions and supernatural ideas that were once part of early man’s belief system (Freud, 2003: 145–157). As explained in chapter 1, they engage with minimally counter-intuitive concepts that have been effective in our minds because they have been facilitated by their mnemonic retention. Strongly popularized in myths, legends and religions, they have been easily circulated, transmitted and interiorized since our early childhood. Surmounted in adult life, they appear to be revived once again through strong impressions.

The beliefs that the dead can return to life in the form of ghosts and that the inanimate can become animate represent two remarkable examples of this category. Aware of their ability to resonate in viewers’ minds, horror cinema has widely exploited these concepts. Ghosts, haunting spirits, vampires and killer toys have, in fact, littered fictional representations throughout history.⁸³ In order to delve into this topic, the following pages will focus on films where the inanimate comes to life. This

⁸³ The animated-toy genre has been widely popularized by horror directors in all its horrific and demonic facets. One of the most successful examples is Tom Holland’s *Child’s Play* (1988), a killer-toy film that features a doll possessed by the soul of a serial killer.

concept will be explored in more detail in chapter 5, through the analysis of Bava's *Lisa e il diavolo* (1973). The origins of the dreadful sensations deriving from exposure to films which depict inanimate objects coming to life can be traced back to our childhood. As Freud (2003) argues,

We recall that children, in their early games, make no sharp distinction between the animate and the inanimate, and that they are especially fond of treating their dolls as if they were alive ... [However,] children are not afraid of their dolls coming to life – they may even want them to. Here, then, the sense of the uncanny would derive not from an infantile fear, but from an infantile wish, or simply an infantile belief (Freud, 2003: 141).

In other words, the fear we derive from these films comes from our childish desires to see these inanimate objects come to life. Even if surmounted in our adult life, these wishes have never totally abandoned our unconscious and, once revived by horrific representations, they spark off an uncomfortable feeling of uncanniness in our mind. This effect is evoked, for instance, in a peculiar sequence (01:34:18 – 01:34:49) from Dario Argento's *Profondo rosso* (1975), where a creepy mechanical doll menacingly approaches Dr. Giordani.⁸⁴ The man is alone in his library, when he realizes that the killer is in his apartment. He takes a knife to defend himself. Suddenly, when the killer would be expected to set upon him from behind the curtains, Giordani is instead approached by a child-sized doll. The dummy seems to be alive. It is a murderer's calling card, used to distract and unnerve the victim. Giordani strikes the doll, which falls to the ground with its arms and head broken (Figure 18). The dismembered parts of the fetish mechanism keep on moving on the floor, evoking a sense of the uncanny. The tension of the sequence is emphasized by the progressive-rock music by Goblin, which reaches a crescendo when the victim is eventually murdered by the real killer.⁸⁵ As will be examined in more detail in chapter 5, the effectiveness of dummies, duplicates and mechanical dolls is due to their capacity to initiate a belief-revival

⁸⁴ Other aspects of this sequence, such as the decontextualization of objects, will be discussed in chapter 5.

⁸⁵ To read more about music and sounds in Argento's films, see Mitchell (2008).

process in the viewer's mind. Hence, in *Profondo rosso*, the presence of a living doll succeeds in its intent of fear, leading the spectator to a reconfirmation of the surmounted belief that the inanimate can come to life.



Figure 18 – The creepy mechanical doll in Dario Argento's *Profondo rosso* (1975)

Though it has been less frequently discussed compared to the first aspect of the uncanny related to the return of the repressed, the category of the reconfirmation of surmounted beliefs has nevertheless attracted many theorists. Steven Jay Schneider (1997, 1999, 2004), for example, has made it the main focus of his research. According to Schneider (1999),

horror film monsters are best understood as metaphorical embodiments of paradigmatic uncanny narratives, rather than literal manifestations of paradigmatic uncanny images (Schneider, 1999: n.p.).

To explain this argument, Schneider makes a distinction between the different personifications of our surmounted beliefs as conceptual metaphors of horror film monsters. He identifies three main categories: that the dead can return to life, the omnipotence of thought and the existence of doubles. The surmounted belief that dead souls can return to life as spirits or ghosts can be divided into two different groups: disembodied and embodied. The disembodied have been exploited in horror films through the figures of ghosts (Bava's *La frusta e il corpo*, 1963) and haunted houses (Bava's *Schock*, 1977), while the embodied have been depicted through demoniac

possessions (Bava's *Operazione paura*, 1966) (Schneider, 1999: 19). Both groups have been persistent in cinematic productions, resonating with audiences, and proving that many viewers harbour beliefs in the supernatural (Koven, 2000: 219). As Aaron Smuts (2008) suggests, the prevalence of this kind of beliefs mainly derives from

the difference between believing in something and believing that something does not exist. [...] Beliefs that things do exist are much harder to vanquish, since it is typically impossible to prove that something does not exist (Smuts, 2008: 12).

Ghosts are a noteworthy example of this. Even if many people claim not to believe in ghosts, they cannot prove their inexistence. Thus, the impossibility of demonstrating that ghosts do not exist from a cognitive point of view leaves some room for doubt, causing spectators to wonder about and reflect on the plausibility of their existence. In order to strengthen this doubt, horror films enact a belief-revival process through the presence of a sceptical character. The narrative energy and dread that derives from these films is usually intensified by the conflict between the sceptical, rational protagonist and those forces that fight against the protagonist's reason. Furthermore, ghost stories, in order to reinforce the doubt, dramatize the empiricist's fate: the sceptic often ends up converted, and, in the worst cases, cruelly dies (Grove, 1997).

As the first chapter highlighted, ghosts and haunting spirits gain part of their fortune from the remarkable advantage they enjoy in their transmission and memorability – an advantage that mainly derives from their minimally counter-intuitive nature. Ghosts, in fact, possess many of the ontological aspects of the human body, including “consciousness, sentiments and even biological needs”, but at the same time, being invisible and able to pass through solid objects, they violate physical ontological rules (Norenzayan and Atran, 2004: 18). The combination of both natural and non-natural qualities makes these figures easily memorable and successfully transmittable. Broadly circulated in previous rituals (especially religious ones), these symbols became effective in the traditions that followed due to the extraordinary value (emotional energy) placed on them. Horror directors, then, making them recirculate in new cinematic rituals, empowered their effectiveness and success.

Schneider's second group of monsters as conceptual metaphors of surmounted beliefs – relating to omnipotence of thought – includes psychic monsters, which can be separated into two main categories: telepathic (Argento's *Profondo rosso*, 1975) and telekinetic (Argento's *Phenomena*, 1985). An opportunity to engage with the omnipotence of thought is evident in Argento's *Profondo rosso* (1975). The film opens with a conference on parapsychology which discusses telepathy in animals. Helga, a gifted psychic invited to the conference, can read the thoughts of other individuals. The woman is suddenly overwhelmed with intense emotions, when she realizes that a murderer is in the audience, ready to attack his next victim.

The theme of paranormality in animals seems to anticipate the principal motif of *Phenomena* (1985). Jennifer, the main protagonist of the film, possesses telekinetic powers, which allow her to communicate with insects. Her psychic ability will help her to save her life and to solve the mysteries of numerous deaths. The ability to move objects with the power of the mind and telepathic phenomena are staples of many horror films; however, the most prominent motif of the genre is the double. Schneider refers to it as the core of the third group of horror metaphors of surmounted beliefs. Doubles are dyadic monsters which can be divided into two categories: physical doubles, both natural (Bava's *La maschera del demonio*, 1960) and non-natural (Bava's *Terrore nello spazio*, 1965), and mental doubles (Argento's *La syndrome di Stendhal*, 1996). Both categories are identified as the most recognizable manifestation of the uncanny, and consequently interpreted as the principal icons of the genre (Joshi, 2007: 190).

The theme of the double is indeed one of the most recurrent in horror films. Considering the volume and variety of doublings tackled from every aspect, it is possible to claim that horror could not exist without the *Doppelgänger* figure. The motif of the double is so persistent that it is hard to identify a horror film that does not use it in some way. The possibilities of representation are endless and involve many forms, aspects and fields, from social to psychoanalytic, from anthropological to cultural (Funari, 1986; Rutelli, 1984; Gaburri, 1986; Aparo, 1986; Coates, 1988; Fusillo, 1998; Schmid, 1996). Sometimes this theme is introduced in a latent way. The double, then, assumes a subtle representation: it can be concerned with the dialectic of opposites, such as the eternal struggles between good and evil, the sacred and the profane, love

and hate. In others, instead, the dualism is expressed in a more explicit and tangible way: that of a persecutor double. The protagonist feels haunted by a perturbing *Doppelgänger* that is encountered everywhere. Only in the end, in an ultimate struggle, is this double revealed to be a complementary figure of the Self, another face of the same individual.⁸⁶

Otto Rank (1971) [1914] assumes the notion of the “double” as archetypal representation of the uncanny. An unexpected encounter with something that is both the same and Other from the Self is sensed as threatening to personal safety, eliciting, therefore, a feeling of uncanniness. Encountering a double is an experience that perturbs, because the subject finds himself face-to-face with an alter ego, the objective counterpart of his unique subjectivity (Žižek, 1999: 315). It follows that, the individual has a simultaneous awareness of being both his present self and the external other observing himself (Rank, 1971 [1914]). In this interrelation between subjectivity and objectivity of the Self, a first connection between horror and the double emerges. Horror, in fact, arises when the subject, seeing himself from an external position, realizes that the uncanny figure he is observing is actually that of himself. In this way he feels ambivalent emotions which affect him and cause him fear.

According to Rank (1914) this fear can be traced back to the history of primitive and folk traditions where the double was connected to an instinctive belief in the weakness of the individual and to his need to overcome his limits.⁸⁷ The fear of death induced primitive men to believe they possessed a soul configured, time after time, in a duplicate of their corporeal I. Thus, men have been accompanied by an invisible brother, a paradoxical figure that, though presenting itself with the same face as the I, was at the same time similar and different, familiar and perturbing (Di Lorenzo, 1990: 30). The double, developed from self-love and primary narcissism, was originally “an insurance against the destruction of the ego” and an “energetic denial of the power of death” (Freud, 1955 [1919]: 220). Upon passing through these early stages of

⁸⁶ To read more about the figure of the complementary double, see the analysis of *La frusta e il corpo* (1963) in chapter 6.

⁸⁷ According to primitive beliefs, the soul is a copy of the body; thus it is easily understandable how the meeting of the double corresponds to the perception of the absolute Other as well as of a mirror image. In this way, the “I” does not give birth to the double, but simply recognizes it (Valcarengi, 1990: 18).

development and “having once been an assurance of immortality”, it became an “uncanny harbinger of death” (Freud, 2003 [1919]: 142). As Kerman (1997) argues,

Doubles compete for the same space, rank and even the right to existence. The competition further implies the threat of displacement: the original self may lose its uniqueness and its identity to the other self, which replaces the original (Kerman, 1997: 7).

It is understandable that, in such a struggle for existence, the double assumes a rival and threatening face, enacting, therefore, a feeling of terror.

3.3 Psychic phantoms within the Ego

A horrid stillness first invades the ear, and
in that silence we the tempest fear.

J. Dryden, 2007 [1660]: 17

Despite demonstrating different ways of reading the Freudian concept of the uncanny, the psychoanalytical tendencies analysed thus far fit the same argumentative structure of restoration. In Kristeva’s terms horror restores pre-Oedipal pleasures of the abject, while in Freud’s terms it restores the familiar, which has been blurred by the unfamiliar and threatening presence of the uncanny (Arnzen, 1997).⁸⁸ In their attempts to explore the pleasure and effectiveness of horror, these arguments have brought to light a kaleidoscopic variety of horrific presences. The return of the repressed, the abject and the reconfirmation of surmounted beliefs have shown, indeed, different features of uncanny monsters. And yet, though they have provided interesting analyses, many aspects have been left unexplored.

⁸⁸ Please, cfr Hills (2005: 46).

The effectiveness of horror, in fact, is also related to subtle elements, undetectable to the human mind but nevertheless effective to the Self. I am talking about voids, gaps and secrets of others which, though representing foggy elements that are impossible to grasp, affect the perception of horror and the circulation of its symbols at an unconscious level. With regard to this, to fill the gap left unexplored by the psychoanalytical approaches to the genre, the following pages will engage with Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok's theories of psychic phantoms and trans-generational transmission. Their theories, never applied before in studies of Italian horror cinema, will supply new elements in the understanding of the internalization and effectiveness of horror symbols in viewers' minds, as well as providing innovative insights about the dialogical dynamics of the Self.

To facilitate the comprehension of this topic and its relevance to the genre it is necessary first to introduce the concepts of trauma and psychic phantoms as elaborated by Abraham and Torok in their book *The Shell and the Kernel* (1987). According to Abraham and Torok, traumatic experiences are all those painful experiences which have never been accepted or metabolized in a spoken or concrete form (Yassa, 2002: 82). The impossibility of introjecting the trauma leads to the formation of psychic phantoms, a term which indicates all of the "experiential fragments" of the traumatic event which are impossible to assimilate. The phantoms are "swallowed and preserved" in isolated psychic regions named crypts (Stephan, 2005: 258). The crypts, then, become

the repository of the secrets of the past, they are the places where our parents and grandparents are buried, the sites on which are stored all the stories which have been too painful, too embarrassing and too revealing to tell. It is in the crypts that the secrets of our own genesis may be buried (Wolfreys, 2002: 263, my plural).

The preservation of the psychic phantom in the crypt occurs through the process of incorporation, which is not to be confused with introjection (Abraham, 1972, 1980, 1984, 1987, 1994). The process of incorporation develops at an unconscious level. Hence, it is evident that the function of the psychic phantom differs from the

repression model elaborated by Freud. The phantom is “a formation of the unconscious that has never been conscious” (Abraham and Torok, 1994: 172), while Freud’s uncanny is related to something “once well known and familiar to the psyche” that has been repressed and then returned to consciousness (Freud, 2003 [1919]: 124). From the moment of incorporation, the psychic phantom lives inside the I like an internal and secret Other: a silent double that, inhabiting the Ego, haunts the subject from the inside (Derrida, 1985: 57).

The process of introjection follows different dynamics, which Abraham and Torok explain through an example which involves a mother and her child. In the absence of the maternal breast, the baby’s cry represents a replacement for the missing satisfaction of the empty mouth. Learning to fill the emptiness of the mouth with words, the baby makes a first step towards introjection (Yassa, 2002: 87). While introjection is a psychic process that, through the acceptance and verbalization of the loss, gradually leads the subject to personal growth and subjectivity, incorporation, representing a failure in the process of assimilation of the loss, causes the traumatic object to be encrypted within the Self.

As Abraham and Torok argue, psychic phantoms can be transmitted from one generation to another, from parent to child or from community to individual “without ever having been voiced” (Berthin, 1993: 54). The transmission occurs unconsciously, through a silent process that leads to the formation of “a gap, a mute zone” that is incomprehensible and inaccessible to the individual who inherits it (Yassa, 2002: 83). Preserving this gap, the individual can develop symptoms that are derived not directly from his own life but from the parents’ or ancestors’ psychic conflicts and traumas. This silent communication can manifest itself in obsessive, compulsive, phobic, depressive disorders (Rashkin, 2009: 94). To distinguish the effects of the psychic phantom from the Freudian concept of repression, Abraham and Torok advance the notion of ‘preservative repression’. As Esther Rashkin (2009) describes it, this concept

conveys the idea that the child haunted by the phantom is not the active source of the repression, but a recipient or legatee of another’s psychic agency (Rashkin, 2009: 94).

In other words, the inherited gap does not derive from his own repression, but from “a direct empathy with the unconscious of the rejected psychic matter of a parental object” (Abraham, 1994: 181). This means that children extract unconscious crypts from their parents and incorporate them within their Ego. Hence, “what haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others” (Abraham, 1987: 287).

In order to develop the understanding of the circulation of the horrific in the minds of viewers, these dynamics will be further extended by adopting another hermeneutic tradition: pragmatism. With regard to this, the following pages will explore the private world of internal conversations.

3.4 Framing internal conversations

Thought is the silent speech of the soul with itself.

Plato⁸⁹

Abraham and Torok’s theories of psychic phantoms and trans-generational transmission have provided new elements in the understanding of the internalization of symbols in the minds of viewers from a psychoanalytical point of view. Now, by integrating their assumptions with concepts and ideas from Norbert Wiley (1994, 2006) and Margaret Archer (2000, 2003, 2007), a new contribution to the neo-pragmatist tendencies about internal conversations will be afforded. In order to do so, the following section will introduce some of the principal aspects of the internal conversation.

The term internal conversation was first introduced by the social theorist Margaret Archer (1988, 1995, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2007), although the notion itself is much older, as it can be traced back to Plato, who first referred to the dialogical interactions that individuals undertake with themselves. Many theorists have attempted to describe

⁸⁹ *Tht.*, 189e–190a and *Sph.*, 263e–264a.

the inner interactions of the Self by adopting a variety of terms for the same concept: “musement” (Peirce, 1934), “inner speech” (Vygotsky, 1962 [1934]), “self-talk” (Goffman, 1981), “intrapersonal communication” (Vocate, 1994). While some theorists applied the idea of internal conversation to the psychological discourse, others applied it to the sociological discourse. Georg Simmel and Erving Goffman, for instance, re-elaborated the concept, pointing out the interactional order in relation to society. Subsequently, the school of thought known as American Pragmatism took up the concept, broadening the illustration of the Self and its intra-dynamics.⁹⁰ Peirce (1934) and Mead (1934) provided two of the earliest pragmatist approaches in their attempts to delineate the dialogic forms of inner life. While Peirce recognized in the I (Present) and the You (Future) the main conversational poles of the Self, Mead’s model identified a dialogue between I (Present) and Me (Past). Despite being divergent, their insights about the different dialogic forms of the Self opened up new horizons of research in relation to internal conversations. With regard to this, Norbert Wiley (1994) and Margaret Archer (2000) have offered a notable contribution, proposing a new model of the Self which broadens the understanding of the topic, supplying new perspectives to the matter.

By combining the theories advanced by Mead and Peirce, Norbert Wiley offered a significant contribution to the understanding of inner speech.⁹¹ Considering the human being as characterized by present, future and past temporal dimensions, he proposed his own model of the Self, comprising the triadic combination of I, Me and You. This triad can be defined in semiotic terms as: I-Present-Sign, You-Future-Interpretant and Me-Past-Object. It deals with three poles of the Self which overlap and are interconnected, creating a simultaneous triologue instead of a diachronic one (Wiley, 1994: 26–7). Present, past and future are, therefore, dynamically and concurrently involved. The permanently present I is the agent who acts as a definer of the Me and the You. The Me provides “a guiding line for present actions” (responsibility and moral standard) and the You represents anticipations of and plans

⁹⁰ The American School of Pragmatism was founded by William James, John Dewey, Charles Sanders Peirce and George Herbert Mead. For more details see Shook (2000).

⁹¹ Wiley uses the term *inner speech* to refer to *internal conversations*.

for the future (Meyer, 2001: 21). The interaction between all of these parts plays a fundamental role in the development and outcome of dialogue/trialogue with the Self and, above all, in the increase or decrease of emotional energy.

3.4.1 Permanent and temporary visitors: the silent voices of the Self

Guess who's the number one person you communicate with on a daily basis? It's you! Our internal conversations characterize how we view the world and influence every part of our lives – relationships, achievements, attitude and ultimately our degree of happiness.

Todd Smith, Entrepreneur and Network
Marketer

In addition to these three main components of the Self, Wiley introduces the concept of temporary and permanent visitors: internalized others that appear in our mind and are involved in the conversational dynamics between I, Me and You (Wiley, 1994: 54). While the temporary visitors occupy the Self in a transitory way, the permanent ones do it in a persistent way. They are images “sedimented into the Self as regulatory aspects”, described in Mead’s terms as “generalised others” (Mead, 1934: 155) or in Athens’ terms as “phantom others” (Athens, 1994: 525).⁹² Thus, to sum up, inner conversations involve not just our Self but also the presence of others, which, despite being immaterial from a physical point of view, are persistent in our mind, widely affecting the dialogical dynamics of the Self. While conversing with ourselves, in fact, we engage with external presences that influence our inner conversations. These presences can be viewed as a type of imaginary companion that represents both a

⁹² For a further understanding of the concept of generalised other, please see Dodds (1997: 483-503).

single and a multiple entity: single in the sense that when we internally converse we normally do it with one person at a time, multiple because they comprise “a phantom community” (Athens, 1994: 526). As a result of these observations, it follows that people we come across in our social experiences converse with us not just directly, but also indirectly.

Moving a step further towards the investigation of the dialogic components of the Self, another outstanding category of third visitors, or generalized others, can be identified in the whole range of immaterial presences which belong to dimensions that are parallel to the real one. The heterotopic world of horror cinema provides an interesting example in this regard. If a film is effective enough, the viewer will let it penetrate to the core of his consciousness, allowing it to be completely absorbed and internalized within the Self. Thus the triad I-Me-You will be inhabited by third visitors that, drawing from both linguistic and visual worlds, belong to dimensions parallel to the real one. Voices, images and sounds, but also gaps and silences, which belong to heterotopic worlds, are, despite being illusory, powerful enough to affect our internal conversations. Cinema, in fact, with its fictional imagery, exercises a strong power upon its viewers, widely affecting their internal and external conversations. This mechanism arises in particular when the sequences we watch are extremely touching for us, both positively and negatively, allowing in this way a process of internalization and absorption of symbols. The internalization of images, as will be discussed later in chapter 7, also involves the interplay of senses, which can emotionally affect the perception of films in terms of inner speech. As Sobchack suggests:

We do not experience any movie only through our eyes. We see and comprehend and feel films with our entire bodily being, informed by the full history and carnal knowledge of our acculturated sensorium (Sobchack, 2007: 63).

This means that the watching experience activates all of a spectator’s senses, and not just hearing and viewing. I argue, then, that what Sobchack (2007) defines as an embodiment experience of the carnal dimension of films generates sensorial inputs that inform our inner conversations.

With the purpose of broadening this aspect, the following pages will focus on the viewer's perception of horror films. Designed to elicit fear and feelings of uncanniness in the viewer's mind, horror productions provide a remarkable illustration of the dialogical dynamics within the Self when a viewer is affected by negative traces. "A strongly internalized movie enters the niche of one's inner speech and seems oneself talking to oneself" (Wiley, 2006: 332–333). The boundaries between outside and inside are crossed, and the film, entering the spectator's inner speech chamber, seems to be part of the spectator's natural consciousness. This happens because the internalization of the film allows the inner consciousness of the viewer to be permeated by the outer one of the film itself. More clearly, this process of internalization allows the triad I-Me-You to be inhabited by third visitors, nourishing in the spectator's mind a mixture of feelings that will affect the dynamics within the Self and, consequently, the increase or decrease of emotional energy. These third visitors are recognizable in all those elements that, drawing from both linguistic and visual worlds, belong to heterotopic dimensions parallel to the real ones.

By combining these considerations with Abraham and Torok's concepts of psychic phantoms and trans-generational transmission a new perspective in the understanding of the conversational dynamics of the Self will be established. As already mentioned throughout my work, horror films can leave negative traces in the viewer's mind. The most effective of these traces can act as real traumas, which are incorporated within the Ego in the form of psychic phantoms. When this occurs, they inhabit the channel of inner speech, influencing the dialogic interactions of the Self at an unconscious level. These visitors, arising out of the impossibility of introjecting the trauma, act as silent presences (psychic phantoms) that affect the subject from within. The internal conversation will thus involve a new component in the dialogue: I, Me, You, and Permanent and Temporary Visitors will be accompanied by psychic phantoms.

However, the frame is not complete yet. As Abraham and Torok suggest, the psychic phantoms can in fact be trans-generationally transmitted: silently communicated in the form of a mute zone which remains inaccessible and impenetrable to the individual who inherits it. Hence, undetectable from a cognitive

point of view, the traumas of others, in the form of gaps, voids, secrets and unspoken words, once inherited and incorporated in our mind, can affect the dynamics of the Self at an intimate level. Inhabiting our inner speech, they silently converse with the other components of the Self. The undisclosed becomes, therefore, a deafening silence which functions as a ventriloquist, a phantomatic double entombed within the Self (Kamuf, 1979: 38). It might seem a paradox that a silent presence can converse, but is silence not one of the most powerful tools of communication? Is silence not one of the most deafening voices, able to converse through emotions, sensations and feelings? Silence gives messages and inputs and, despite communicating secretly, its voice can be the most powerful of all. Subtle and insidious, in the form of a psychic phantom, gap or generalized other, it acts indeed as one of the most powerful presences: a permanent heterotopic companion able to inhabit the channel of inner speech in a secret way.

3.4.2 Inside inner speech: third-order circulation of symbols

The investigation of the second-order circulation of symbols in chapter 2 demonstrated how social interactions and collective solidarity play an outstanding role in the generation of emotional energy. Moving a step further and proposing his model of the Self, Wiley pointed out how the generation of emotional energy can also develop internally in the individual's mind, through internal conversations. To broaden this argument, the following pages will explore the private nature of inner speech, drawing attention to the interactional dynamics of the Self and the third-order circulation of symbols. By recalling the Saussurian notions of the syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes of language, Wiley explains the interplay of dynamics between the different components of the Self, and, in doing so, he highlights the differences and similarities between inner and outer speech. An important difference between the two dialogic forms is inner speech's economy of words. In inner speech, we do not need to use the same syntax as we do in outer speech, as a "condensational process" takes place in our

mind. Compared to outer speech, our internal conversation is more intense and condensed into the Self.

Exposure to horror films provides an interesting example that is worth exploring. The frightening sequences watched on the screen can affect the viewer's mind with feelings of uncanniness and anxiety. When this happens, the inner speech is condensed in a stream of thoughts and emotions, which causes the spectator to lose his outer speech. This occurs because even if the syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes of the outer speech also exist in the inner one, they are loaded with more meanings and complexity in the latter: the syntax becomes folded and speedier, making the inner conversation more powerful. This phenomenon develops especially during intense experiences of fear, when the spectator gives more space to the inner speech while the outer one is often substituted by sounds and exclamations. It follows that, while on one side the internal conversation is simpler and involves a reductive use of semantics and syntax, on the other side it is more complex in the way in which it engages extra-linguistic elements that involve all five senses and our unique psychology (Wiley, 2006: 324). Parts of the sentences in the internal conversation, in fact, are substituted by non-linguistic imageries that draw from our private world (*Ibid.* 321).

Inner speech incorporates emotions, thoughts, dreams, symbols and all the wide range of signs that belong to the individual's unique private world (Peirce, 1934, V.6: 233). It deals with a variety of extra-linguistic elements that differentiate individuals from one another. It is therefore understandable that individuals who can speak more than one language, or who have grown up in a multicultural context, have access to a wider circle of symbols, which derive from a more articulated private world (internal archive). Consequently, their internal conversations will be more accurate, allowing them to understand and interact with themselves and the external world in a more complete way. All these symbols and extra-linguistic elements are different for each individual, and adopted in a different way to interpret and deliberate thoughts. Moreover, being a private language, "rooted in the unique Self", inner speech is necessarily inaccessible; it would be "inaccessible in its meaning even if it were accessible in its signifying forms" (Wiley, 2006: 337). Even if the inner speech was

revealed and the words understood, the non-linguistic imageries would be impossible to perceive and reach in the same way as ideated and imagined by the individual self.

Internal conversations are, therefore, understood only by the individuals who produce them. "We are little gods in the world of inner speech. We are the only ones, we run the shows, we are the boss" (*Ibid.* 329). This assertion delineates the exclusivity of human beings. Every individual, in fact, is unique and unique is his own way to dialogue with his Self and the external world. Furthermore, marking the boundaries between the internal and the external world, this singularity confers sacredness to human beings. From these observations it can be inferred that individuals are powerful because of the things they do and say about themselves and the external world in the private arena of their inner speech. Hence, their sacredness is basically generated by their internal conversations. The private nature of the internal conversation confers power and sacredness to individuals, even far from the collectiveness; this is because the Self is, *de facto*, characterized by components which interact as in social interactions.

As Randall Collins (2004) suggests, though taking place in our mind, internal conversations are shaped in the same way as social interactions. Bringing together the dynamics of present, past and future, their components (I-Me-You, temporary and permanent visitors, psychic phantoms and gaps) create a private world, a concealed existence parallel to the public one, influencing the level of emotional energy within the Self and the third-order circulation of symbols. If the intra-psychic dynamics among the poles are pacific, the level of emotional energy will increase, favouring an undisturbed internal rhythm and a successful circulation of symbols. Conversely, if the dynamics are conflicting, the intra-psychic emotional energy will diminish and the symbols will not be charged by new energy (Summers, 2002: 44).⁹³ From these observations it follows that the combination of the different components of the Self plays an outstanding role in the increase or decrease of emotional energy and, consequently, of the internalization and circulation of symbols. But how do horror archetypes circulate in the human mind? To what extent are symbols internalized in personal thoughts or motivations? What do individuals do with them in their solitude?

⁹³ See chapter 1, external archives.

Far from the gaze of others individuals take refuge in their secret world and privately communicate with themselves. It is in this new dimension that symbols circulate, and are thereby charged by new and meaningful power. As Collins (2000) notes,

symbols which are sufficiently charged with feelings of membership carry the individual along certain courses of action even when the group is not present (Collins, 2000: 23).

It follows that if, during social interactions, symbols have been charged by an intense emotional energy, their effectiveness in the present will be more successful, affecting individuals not only in their collectiveness but even in their own privacy. The analysis of the second-order circulation of symbols, in chapter 2, has demonstrated how simple objects of everyday life have been transformed into iconic horror symbols, acquiring sacredness conferred and recognized by the collectiveness. These symbols, crucial in many horror films, are so powerful because of the extraordinary value charged on them: a “sacredness that is not an intrinsic property of things but a quality attributed or superposed on them; a quality which therefore can change over time, be acquired or lost” (Durkheim, 2011 [1975]: 295). In other words, it deals with a special value conferred to ordinary objects through rituals.

Considering the arguments thus far, it can be assumed that the same process that develops in the collectiveness also occurs in the individual’s private world of internal conversation. Through the ritual process of inner speech, individuals convert symbols from the ordinary into the sacred. Moreover, in the private realm of internal conversations, they even attribute new meanings to symbols already recognized by the collectiveness.⁹⁴ While some symbols are represented by mere abstract representations of thoughts, others are material objects that can be concretely manipulated and decontextualized, giving birth to visible ritualistic actions. In both cases the process deals with symbols that are charged by a strong emotional energy and are, for this reason, extremely meaningful and powerful.

⁹⁴ As Collins suggests, the Me, containing information about general social responses, works as a proper interaction ritual chain. Thus, if contrasts between the I and the Me emerge, the level of energy will be affected negatively. The same will occur if conflicts arise between the I and the permanent visitors.

A brief illustration will help to explain this concept. The knife, for instance, is an object that belongs to everyday life. It is a tool mainly used as cutlery and to prepare food. However, these are just two of the most common examples of how this tool is used. Individuals can privately attribute different meanings and levels of emotional energy to a common knife. The possession of private collections can cause owners to worship knives as sacred objects. In their solitude, possessors spend their time holding, admiring and looking at these objects. This occurs because of a private ritual that has transformed that ordinary object of everyday life into a sacred one. As Collins (2000) argues:

This is a ritualistic affirmation of their membership, something like a member of a religious cult engaging in private prayer, in actual physical contact with the sacred objects, like fingering the beads of a rosary (Collins, 2000: 101).

Moreover, as already mentioned, through this private ritual process, not only are symbols converted into sacred objects, but even the participants of the ritual itself assume a quality of sacredness. Acquiring a unique identity in the arena of inner speech, individuals are charged by a sacred power that distinguishes their inner world from the external one and themselves from anyone else.

Conclusion

By extending the concept of internal archives of horror, this chapter has explored the formation and circulation of horror symbols in the human mind. To delve into this aspect, the attention has initially focused on the different ways of reading the Freudian concept of the uncanny. A preliminary investigation has brought to light a kaleidoscopic variety of horrific presences mainly categorizable into three groups: the return of the repressed, the reconfirmation of surmounted beliefs and the abject. The

identification of these forms of uncanniness and monstrosity has favoured a better understanding of the internalization and effects of the horrific in the human mind.

However, other aspects relevant to the comprehension of the potency of horror have required further analysis through the use of post-Freudian theories. With regard to this, Abraham and Torok's concepts of psychic phantoms and trans-generational transmission have been helpful in highlighting the dynamics of the internalization of horror symbols at an unconscious level. This discourse has been extended through a pragmatist approach. This study has revealed that a third-order circulation of symbols takes place in a more private sphere. Individuals, in fact, in their solitude, re-elaborate thoughts and beliefs within their own mind through internal conversations. The combination of psychoanalytical and pragmatist approaches has provided a new perspective on the process of internalization of horror films in the human mind. By exploring different dynamics, both conscious and unconscious, a new contribution to the neo-pragmatist tendencies relating to internal conversations has been afforded. Furthermore, this section has demonstrated how third visitors, identified in a kaleidoscopic variety of forms including psychic phantoms and generalized others, represent the choral voices of the Self.

CHAPTER 4

HETEROTOPIC SPACES OF FEAR

As for me I continue to inhabit my glass house (ma maison de verre), [...] where I rest at night on a bed of glass with glass sheets, where who I am will appear to me, sooner or later, engraved on a diamond.

A. Breton, 1964: 18, 19

Introduction

After outlining the theoretical framework of my research in the first part of my thesis (chapters 1, 2 and 3), the second part of my work (chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7) will be devoted to a series of case studies, aimed at exploring the dynamics of development, circulation (intertextuality) and reception of Italian horror cinema from its origins until the 1980s. Taking a closer look at specific films from Freda, Bava and Argento, my discussion will address the ways in which spaces, objects, identities and actions interact across the genre's narrative structures.

Each horror film is set in a heterotopic or dystopic world populated by spaces/non-spaces and phantasmagoric dimensions. These *other spaces* are characterized by qualities of otherness and assume a different role and degree of uncanniness in each horror film. As a means of drawing them all together, Freud's concept of the uncanny (1919) and Michel Foucault's model of heterotopia (1967) will be adopted, providing new and insightful perspectives in the reading of horrific spaces in the cinematic context. This study will lead us towards the exploration of more diverse forms of fear and uncanniness, opening new horizons in the understanding of the circulation and development of spaces in the Italian horror genre.

4.1 Conceptualizing heterotopias

In their films, horror directors create sites/counter-sites that can be read as “outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality” (Foucault, 1986: 24). These sites can be defined in Foucauldian terms as heterotopias. The concept of the heterotopia has received much attention from a number of scholars in the last few decades (Teyssot, 1980; Connor, 1989; Delaney, 1992; Chambers, 1994; Lyon, 1994; Bennett, 1995; Genocchio, 1995; Soja, 1995, 1996). The term *heterotopia*⁹⁵ appeared for the first time in the preface to Foucault’s book *The Order of Things*, published in 1966. In that context the term was employed to refer to language rather than spaces (Dehaene, 2008: 43). In the following year, in a lecture titled *Des espaces autres*, the notion was extended to spaces. The two texts develop the concept in significantly different ways that “bear a strange consistency” (Genocchio, 1995: 37). However, the articulation between the two diverse ideas of heterotopias has never been discussed by Foucault. For this reason, whether it depends on the divergent nature of the texts or because we are engaging with an underworked notion, we have to assume that heterotopia is an unfinished theoretical concept that still needs elaboration and development (Hook, 2002: 206). Despite this, it offers key elements which, in relation to feelings of uncanniness, are strongly applicable to cinema studies, and it is in this sense that the concept will be adopted in the present work.

Heterotopias are spaces that always function in a relationship with the usual spaces we are familiar with. They act in a disturbing way, altering and subverting our perception and common sense of things. The mirror represents a perfect example of a heterotopic space. Being a place without place, “the mirror is, after all, a utopia.⁹⁶ [...] I see myself there where I am not, in other words, in an unreal place” (Foucault, 1967: 17). At the same time, the mirror is a heterotopia in the sense that it really exists,

⁹⁵ Derived from the Greek *hetero* meaning other and *topos* meaning place, the term was borrowed from the medical and biological context and adopted by Foucault in his own discourse (Dehaene, 2008: 41).

⁹⁶ Foucault (1967) distinguishes heterotopias from utopias. While the latter, with their symbolic meanings of imaginary and ideal places, are unreal and do not exist anywhere, heterotopias are real places, whether they be ideal or not. The mirror represents an exceptional fusion of both categories of space: if the reflection in a mirror is a utopia, the mirror as object and as a medium of reflection is a heterotopia.

exerting on the place that an individual [I] occupies a sort of return effect: “it is starting from the mirror that I discover my absence in the place where I am, since I see myself over there” (*Ibidem*). Thus, functioning only in relation to what it reflects, the mirror is a source of uncanny experiences. Its effect, in fact, is something perturbing which opens up the possibility of re-evaluating what was once familiar. This dialectic can be examined in conjunction with Gilles Deleuze’s notion of the crystal-image:

In Bergsonian terms, the real object is reflected in a mirror-image as in the virtual object which, from its side and simultaneously, envelops or reflects the real: there is a ‘coalescence’ between the two. There is a formation of an image with two sides, actual and virtual. It is as if an image in a mirror, a photo or a postcard came to life, assumed independence and passed into the actual, even if this meant that the actual image returned into the mirror and resumed its place in the postcard or photo, following a double movement of liberation and capture (Deleuze, 2005b: 66–67).

In other words, the crystal-image is the point of conjunction of two dimensions, which generates a two-faced image where past and present coexist. In a similar way, heterotopia works as “the indivisible unity of an actual image and its virtual image”, the fusion of two spatial dimensions which creates a new one (Deleuze, 2005b: 76). According to Foucault, heterotopias have six principles in common (Foucault, 1967: 17–22). In order to explore them, the following pages will consider several film examples, extending the analysis to Italian horror cinema.

4.1.1 Heterotopias of crisis and deviation: a concept in evolution

The first principle of heterotopia states that even if all societies constitute heterotopias, their forms vary according to the diversities of cultures and geographical conformations. Each society, in fact, defines its own spatial dimensions, reflecting its social and cultural structures. Thus, since heterotopias are created by the expression of the society, universal forms do not exist. Two main categories can be distinguished: the heterotopia of crisis and the heterotopia of deviation. The first refers to all those “privileged, sacred or forbidden places reserved for individuals who are, in relation to the society or to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis” (Foucault, 1967: 18). Boarding schools (Argento’s *Phenomena*, 1985), asylums (Di Leo’s *La bestia uccide a sangue freddo*, 1971) and retirement homes can be included in this category. The second group encompasses those spaces reserved for individuals “whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or required norm” in the society (*Ibidem*). Psychiatric hospitals (Scardamaglia’s *La lama nel corpo*, 1966) and prisons (Don Edmonds’ *Ilsa: She Wolf of the SS*, 1975) are representative models of this category.

As is evident from the above-mentioned examples, in some cases the same spaces can belong to both classifications.⁹⁷ The reason for this can be traced to the Foucauldian concept of crisis. Crisis refers to a period of life when individuals are in a state of difficulty or breakdown (Foucault, 1967: 18). It deals therefore with a transitory moment which is determined by a beginning and an end. When crises degenerate they become deviant. For this reason spaces such as psychiatric hospitals can be ascribed to both categories of crisis and deviations. Reserved for deviants who do not conform to the norms, they can also represent spaces for a transitory period of life.

Heterotopias change their meanings and functions across societies, cultures and civilizations, but their meanings change, foremost, over the course of history (Dehaene,

⁹⁷ An example given for one kind of heterotopias never represents only one type of principle, but always involves connections with other categories. Like asylums and psychiatric hospitals, hospices and retirement homes can be ascribed to heterotopias of both crisis and deviation. Foucault considers the state of being elderly as a crisis and the idleness of age as a deviation (Foucault, 1967: 18).

2008: 45).⁹⁸ Spaces, in fact, are not static or ahistorical; they are subject to a continuous stream of changes and renovations, and, undergoing transformations over time, they must be considered dynamic and multifaceted. Horror films offer an attractive framework for exploring this mutation. Spatial representations in cinema, in fact, involve substantial changes, being invested with qualities of uncanniness from time to time (Vidler, 1994: 11). To investigate this aspect, the following pages will consider two shots drawn from *I Vampiri* (1957) by Freda. The film, credited as being the first production of the Italian gothic tradition, provides elements that show the slippage of heterotopias from old to new. However, before starting with the analysis of the shots, some key points about the importance of spaces in the genre need to be discussed.

Spaces, both internal and external ones, are greatly influential in the horror genre. They are not subordinate components in the narration; on the contrary, they are a relevant part of it. They act as *real* protagonists of the scene, becoming helpful devices able to elicit dread and terror in the audience. In this regard, gothic literature offered a substantial source of inspiration in terms of settings. Often connected to the concept of the uncanny, Gothic architecture, with its sharp forms and emphasis on verticality, defined the genre, providing new shapes of heterotopias.⁹⁹ Ruins, abandoned castles, convents and creepy mansions were perfect vehicles of fear. In terms of visual design and lighting, German expressionism made a significant contribution to the gothic subculture. Blending ghoulish sounds and visual effects, Italian horror directors tried to reproduce the gloomy and distorted atmospheres that were typical of the movement. The strong use of contrasts in dark and light, together with particular camera perspectives, allowed them to gothicize scenes, transforming ordinary heterotopias into heterotopic spaces of fear.

⁹⁸ To explain the evolution of heterotopias Foucault (1967) adopts the example of the cemetery. Until the end of the eighteenth century cemeteries were located at the heart of the city, close to the church. In modern times, the growing belief that the dead could bring illness to the living caused cemeteries to be displaced from the centre of the community and pushed out to its periphery.

⁹⁹ Gothic referred to architecture long before literature. The term was associated with a medieval style that was popular across Europe between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries. Pointed arches, high vaults, narrow spires and stained-glass windows were the main characteristics of this style, which typically emphasized verticality. Gothic was then used to describe a certain type of novel which drew heavily on this peculiar architecture for its settings.

Expressionistic use of shadows was particularly prevalent in the first horror productions. A memorable sequence (00:05:30 – 00:05:48) from *I Vampiri* (1957) by Freda offers an exemplary illustration of this phenomenon. The sequence, which shows the killer entering a dressing room (Figure 19), is reminiscent of Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922). The heavy contrasts of light, and the low-angle lighting effects, create dramatic shadows (Hayward, 1996: 166–7).



Figure 19 – Looming shadows and distorted atmospheres – Freda's *I Vampiri* (1957)

Although drawing from the gothic tradition, *I Vampiri* (1957) introduces modern elements to both the narration and the setting. Some ambiances are gothicized while others are modernized (Abbott, 2002, n.p.). This aspect is particularly evident in two spaces in the castle: the crypt and the laboratory (Figures 20, 21).



Figures 20, 21 – The gothic crypt and the modern laboratory: two opposite spaces – Freda's *I Vampiri* (1957)

Surrounded by torn draperies, dripping candles and ornamental skulls carved in the stone, the decadent tomb in the crypt reflects the conventional features of the gothic style. One could even argue that the gothic mode in this sequence is represented as “a form of parody, a way of assailing clichés by exaggerating them to the limit of

grotesqueness" (Fiedler, 1960). As Angela Carter (1974) argued in relation to gothic novels:

Gothicism grandly ignores the value systems of our institutions; it deals entirely with the profane [...] Characters and events are exaggerated beyond reality to become symbols, ideals, passion. Its style will tend to be ornate, unnatural and thus operate against the perennial human desire to believe the word as fact. It retains a singular moral function — that of provoking unease (Carter, 1974: 122).

In this sense, Bava manipulates these symbols, exaggerating their visual performance and creating borderline clichés. Through an expressionistic use of camera, shifts of lighting and widescreen compositions, he strongly gothicizes the ambience in the crypt (Figure 20), imbuing it with an upsetting aura of creepiness and unease.

Conversely, the laboratory (Figure 21), where the mad scientist conducts experiments to find methods of combatting mortality, is modernized, completely changing the gothic standards of vampirism. The shift from the modern to the gothic space is rendered through the use of a dissolve (Abbot, 2002, n.p.). Suggesting the transition/connection between crypt and laboratory, this film technique reinforces the heterotopic function of suspension, neutralization and inversion of spaces (Foucault, 1967: 17). The crypt is a secret passage which leads to an unexpected room: the laboratory. The point of conjunction of the two worlds is a key element which opens up a new perturbing dimension. The dichotomy of spaces in the same heterotopia reflects the double personality of Duchess Du Grand. The castle, therefore, assumes the anthropomorphic shape of the protagonist's dualism; the old and eerie crypt mirrors the physical decadence of the Duchess, while the modern laboratory, as a source of regeneration, represents the young and beautiful Giselle.

The introduction of new elements to the gothic tradition of vampirism seems to anticipate audiences' changing tastes. In the late 1960s the settings that were typical of the early gothic productions underwent important changes. A new tradition developed, giving birth to new heterotopias. Rather than remote and eerie castles, the hidden terrors were placed in modern locations, more familiar to contemporary

audiences. Houses (Bava's *Shock*, 1977), schools (Argento's *Suspiria*, 1977) and hotels (Barilli's *Pensione paura*, 1977), as places of everyday life, were exploited, providing new spaces of terror. This phenomenon reflects the changes heterotopias undergo according to the mutations in the society.

As discussed in chapter 2, between the late 1950s and mid-1960s, Italy went through a period of intense industrialisation and modernisation. The *Economic Miracle* (1958–1963) accentuated the financial fracture between North and South. As Ginsborg (1990) notes, “all the sectors of the economy in rapid expansion were situated in the north-west and in some part of the Centre and north-east of the country” (Ginsborg, 2003 [1990]: 212–216). The South, instead, was still characterised by rural areas, which suffered from the economic changes. As a result of this industrialisation, waves of migration from southern to northern and central cities, such as Rome, Milan and Turin, followed (*Ibid.* 219-220).

The Italian society had to face urban problems, due to the mass influx of immigrants, coming from the South in search of work in the factories (Di Scala 1995: 311-312). To respond to the high demand of housing and to help integration of the new working families and immigrants, public and social housing projects were envisioned. The cultural and social effects of this intense transformation influenced the cinematic productions of those years, including the representation of heterotopias. Horror directors, following the mutation of the Italian society and considering the viewers' changing in tastes, constructed altered and manipulated ordinary spaces, in an attempt to communicate feeling of awe and uncanniness to the audience. Hence, heterotopias need to be interpreted in relation to the society to which they are connected, and in this regard, horror cinema functions as a mirror of their mutations.

4.1.2 Juxtaposing heterotopias and constructing heterocronies

Heterotopias function as places that are “capable of juxtaposing in a single real place [...] several sites that are in themselves incompatible” (Foucault, 1967: 241). It follows that heterotopias enclose more layers of meanings and relationships to other places. In line with this principle, horror films juxtapose in a single real place other sites and elements of a different nature, often incompatible among themselves. These function as counter-sites that, though keeping close relations with the surrounding spaces, invert the meaning and perception of the real ones. The effect is a sense of uneasiness and bewilderment for the viewer. For example, in the underwater ballroom sequence (Figure 22) in Dario Argento’s *Inferno* (1980), a hole in the floor leads Rose to a water-filled basement. The submerged space has no reason to exist. It is an irrational counter-site in which “other real sites can be represented, contested and inverted” (Foucault, 1967: 17). The presence of two spatial dimensions in the same house opens a horizon to two different worlds which, though in relation, contradict each other.



Figure 22 – A hole in the basement leads Rose to a flooded ballroom

Argento’s Inferno (1980)

In the same film, another place which introduces a substantial juxtaposition of spaces is the vast library where Sara finds the book of the Three Mothers. This site involves at the same time more principles of heterotopias. Not only does it juxtapose in a single

real place other sites that are incompatible with one another, but it also presents relations with heterochronies.¹⁰⁰



Figures 23, 24 – Sara discovers the evil forces at work in the alchemist's laboratory
Argento's *Inferno* (1980)

While looking for the exit in the library's basement, Sara ends up in an alchemist's laboratory (Figures 23, 24). The library functions as a container of other spaces which simultaneously coexist in the same heterotopia. The laboratory is hidden in the maze structure of the building. It is a space/no space, in Foucauldian terms a counter-site, which, despite keeping close relations with the surrounding sites, inverts the meaning and perception of the real ones (Foucault, 1986: 24). A characterizing feature of heterotopias is related to their connection to slices of time. In other words, they function as spaces where time accumulates indefinitely, involving heterochronies.¹⁰¹ Places such as museums (Argento's *La Sindrome di Stendhal*, 1996), libraries and antique dealers (Argento's *Inferno*, 1980) are representative examples of heterotopias of time. With its dusty volumes and vast assortment of antiques, Kazanian's shop in *Inferno* (1980), for instance, functions as an archive - a space repository of slices of time - where old and new are mixed together.

These places enclose in one site objects that belong to different periods and styles, preserving, therefore, a mix of epochs and stories. As Foucault (1967) suggests,

¹⁰⁰ The term *heterochrony* (from the Greek *hetero* meaning "other" and *chronos* meaning "time") refers to changes, over evolutionary time, in the rate or timing of developmental events. For a better understanding of the concept, see section 4.1.4.

The idea of accumulating everything, of establishing a sort of general archive, the will to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes, the idea of constituting a place of all times that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages, the project of organizing in this way a sort of perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in an immobile place, this whole idea belongs to our modernity (Foucault, 1967: 20).

In the private environment of the house, the ritual of gathering and accumulating, typical of the modern era, finds a perfect conformation in the spatial dimensions of the attic and the cellar. Positioned in the extreme parts of the house, attics and cellars are infrequently visited places, where the discarded, the disused, the unwanted and the surplus, both materially and psychologically, are buried. They function perfectly as heterotopias which, being related to slices of time, involve heterochronies. In other words, they are sites which favour an inevitable accumulation of time in the same space. Invaded by objects that belong to different epochs, they become a kind of memory warehouse, where old and new are mixed up, creating confusion and temporal flattening. Like crypts they preserve the gloomy remains of the past, the buried secrets of family history, which can rise up from the darkness like vengeful ghosts. Opposite to the heterotopias which are linked to the accumulation of time are those spaces that are

linked, on the contrary, to time in its most flowing, transitory, precarious aspect, to time in the mode of the festival. These heterotopias are not oriented toward the eternal; they are rather absolutely temporal [chroniques]. Such, for example, are the fairgrounds, [...] and the vacation villages (Foucault, 1967: 21).

These kinds of heterotopias are recognizable everywhere as part of the culture. However, this work will mainly focus on those spaces which constitute permanent heterotopias of fear, including therefore an accumulation of the past which still persists in the present.

4.1.3 Opening and closing heterotopias

One of the most relevant spatial vehicles adopted by the gothic narrative, in an attempt to generate fear and dread, concerns the uncertainty of boundaries. The dichotomy between internal and external spaces, found in “the contrast between a secure and homely interior and the fearful invasion of alien presences”, has, in fact, been a key defining feature of gothic literature (Vidler, 1994: 3).¹⁰² Horror cinema extends this motif, epitomizing the ambiguous nature of boundaries, which are indeed uncanny in nature. They are heterotopias in the Foucauldian sense of the term. Used to demarcate two opposite worlds, such as inside/outside, private/public, familiar/unfamiliar, their primordial function can be suspended, neutralized and inverted (Foucault, 1967: 17).

To explore this uncertainty, my interest will focus now on the heterotopic boundaries found in the house. The house as a closed space can become permeable and uncertain. Any of its borders, doors, windows and walls can be crossed, allowing alien presences, both physical and immaterial, to invade and occupy the private space. Thus, subverting their primordial function of shelter, borders lose their closeness, causing the protagonists to perceive the house as both familiar and alien. What has been excluded invades the privacy of the house, breaking the boundaries between inside and outside. Doors and windows are the most significant boundaries within the house. Related to both the opening and the closing systems of heterotopias, they demarcate the threshold between two worlds, which can only be crossed through permission or special gesture. Heterotopias, in fact, are characterized by opening and closing systems “that both isolate and make them penetrable” (*Ibid.* 21). This makes them not freely accessible for everybody as public spaces, but dominated by rules which follow specific criteria.

Secret spaces, forbidden rooms and isolated sites are heterotopic spaces which mark the difference and the opposition between visible and invisible, known and unknown. Freda’s *L’orribile segreto del Dottor Hitchcock* (1962) offers a good example of

¹⁰² Authors such as E. T. A. Hoffmann (*Der Sandmann*, 1816), Victor Hugo (*Notre-Dame de Paris*, 1831), Thomas DeQuincey (*The Confessions of an English Opium-eater*, 1821) and Edgar Allan Poe (*The Fall of the House of Usher*, 1839) are typical of those who used the motif of the uncanny, exploiting the dichotomies of internal/external spaces, secure/insecure, homely/unhomely, etc.

this principle (sequence 00:47:22 – 00:50:53). Returning home alone after a visit to the opera, Cynthia explores the house and finds a locked room: a forbidden chamber to which access is denied. Driven by curiosity, the young lady crosses the threshold of this prohibited space, discovering a horrible secret kept hidden in the obscurity of the chamber (Figure 25). The sequence echoes Bluebeard's castle and the fate of the young bride who made the horrible discovery.¹⁰³ Like the bride in Charles Perrault's tale, Cynthia is overcome with the desire to see what the forbidden room holds, and, despite the insistent warnings from her husband and Martha, the housekeeper, she goes inside. The boundaries between outside/inside, unknown/known are crossed and a space, a repository of terrible secrets, revealed: the mysterious room is a perverse heterotopia where Dr. Hitchcock narcotizes his previous wife Margaretha, in order to satisfy his necrophiliac proclivities.



Figure 25 – Cynthia (Barbara Steele) discovers the macabre secret in the forbidden room – Freda's *L'orribile segreto del dottor Hitchcock* (1962)

Horror films are rich in forbidden rooms and secret passageways which hide dimensions parallel to the visible ones. These heterotopias allow a journey into a world that inverts our everyday sense of things, providing uncanny experiences.

Another heterotopic boundary which subverts its functions is the window. With its double property of transparency and reflection, the window is undoubtedly a heterotopic device of fear. The transparency of its glass is visually permeable. Losing

¹⁰³ *Bluebeard* is one of eight tales by Charles Perrault, first published by Barbin in Paris in January 1697 in *Histoires ou Contes du temps passé*. Once again reminiscences of folktales are evident, confirming horror cinema as a second-order circulation of symbols.

its original function of a safe point of view, the window becomes a point of invasion and inversion of the look. Watching from outside the window, the killer invades the privacy of the sacred place, and, in doing so, he totally changes the nature of the house. This is what happens in a peculiar sequence (00:53:32 – 00:56:04) in Bava's *Operazione paura* (1966). Looking through the window, Melissa Graps (Figure 26) transforms the house into a cage. Her gaze subverts the safe nature of the domestic space. Thus, no longer comfortable and secure, the house becomes a menacing trap from which it is impossible to escape. Melissa's apparition represents an omen of death. The point-of-view shot allows the viewers to identify with the young victim, Nadine, who, terrified by the view of the ghost, commits suicide. The intensity of the frame is emphasized by the presence of a black bar (the structure of the window), which visually divides Melissa's face.



Figure 26 – Looking through the window, Melissa Graps subverts the safe nature of the house – Bava's *Operazione paura* (1966)

Another deceptive quality of the window is its reflective property. Reflecting images, in fact, the glass window functions as a mirror, assuming the qualities of heterotopias as delineated by Foucault. As we put it before, the mirror is a peculiar object/space which only functions in relation to what it reflects. Altering the common sense of things, its function is therefore an uncanny one. In *Inferno* (1980), by pulling the lamp near to the window, Pat Hingle doesn't see the dark outside, but instead enhances the view of herself (sequence 00:09:34 – 00:11:37). The reflection on the glass prevents the

girl from viewing what is beyond the window and, consequently, from avoiding possible attacks from outside (Figure 27).



Figure 27 – Pat Hingle is pulled out of a window by a mysterious figure
Suspiria (1977)

Thus, normally used by the inhabitants of a building to look outside, the window, with its double qualities of transparency and permeability, suspends, neutralizes and inverts its primordial functions of safety and protection, providing a source of uncanny experiences.

In his masterpiece *The Poetics of Space* (1958), the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard demonstrates how the sites in which we live are neither homogeneous nor empty. On the contrary, we live in heterogeneous spaces imbued with quantities. As Foucault notes, “we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not super-imposable on one another” (Foucault, 1986: 23). It follows that our placement within a given physical space determines our position within a set of relations which enable us to identify the space as a specific social site. According to this principle, heterotopias are “active and interactive contexts within which social relations and social structures are produced and transformed” (Moore, 1966: x). They are not simple backdrops; on the contrary, they play an outstanding and active role in localized social practices.

Spaces can only be interpreted on the basis of the relations between objects, persons, environments and actions. These relations are not static. Conversely, they are

extremely dynamic and can be easily affected by changes over time. The transformation of spaces does not depend on the mutation of their components. Rather, it derives from the change in relations between all the elements present in the heterotopias. Consequently, the interplay between these agents reshapes the relations of this specific heterotopia. The change derived from this interaction causes further changes, which leads to an extension of spaces. To focus on this aspect of the heterotopia I will refer to a particular shot in *Suspiria* (1977). Suzy is alone in Madame Blanc's office. Looking around in the oddity of the room, she notices a blue iris, which reminds her of Pat's words about the secret of the coven. The girl turns the iris and a door opens. The interplay between Suzy and the flower on the wall totally changes the nature of that peculiar space. All the relations connected to that heterotopia are subverted, neutralized and reshaped. Madame Blanc's office reveals a new dimension, a new world to be discovered.

4.2 Heterotopias of fear

In order to achieve suspense and a sense of unease in the viewer's mind, horror directors place a good deal of emphasis on atmospheres, settings and spaces in general. By manipulating mise-en-scène and exposure, they propose numerous spatial phobias: claustrophobia (fear of enclosed spaces – Freda's *L'orribile segreto del Dr Hitchcock*, 1962), agoraphobia (fear of open spaces – Argento's *Suspiria*, 1977), cenophobia (fear of empty spaces), domatophobia (fear of houses and surrounding environments – Lenzi's *La casa delle anime erranti*, 1989) and lygophobia (fear of dark and murky places – L. Bava's *La casa con la scala nel buio*, 1983).¹⁰⁴

The perception of ordinary spaces changes according to light, which, natural or artificial, plays an important role in directors' evocation of eerie and oppressive feelings. Low-key lighting and the alternation of high- and low-angle shots, for

¹⁰⁴ For a thorough analysis of spatial phobias, see Ronald Manual Doctor, Ada P. Kahn and Christine A. Adamec (2008: 18, 37, 122, 137, 169, 456).

instance, strengthen the impression of looming spaces. With regard to this, underground settings, such as sewers (Argento's *Il fantasma dell'opera*, 1998), catacombs (Avallone's *Spettri*, 1987), tunnels (Giagni's *Il nido del ragno*, 1988) and underpasses (Mastrocinque's *La cripta e l'incubo*, 1963), have offered several shapes of representation, developing different levels of claustrophobic sensations.¹⁰⁵ Because of their subterranean position and lack of visibility, they are perceived as mysterious and menacing. Narrow, dark and grimy, they reflect the canonical schemes of spatial fear, triggering a fear of the unfamiliar and the unknown, which leads the viewer's imagination to fill in the unseen and the unclear.

By extending their physical meanings, undergrounds echo the presence of horrific remains in terms of the abject and pollution. Sewers, for instance, "carry in their water the atavistic and organic elements of the city – the waste, its filth, its repressions, its secrets" (Pike, 2009: 324). Hence, embodying hidden parts of the city, they represent concealed counter-sites that manifest the *urban repressed*. In other words, as a form of the uncanny, they represent something that ought to have remained secret and hidden but that has come to light, consequently evoking a sense of uncanniness (Freud, 2003 [1919]: 51).

Perturbing feelings and claustrophobia also originate from the phenomenon of repetition: the eternal return of a situation, a number, but above all of a space. Horror cinema proposes this phenomenon as a source of bewilderment and disorientation. The rambling return to the same place is in fact a powerful device able to unsettle and confuse the protagonists and by extension the viewers (Manti, 2003: 44). This phenomenon occurs in both enclosed and open spaces. In the first case the labyrinth is the best spatial figure to represent the experience of cyclic repetition (*Ibid.* 45).¹⁰⁶ With

¹⁰⁵ Subterranean spaces often allegorize a step into the underworld: a metaphorical descent into hell. Because of their darkness they are associated with ominous and threatening spaces which trap the individual, with no way out.

¹⁰⁶ The spatial representation of the labyrinth derives from Greek mythology. Built between 1700 and 1400 BC, Knossos's palace was the legendary home of King Minos of Crete. The elaborate labyrinthian structure was designed by Dedalus to hold the Minotaur, a creature that was half man and half bull. The Minotaur inhabited the maze and was eventually killed by the Athenian king Theseus. According to the mythology, Theseus, after defeating the monster, was able to find his way out of the labyrinth only with the aid of Minos's daughter Ariadne, who gave him a spindle of thread to mark his path through the maze.

its endless corridors and infinite hallways, it offers the idea of being trapped in the same place with no way out. The protagonist is therefore invaded by a sense of confusion and loss. This happens for instance in a sequence in Mario Bava's *Operazione paura* (1966), where Dr Eswai is involved in a chase through a series of repeating rooms. In its cyclic repetition, the shot starts and then ends up back in the same room. All of this confuses the spectator, who will only realize at the end that Dr Eswai is actually pursuing himself.

The feeling of loss and bewilderment also arises in open spaces. As Pat Hingle tries to escape the forest in *Suspiria* (1977), she seems to come across the same place over and over again. A sense of spatial fear pervades the narration. Her run seems endless and the girl feels lost in this nightmarish fleeing. The persistent repetition of spaces evokes the feeling of being trapped in a space-temporal situation that is always the same. The feeling is extended until a turning point in the narration, when the protagonist acknowledges her trap and finds a way out. Although Pat is in an open space, the forest environment seems claustrophobic because of the lack of visibility. The nocturnal view, the narrowness of the trees and the awareness of something menacing approaching transform the space into a suffocating, hostile presence.



Figure 28 – Pat Hingle escaping in the wood – Argento's *Suspiria* (1977)

The eerie atmosphere is further reinforced by non-diegetic sounds, whispers, sighs and long-angle shots, which depict Pat as tiny in relation to the overall surroundings. All of this emphasizes the girl's vulnerability and conveys a sense of mystery and uneasiness.

Opposite to claustrophobia, which mainly derives from closed spaces, is agoraphobia, which develops in wide-open spaces. In their immensity, city squares,

large fields, airports and shopping malls give a sense of loss. My interest will focus now on city squares. In order to develop my argument, I will analyse a sequence (00:49:43 – 00:53:29) from Dario Argento's *Suspiria* (1977). A sense of dread and helplessness reaches a climax in the middle of an empty square where Daniel, the blind pianist of the Tanz Akademie, dies, attacked by his own guide dog (Figure 29). The scene is extremely effective in its intelligent use of the camera and particular angles, which allow the viewer to be completely involved in the dramatic suspense. Long shots and close-ups alternate, showing both square and protagonist from different points of view.



Figure 29 – the Propyläen and the Glyptothekbuildings in the Königsplatz.
Daniel feels lost in the immensity of the square – *Suspiria* (1977)

Neo-classic white buildings adorned by Corinthian columns are the only monuments present in the plaza.¹⁰⁷ This confers to the space a lack of margins which enhances the sense of loss and agoraphobia.¹⁰⁸ In a supernatural animation, the void and the apparently static atmosphere are broken. Occult signs are hidden in the square. Something indefinite like a shadow appears and the marble eagles which adorn the

¹⁰⁷ These ornaments are more suggestive of Munich (Odeonsplatz) than of Freiburg. To read more about this aspect, please see Schulte-Sasse (2002).

¹⁰⁸ Along with the setting comes a subliminal political message: the public square is an allusion to Nazism. One could argue that the film offers an implicit denunciation of the abuses and cruelties of the Nazi era. During the Third Reich (1933–45), the Königsplatz, also known as the “Capital City of the Movement”, represented the German Acropolis of the National Socialists (Rosenfeld, 2000: 204). The allusion to Nazism is further extended to Daniel's guide dog. German Shepherd dogs were used by the SS to control prisoners of war in the concentration camps (Schulte-Sasse, 2002). In regard to this, Adrian Horrocks (2001) extends his interpretation of the film's political subtext: “It does not seem too much to read this scene as a comment on fascism, perhaps even so much as to say the blind man is a representation of Italy, his dog the beguiled Mussolini, and the bird German fascism.” To read more about this aspect, please see Horrocks (2001: 47).

roofs of the buildings seem to come to life in an inexplicable way. Non-diegetic sounds and Goblin's soundtrack guide the viewers, anticipating the danger before it is seen in the images. In other words, it is the act of hearing that warns the spectator about the upcoming menace. The dog feels something and starts barking. Daniel cannot see and neither can we. It starts our identification with the pianist. His claustrophobic blindness, which is opposed to the agoraphobic space, mirrors his sense of helplessness and horrified awareness of being trapped in some fatal destiny.¹⁰⁹ Like a boat in an ocean, he remains powerless in the vastness of the square. The alternate close-ups of his face and the extreme panning shots of the Königsplatz heighten the suspense and reduce the size of the protagonist in the immensity of the void¹¹⁰.

The man senses a presence. He feels surrounded by something indefinite: the sound of steps, the flapping of wings, his dog barking. Disoriented and lost in the square, he turns his head around, trying to understand where the danger is coming from; but it is impossible to see: evil is everywhere. Long shots on the buildings suggest that peril might come from above, but unexpectedly it arrives from below: the guide dog attacks Daniel, shocking both protagonist and viewers. If magic (evil) is everywhere, as Professor Milius says (*Suspiria*, 1977), this sequence shows how the square represents the main theatre where it puts on its cruel performance. The void and sense of agoraphobia evoked make it a dreadful heterotopic space of fear.

¹⁰⁹ A sense of claustrophobia can derive from other features not necessarily related to enclosed spaces. Blindness is an example.

¹¹⁰ For Foucault the boat is one of the most representative examples of heterotopias. Being a floating space, it is a place without place, "a society that closes up around itself but which is, at the same time, changeable in relation to the surrounding" (Asdam, 1996).

4.3 **Abjects, stigmas and superstitions**

The house, like man, can become a skeleton. A superstition is enough to kill it. Then it is terrible.¹¹¹

V. Hugo, *Les Travailleurs*

Describing the uncanniness of spaces, Vidler (1994) argues that

The uncanny is not a property of the space itself nor can it be provoked by any particular spatial confirmation: it is, in its aesthetic dimension, a representation of a mental state of projection that precisely elides the boundaries of the real and the unreal in order to provoke a disturbing ambiguity, a slippage between waking and dreaming (Vidler, 1994: 11).

In this sense, meanings and attributes of spaces and buildings are not intrinsic, but are evoked through practices and mental projection (Moore, 1996: 8). This implies that the uncanny spaces are the consequence of negative connotations that people confer to these spaces. They are the result of specific social acts, or, to put it better, of interaction ritual chains (Collins, 2004).¹¹² Individuals, interacting with one another, invest spaces with qualities and meanings which, whether positive or negative, affect the collective feelings. These attributes are often at the base of superstitions and stigmas. Goffman (1963) made significant contributions to the field of sociology of stigma. According to his definition, a stigma is a “deeply discrediting” attribute in the context of a set of relationships (Goffman, 1963: 3). Certain spaces – both internal and external ones – are stigmatized because of the negative associations they retain or, in other words, the negative connotations social actors have assigned to them (Becker, 1986). Hence, heterotopias such as cemeteries, prisons, mental hospitals and asylums are discriminated against by people because they are related to issues of death, sickness

¹¹¹ Victor Hugo’s *Les Travailleurs*, quoted in Vidler (1994: 20).

¹¹² For a further understanding of the concept of interaction ritual chains, please see chapter 1.

and misfortune. The same occurs with houses, which, when considered as haunted, are discriminated against and stigmatized.

A fundamental concept in the process of stigmatization is abjection. The notion of the abject refers to what “disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules, the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (Kristeva 1982: 4). The term is often used to define the state of marginalized groups, such as prostitutes, poor people, disabled people and so on, but, by extension, it can also be used to refer to heterotopias. Thus, heterotopias of abjection are all those counter-sites that abjected things or beings inhabit. Ruins, abandoned houses and decrepit spaces in general can be included in this category. These spaces distance people physically and emotionally, because of the sense of uncanniness and otherness they emanate.¹¹³ If “it is difficult to speak of an architectural uncanny, in the same terms as a literary or psychological uncanny”, it is also true that

in each moment of the history of the representation of the uncanny, and at certain moments in its psychological analysis, the buildings and spaces that have acted as the sites for uncanny experiences have been invested with recognizable characteristics [...] These almost typical and eventually commonplace qualities [...] have been seen as emblematic of the uncanny as the cultural signs of estrangement for particular periods. [...] The uncanny has, not unnaturally, found its metaphorical home [...] in the house, haunted or not, that pretends to afford the utmost security while opening itself to the secret intrusion of terror (Vidler, 1994: 11).

Behind its apparent familiarity and its primordial function of shelter, the house provides an especially favoured site for uncanny disturbances and alien invasions (*Ibid.* 17). Myths, legends, literature and above all cinema, aware of this double nature, have exploited this archetype of our daily life, proposing new heterotopic spaces of fear. As

¹¹³ By contrast, spaces of abjection become secure for those people unaffected by the abject, such as smugglers, renegades, exiles and fugitives. These categories of people, in fact, already marginalized and stigmatized because of their diversity, would feel at home in such a dead house.

a result of this, the house is no longer a familiar space but has been undermined, passing from *heimlich* to *unheimlich*, from friendly to uncanny.

Stories about haunted houses have appeared throughout history. Roman authors such as Plautus,¹¹⁴ Pliny the Younger¹¹⁵ (c. 50 AD) and Lucian, for instance, dedicated many of their writings to this topic. The same occurred in the Islamic Golden Age, as attested by titles such as *Ali the Cairene and the Haunted House in Baghdad* and *One Thousand and One Nights*.¹¹⁶ However, haunted houses became extremely popular in the eighteenth century due to gothic literature. Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), regarded as the first gothic novel, popularized medieval Gothic architecture, epitomizing the castle as the main residence of supernatural forces.¹¹⁷ Hence, manors, castles and ruins entered the collective imagination, being stereotyped according to the gothic canon. Charged by strong emotional energy, they became effective for the traditions that followed, assuming different connotations over time.

Horror directors, aware of the resonance these places can have with the audience, exploit them in a variety of ways, focusing on the visual aspect. The strong impact these places have on the viewer's mind can be explained through Kevin Lynch's concept of imageability. According to Lynch (1960), imageability is "the quality in a physical object or space that gives it a high probability of evoking a strong image in any given observer. It is the shape, color, or arrangement which facilitates the making of vividly identified, powerfully structured, highly useful mental images of the environment" (Lynch, 1960: 9). Thus, decadent and deteriorated spaces can be registered in the mind with more intensity than other sites because of the grasping and impressive visual qualities they retain. These qualities affect the viewer's emotional

¹¹⁴ *Mostellaria*, or *The Haunted House*, by T. Maccius Plautus, translated by Henry Thomas Riley. London. G. Bell and Sons, 1912.

¹¹⁵ Pliny the Younger (109–14). "LXXXIII. To Sura". In Charles W. Eliot. *Letters, by Pliny the Younger*. Translated by William Melmoth; revised by F. C. T. Bosanquet, The Harvard Classics.

¹¹⁶ *One Thousand and One Nights* is a collection of Middle Eastern and South Asian stories and folk tales.

¹¹⁷ Gothic referred to architecture long before literature. The term was associated with a medieval style that was popular across Europe between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries. Pointed arches, high vaults, narrow spires and stained-glass windows were the main characteristics of this style, which typically emphasized verticality. Gothic was adopted to describe a certain type of novel which used this peculiar architecture in its settings. Poe's *The House of Usher* (1839) and Hawthorne's *The House of Seven Gables* (1851) represent significant examples of narrations which portray the architectural uncanny in literature.

state, being internalized and preserved in the memory. At the base of Lynch's concept of imageability is "a two-way process between observer and observed" (Lynch, 1960: 11). What is missing from this definition is a third agent. The relation between physical structure and individual perception is mediated by a third fundamental factor, which involves institutionalized images and narratives (Collins, 2002: 35). Hence, the process of imageability cannot be reduced to a simple bipolar interaction. It does not involve only two agents, observer and observed, but engages more components, which act at different levels, both conscious and unconscious.

Internal archives, as mentioned in chapter 1, represent remarkable sources to be taken into consideration. Literature, religion, mythological tradition and culture in general have imbued our minds with images and ideas, which, once rooted in the memory, deeply influence the process of imageability. The same happens with psychic phantoms, which, operating at an unconscious level, interact in our mind in a silent way.¹¹⁸ So, by extending Lynch's concept of imageability, I argue that the image evoked in the observer's mind derives from an interaction between all these elements, and not by a two-way process.

Imbued with strong emotional energy, stigmatized places become depositories of negative feelings, derived from the social denial of differences. In other words, spaces considered as *others* are marginalized because of their diversities. Individuals from some cultures would not consider the possibility of living in the vicinity of stigmatized places, believing that negative energies live around them.¹¹⁹ Fulci's *Quella villa accanto al cimitero* (1981) is a noteworthy case in this regard. The house, as the title suggests, is located by a cemetery. It is supposed to be haunted because of the many events that have happened inside since it was abandoned.¹²⁰ Thus, the building preserves uncomfortable echoes of a previous life. Tragic and mysterious events that occurred in the house's past are trapped within the building itself and extend through

¹¹⁸ For a better understanding of the concept of psychic phantoms, see chapter 3.

¹¹⁹ According to the ancient system of feng shui (風水), developed over 3,000 years ago in China, spaces are imbued with life energy. The practice of this spatial philosophy is believed to enhance the energies of any given space, to ensure health and good fortune for people inhabiting it. For further information, see Bruun (2008).

¹²⁰ Norman's ex-colleague, Dr Peterson, inexplicably committed suicide after the violent death of his mistress.

time. According to many cultural and religious views, the spirits of people who have died do not pass over. Their essence continues to exist after death and, in the form of a spirit or ghost, it can appear once again in the house, a harbinger of pain and death (Fulci's *La dolce casa degli orrori*, 1989).¹²¹ Buildings hold, therefore, the secrets and memories of past occurrences, which are not necessarily connected in a direct way to the presence or absence of their owners. This is what occurs to Freudstein's house. In order to restore the image of the house, the real-estate agent tries to rent it, renaming it *Oak Mansion*.

What? That they want to leave the Freudstein property.
Oak Mansion, Harold. How many times do I have to tell you
Harold that the house is now called *Oak Mansion*!
Yeah, give the bad product a new label. Well, call it what you will,
but it has always been Freudstein's house.

Fulci's *Quella villa accanto al cimitero* (1981)

Renaming the house with "a new label" is a way to change the image of the building. However, although the locals adopt a new name to refer to it, "Oak Mansion" will always be known as "the Freudstein House", maintaining therefore its aura of mystery and negative connotations. The building, in fact, retains connections to its past that are impossible to erase. Thus, the name Freudstein becomes the symbol of the stigmatization which marks the house and its destiny.

The architecture is exploited to accentuate the sense of fear and mystery (Figure 30). Skilful camera movements and the melancholic music by Walter Rizzati reinforce the creepy atmosphere around the building. The smell of death inside the house seems tangible, emphasized by the presence of objects which recall a sense of death and decay. An indoor tombstone, bearing the name Jacob Tess Freudstein, is located under the wooden floor of the living room and covered by a huge rug. The discovery of the

¹²¹ Fulci's *La dolce casa degli orrori* (1989) aka "The Sweet House of Horrors" is the first part of a cycle of four films entitled *Le case maledette* (1989) aka "Doomed Houses". Other titles from the TV series are *La casa del sortilegio* (1989) aka "The House of Witchcraft" and *La casa delle anime erranti* (1989) aka "The House of Lost Souls", both directed by Umberto Lenzi, and Fulci's *La casa nel tempo* aka "The House of Clocks". Produced by Reteitalia, none of these films were ever transmitted on television because of their gory content.

tomb strongly affects Lucy, who, confused and terrified, starts to hear noises and cries emanating from all over the house.



Figure 30 – “It’s a typical example of the local architecture. There are probably hundreds of houses like it in the area.”¹²²
Freudstein House – *Quella villa accanto al cimitero* (1981)

The visual emphasis on the physical structure of the house evokes a process of imageability, which is indeed influenced by other agents, already cemented in the viewer’s memory. The building recalls structures typical of gothic literature and is located in a stigmatized place. All of these elements affect the viewer’s response, enhancing feelings of disquiet and unease.

Therefore, based on what has been argued so far, it is clear that the perception individuals have of abject and stigmatized places affects their attitude and reactions to them. This can lead to the development of beliefs that are difficult to erase. Spaces are often haunted by virtue of the superstitions of local inhabitants (Vidler, 1994: 19). This is what happens, for instance, in Karmingen, the rustic Transylvanian village which is the backdrop of Mario Bava’s *Operazione paura* (1966). Plagued by a series of mysterious deaths, the village is believed to be haunted by the ghost of a seven-year-old girl who resides in Villa Graps. In the grip of fear, the local population lives in a total conspiracy of silence, even avoiding saying the name Graps, as if it was the vocative of Satan. With their preconceptions and rumours, villagers stigmatize both the house and the surrounding environment, creating an aura of mystery and terror. Like a

¹²² The sinister-looking old house in New England is exactly the same as the photograph in the Boyle family’s apartment in New York.

corpse, which in Kristeva's (1982) terms is the representation of the utmost in abjection, Villa Graps, preserved in its sickness and misfortune, is the abject which infects the village's history. Like the corpse, it is "death infecting life [...] Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us" (Kristeva, 1982: 3–4). Although the haunting is impossible to demonstrate from an ontological point of view, this sequence demonstrates how villagers, driven by their ignorance and superstitions, made the house into a haunted one. When this happens, architectures seem to assume their own power, often being personified as evil entities able to emit their own will and emotions. We are faced in this case with a process of anthropomorphism of spaces, which will be further explored in the following pages.

4.4 The evil residences

This building has become my body.
[...] Its bricks my cells, its
passageways my veins, its heart my
very heart.

Varelli's words in Argento's *Inferno*
(1980) McDonagh, 1991: 146

In many horror films environments and buildings are endowed with bodily characteristics, thereby assuming anthropomorphic features. Thus, like humans, they incorporate physical and psychological connotations. Because of its architectural conformation, the house has offered the most thriving model of a space with lifelike characteristics. Corruption, crime, evilness and moral depravation are materialized in contorted shapes. Dario Argento's trilogy *The Three Mothers* offers an example of this

phenomenon.¹²³ Specifically designed for three witches, the three residences, protagonists of the trilogy, function as architectural representations of the witches' perversity and immorality. In order to explore this process of anthropomorphism, the following pages will analyse the anatomy of horror in *Suspiria* (1977) and *Inferno* (1980).

I, Varelli, an architect living in London, met the Three Mothers and designed and built for them three dwelling places. I failed to discover until too late that from these three locations the Three Mothers rule the world with sorrow, tears, and darkness ... And I built their horrible houses, the repositories of all their filthy secrets (Varelli's words, in *Inferno*, 1980).

With these words Varelli introduces himself and the evil residences he was commissioned to design and construct for the three witches. His manuscript, entitled *The Three Mothers*, explains how the world is ruled by a trio of evil sisters: *Mater Suspiriorum*, the Mother of Sighs; *Mater Lacrimarum*, the Mother of Tears; and *Mater Tenebrarum*, the Mother of Darkness. The witches reside separately in huge buildings located in three different cities: *Mater Suspiriorum* lives in Freiburg, Germany; *Mater Lacrimarum* lives in Rome; and the third mother, *Mater Tenebrarum*, lives in New York City. Varelli's manuscript offers important clues that help to identify the location of the three keys able to reveal the residences' mysteries.¹²⁴ As the book states,

the land upon which the three houses have been constructed will eventually become deathly and plague-ridden, so much so that the area all around will reek horribly (*Inferno*, 1980).

This is the first key to the mothers' secret.

The second key to the poisonous secret of the three sisters is hidden in the cellar under their houses. There you can find both

¹²³ The idea for the *Three Mothers* trilogy derived from "Levana and Our Ladies of Sorrow", a section of Thomas DeQuincey's book *Suspiria de Profundis* (1845). The trilogy includes *Suspiria* (1977), *Inferno* (1980) and *La terza madre* (2007).

¹²⁴ Both the architect-chemist and the book are modelled on the alchemist-occultist writer Fulcanelli and *Le Mystère des Cathédrales* (1925), a manuscript that detailed the hidden alchemical meanings of Gothic architecture in cathedrals.

the picture and the name of the sister living in that house. This is the location of the second key. The third key can be found under the soles of your shoes; there is the third key (Varelli's words in *Inferno*, 1980).

From their houses, the witches interfere with human destiny, spreading suffering and pain across the globe. They are the personification of Death on earth and their evilness is materialized in the shape of their residences.

4.4.1 The residence of sighs (*Suspiria*, 1977)

Magic is ever present. Magic is everywhere, and all over the world, it's a recognized fact, always.

Dr Milius in *Suspiria* (1977)

The first evil residence is located in Freiburg (Germany), where *Mater Suspiriorum*, Helena Markos, founded the Tanz Akademie in 1895. The building became the base for a school for ballet and occult science.¹²⁵ When the locals realized, however, that the *Black Queen* was a witch, to avoid their suspicion and to operate in total freedom, Helena faked her own death in a fire in 1905.¹²⁶ From that point, control of the academy, which appeared to be simply a ballet school, was supposed to be passed to Markos' best pupils, but actually still remained under the witch's dominance.

¹²⁵ Daria Nicolodi made an important contribution to the shaping of the film's plot and setting. During the shooting of *Profondo rosso* (1975), Nicolodi told Argento about her grandmother's experiences in a music academy: "When my grandmother was 15, she went to study in an academy to improve her piano playing and discovered instead that black magic was being taught there, so she ran away." This revelation offered a pivotal point of inspiration in the production of the film.

¹²⁶ *Mater Suspiriorum* was also known as the Black Queen. The association of names with colours is worth noting: Black Queen (*Mater Suspiriorum*), Miss Tanner (dance instructor), Madame Blanc (administrator).

The uncanny atmosphere in *Suspiria* assumes a spatial dimension, being materialized in surreal internal and external settings. Despite being a historical building from 1516 – there are numerous close-ups on a plaque which states that “humanist philosopher Erasmus von Rotterdam lived here from 1529” – the Tanz Akademie looks unreal. The unreality and illogicality of spaces mainly derives from the combination of supersaturated colours and unnatural lighting schemes (Figure 31). “More than any other film, *Suspiria* popularized the non-diegetic colored lighting style” (Sipos, 2010: 172).



Figure 31 – The exterior façade of “Zum Walfisch”, the famous building in Freiburg that served as *Mater Suspiriorum*’s home – *Suspiria* (1977)

The façade of the ballet school, in vivid red, suggests that there is something ominous hidden behind the main door (Figure 31). Red is the colour of blood, and it is often associated with sinister symbolism (O’Connell, 2007: 118).¹²⁷ Hence, danger, anger, wickedness, sin and death find an anthropomorphic shape in the chromatic scales of the residence. Assuming a “tactile optical function”, colours are powerful tools that can imbue a setting with sinister and unsteady tones.¹²⁸ They assault the sensorium,

¹²⁷ Red is a persistent colour in the whole Argentinian tradition. In a sequence at the beginning of *Suspiria* the reflection of red lights makes the rain seem like blood. This is a perfect example of what Powell defines as “haptic” (Powell, 2005: 212).

¹²⁸ Argento and director of photography Luciano Tovoli tried to reproduce the colours of Walt Disney’s *Snow White* (McDonagh, 1991: 142). To intensify the contrast of tones, they used the same procedures adopted “in the fifties with Technicolor, with very vivid colors; it’s a matter of using three film matrixes

providing “a maddening tone of ambiguity” which leads the viewer towards a sequence of new and uncertain spaces (Moir, 1996: 18). According to how they are combined, they create fullness and emptiness of spaces. The saturated primary colours define the interior spaces, becoming physical dividers of the academy: the velvet walls of the communal areas of the ballet academy are blue, the study room is red, while yellow is the colour of the practice room where Suzy faints. Conflicting styles such as gothic, Art Nouveau, art deco, baroque and modern merge together in the same film. Their combination provides physical evidence of the Three Mothers: their visceral power and “hypertensive world of witchcraft and occultism” (McDonagh, 1991: 144).

The interiors are extremely ornamental. Massive mirrors, carvings and theatrical tapestries adorn each corner of the school, giving it an occult and surreal atmosphere. Argento’s strategy is to attract the viewer’s attention through a hyper-sensorial aesthetic. Framing, camera movements and editing emphasize a narration based on showing rather than telling. This is a process which André Gaudreault calls *monstrating* (Gaudreault, 2009). Some shots even recall the idea of a church. Slow pans highlight the visual and mystical atmosphere of the environment. It seems as if the director wants to associate the academy with a sacral space (Lenzi, 2007: 50). The ballet school assumes, therefore, the role of a heterotopic temple, where the witches act as priestesses, intent on performing their vicious rituals.

The visual qualities of the film, such as scales and compositions, draw inspiration from German Expressionism. In order to achieve a surreal effect, Argento adopts expressionist lighting, which adds nightmarish tones to the sets.¹²⁹ Through specific use of cameras and close-ups and the careful employment of angle lenses the shapes are distorted, becoming sharp, irregular, confusing and non-rectilinear. The sense of oddity and uncanniness is heightened by the presence of the abject in the

for the three base colors: red, green, and blue, and then superimposing them while each time stressing the color you want to have stand out” (*Ibid.* 144).

¹²⁹ Argento was particularly inspired by German Expressionism. His sensibility for the movement is evident in an artistic quotation which refers to Viennese Expressionist Oskar Kokoschka (1886-1980). As a homage to a style that influenced the director more than any other, a poster for Kokoschka’s exhibition appears in the streets of Freiburg, illuminated by the taxi that brings Suzy to the Tanz Akademie.

school. An entire ceiling crawling with maggots creates panic among the students (Figure 32).

Anomalous forms of life invade the dormitories. Their repulsive tactile qualities are emphasised by the sensitive skin exposed to them as the dancers undress. A bat flutters down onto Suzy and clings tight, biting her. Hundreds of maggots appear, wriggling and crawling over the floor, and the girls are compelled to tread on them, squashing them either with their shoes or with naked feet. The maggots land in the girls' hair and crawl on their skin as they struggle to brush them off. The use of close up intensifies the viewers' virtual sensation of slime, squirming larvae and viscous texture (Powell, 2005: 143).

"The abject is that which dissolves the I, disrupts identity, systems and order" (Kristeva, 1982: 4). Thus, being a metaphorical representation of the witches' evilness, the presence of the abject in their residence reflects the witches' dissolution and loss of integrity.¹³⁰ The old and dusty attic, transformed into storage for food, is indeed a mysterious and filthy place. Infested, it emanates a sense of disgust and repulsion in terms of death and decay. It confirms the existence of a decadent world that is *other* and parallel to the visible one. Beyond the doors, corridors and walls, in fact, there is something else that waits to be revealed.



Figure 32 – Maggots in the attic of the Tanz Akademie – *Suspiria* (1977)

¹³⁰ *Mater Suspiriorum* is the oldest of the Three Mothers. Her wrinkled and decrepit body symbolizes the abject in terms of decay and death. According to Jessica Harper, "the witch was a ninety-year-old ex-hooker Dario had found on the streets of Rome" (Jones, 2004: 91). One could argue that the personal life of the uncredited actress represents the character's loss of moral integrity.

The existence of evil forces is perceptible everywhere. Even in the sequence in the swimming pool (00:55:07 – 00:57:20), where Suzy and Sarah chat about the mysterious occurrences in the academy, the girls do not seem totally alone (Figure 33).¹³¹ The hovering camera and the concentric radiation of the water suggest they are being spied on from a distance. The ripples in the water recall the presence of other waves pervaded by occult energies (Thrower, 2001: 142). The viewer cannot hear or physically see these forces, but he can perceive that they are undeniably there. The oppressive feeling is reinforced by an unidentified point-of-view shot, which, drifting menacingly on the girls, suggests a wicked presence looming over them.



Figure 33 – The swimming-pool sequence – *Suspiria* (1977)

Thus, the academy functions as a space dominated by a panopticon view: a one-way observation which overshadows everything.¹³² While the girls' gaze wanders in the wideness of the pool, the witches' one follows their movements as they swim and chat together. "The lack of reciprocity between the viewer and the viewed in the gaze defines the latter in isolation from its context" (Tiwari, 2010: 53). Hence, the girls are positioned in a state of weakness and limitation. They are victims trapped in the panopticon space of power.

The greater part of the action in *Suspiria* develops in enclosed spaces. Discouraged by the strict roles of the school, Suzy, the heroine of the film, rarely

¹³¹ The aerial view in the swimming-pool sequence (Figure 33) recalls Jacques Tourneur's *Cat People* (1942).

¹³² The panopticon is an architectural device of control (prison) designed by the English philosopher and social theorist Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) in the late eighteenth century. For a further understanding of the concept of *panopticism*, see Foucault's *Discipline and Punishment* (1975) and *The Eye of Power* (1980).

crosses the boundaries between the inside and the outside of the academy. The opening and closing systems of the residence are severely dictated. Thus, her journey mainly takes place in the enclosed areas of the Tanz Akademie. The intense internalization of actions suggests a sense of uneasiness and claustrophobia inside the protagonist's mind. This feeling will arrive at a climax in her last journey in the labyrinthine spaces of the house. Following the count of the footsteps she hears during the night, Suzy ends up in Madame Blanc's empty office. The room is circular. It is decorated with allegorical wallpaper which depicts a surreal city (Figure 34). Steps, houses, swirls and flowers suggest an illogical space, which is vaguely reminiscent of Maurits Cornelis Escher's paintings.¹³³ A quotation from the visionary artist seems to suggest the existence of parallel worlds which lie beneath the surface of immediate appearances: "Our consciousness is very limited, we know only a minuscule part of the world in which we live," Escher remarked in 1952. In *Suspiria* appearance is nothing more than a visual trap. Argento's stratagem, in fact, consists of hiding things in plain sight. The flowers on the wall, for instance, are all visible, but only the blue iris is the key that can solve the mystery.



Figure 34 – Madame Blanc's room decorated with floral designs – *Suspiria* (1977)

Glancing into a mirror, the vision of three irises painted on the wall reminds Suzy of the words Pat said the night she was killed: "The secret! I saw behind the door! Three

¹³³ Maurits Cornelis Escher's art is often quoted during the film. His famous print *Sky and Water* (1938), where birds turn into fish, for instance, is evoked in the wallpaper which adorns the bathroom in the house of Pat's friend. The artist is also quoted by name during the dialogue: Escher Strasse is the address that Suzy gives to the taxi driver, being the street on which the Tanz Akademie is located.

irises! Turn the blue one!” Recalling this clue, Suzy opens the door and takes her journey into the secret passages of the building.¹³⁴ Suzy’s movements develop from the exterior rooms inward, almost to denote the epicentre of the building as the core of evilness. Darkened corridors and multiple hidden passages lead the girl into a room decorated with blue velvet curtains. Other hallways and paths follow, adorned by occult symbols in gold leaf (Figure 35). The residence turns into “a symbolic space represented through intrauterine symbols” (Creed, 1993: 55).



Figure 35 – The wall adorned with gold leaves and Latin inscriptions – *Suspiria* (1977)

In a dreamlike state, Suzy keeps wandering in the obscurity of the residence and finally finds out the secret: Madame Blanc and Miss Tanner are actually witches in the service of Helena Markos (Figure 36). Crossing the boundaries between the known and unknown, the public and private, of the academy, Suzy reaches “the place of beginnings, the womb” of evilness: a ritual chamber where the witches, gathered together, rule the world (Creed, 2005: 18). This secret space, reserved for the mysterious practices of witchcraft and occultism, functions as a heterotopia. An opening and closing system separates the ordinary from the extraordinary in two juxtaposed dimensions that coexist in the same place.

¹³⁴ Floral symbols (Figure 35) represent “the culmination of a growth cycle and a crowning achievement” (O’Connell, 2007: 186).



Figure 36 – The ritual chamber where the witches prepare to kill Suzy with a ritual spell – *Suspiria* (1977)

The panoptic qualities of the Tanz Akademie are inverted and Suzy now possesses the controlling gaze. In the privacy of a remote niche, the girl witnesses the witches preparing to kill her with a spell: “She must vanish, vanish, vanish! Die, die! Helena, give me power! Sickness! Sickness! Away with her! Away with trouble! Death, death, death!” (Figure 22). Suzy confronts Helena Markos, killing her with a crystal spike. *Mater Suspiriorum*'s death determines the end of the witches' coven. In a fantastic scenario where the walls crumble and ornaments explode, the academy collapses and is destroyed by a fire. The evil is defeated and the order is eventually restored.

The Tanz Akademie functions as a womb-like residence where Suzy undergoes a formative process which allows her to survive in the external world. By killing the Great Mother, Suzy achieves independent selfhood and full psychological maturity.¹³⁵ She moves from adolescence to adulthood. Entering the evil residence is essential to this process. This ritual passage of female initiation, in fact, enables Suzy to gain knowledge and spiritual renovation. As Erich Neumann (1963) suggests, “the transformation is possible only when what is to be transformed enters wholly the feminine principle” (Neumann, 1983 [1963]: 291). In this sense, Suzy has entered the maternal universe and has ended her journey victoriously. She has found her way out of the evil residence, and, being totally changed, she is now a new woman ready to face the adult world.

¹³⁵ For a better understanding of the concept of the Great Mother, see Newman (1963).

4.4.2 The residence of darkness (*Inferno*, 1980)

The second evil residence of the Three Mothers' trilogy is located in a mysterious apartment complex in New York City, where poetess Rose Elliot lives alone (Figure 37). In the antique shop down the block, Rose finds Varelli's ancient book and, after reading it, she starts believing that the apartment building where she lives is the dwelling place of *Mater Tenebrarum*. "Insistent images stimulate our virtual sense organs of taste and smell, repelling us as we fill in the absent smell virtually by visual and aural clues" (Powell, 2005: 85). An unpleasant, bittersweet smell permeates the area surrounding the residence. It is the smell of evilness, visually evoked as it emanates from the surrounding environment.



Figure 37 – *Mater Tenebrarum*'s residence – *Inferno* (1980)¹³⁶

Recalling clues provided in Varelli's manuscript, Rose explores the secret passages of the building. Passing through endless corridors, she arrives in the cellar: an irrational space filled with abjects, deteriorating pipes, wires and old dusty ornaments (Figure 38).

¹³⁶ "The Riverside Drive house was never photographed head-on, but was recreated on the sets at DePaolis from photos taken on location. It only rose a couple of floors, so everything seen above that (and surrounding that) is a Bava illusion – extended by a maquette and surrounded by faux skyscrapers fashioned from milk cartons and covered with photographs. These tabletop skyscrapers were also used to optically augment shots filmed on location in Central Park" (Lucas, 2007).



Figure 38 – The chaotic and irrational cellar in *Inferno* (1980)¹³⁷

In the basement Rose discovers a fissure where accidentally she drops her keys. In her attempt to retrieve them, she enters the hole, which leads her to a mysterious flooded ballroom. In a highly surreal architectural inversion, the underwater chamber opens the horizons to an Other world, dominated by an incomprehensible illogicality. Space-time physics are dissolved and everything seems confused and unexplained, almost to suggest that evil is everywhere. Visually, chaos is the most obvious representation of evil. The water-filled basement seems bottomless. Chandeliers, furniture and paintings bearing the name *Mater Tenebrarum* appear all over the place. Even a rotten corpse rises from the submerged space (Figure 39). Terrified, Rose surfaces from the flooded ballroom and writes to her brother, Mark, begging for help. The presence of this irrational space leads the viewer into a suspended universe, which embodies the forces of evil. The confusion reflects the contorted unconscious of the witch.



Figure 39 – The putrefied corpse in the submersed ballroom – *Inferno* (1980)

¹³⁷ Mario Bava's contribution as visual-effects specialist and second-unit director was remarkable in the set design and lighting, which mainly recalled the use of reds, greens and blues in his early horror films (Bondanella, 2001: 324–25).

As previously pointed out, the descent to the cellar often allegorizes the descent into the subconscious: a journey towards the most intimate spaces of the mind. Entering the submerged room, Rose finds herself in the basement of the basement, where meanings collapse in a dreamlike logic (Castricano, 2002). The muffled sound of the stagnant water suggests the idea of a lucid nightmare in the maternal womb. Partially awoken in her dreamlike state, Rose faces a world where horrific presences reside. The water, like an amniotic fluid, preserves a corpse: “the most sickening of wastes”, the border that encroaches upon everything and that is no longer I who expels, but “I” expelled (Kristeva, 1982: 4).¹³⁸ The encounter with a corpse is a repulsive experience, in which Rose faces something that she recognizes as human and that should be alive, but is not anymore (Figure 39). The corpse anticipates something horrible to come: Rose is confronted with her own death.

The lack of a real sense of spatiality increases in the following sequences, which see Mark wandering in the labyrinthic veins of the building (Figure 40). Mark’s confusion seems to be reflected in the confusion of the residence’s spatial order, which metaphorically represents the embodiment of the maternal oppressive forces. Recalling Varelli’s clue, which identifies the third key “beneath the sole of your shoes”, Mark dismantles one of the floorboards in his sister’s room, discovering an underground opening. Staircases, tunnels and concealed passageways come one after the other in an irrational sequence. These heterotopic spaces make no sense and have a nightmarish logic. The building follows the structure of a confusing maze, where the endless hallways seem to guide Mark closer to the roots of the mystery. Low-angle shots emphasize the sense of claustrophobia. Narrow and oppressive spaces follow one another. In his attempt to find a way out, Mark is forced into a foetal position, which is a metaphor for a coming birth. His journey, like Rose’s, is descendent, but his is straight to the core of wickedness.

¹³⁸ Water is necessary for any kind of life to exist. But in this case, being a metaphor of the malefic witch, it represents the ominous menace of death. Impure and filthy, it embodies the abject in the maternal womb. To learn more about water symbolism, see Farnsworth (2001).



Figure 40 – Mark in the anthropomorphized tunnel beneath the house – *Inferno* (1980)
After passing through a tunnel with anthropomorphized carved walls (Figure 40), he finally arrives in the main hideaway, repository of all secrets: the place of beginnings, the womb. In the darkness of the room he faces the wheelchair-bound Professor Arnold and his nurse. Professor Arnold reveals his identity, explaining he is actually the architect Varelli.

Now I suppose, you know who I am ... when I lived in London, many years ago, I called myself Varelli. I use another name these days, to be forgotten. Are you surprised to hear my voice? I can speak only with this. I've built the house which became their eyes and ears. Then I buried myself here. This building has become my body, its bricks my soul, its passageways my veins, and its horror my very heart. Come closer ... so I can whisper ...

... and in his last whisper he confesses to be a simple slave of the Three Mothers.

In one of the other rooms Dr Arnold's nurse lies over a table. Mark confronts her and realizes she is actually *Mater Tenebrarum*.

Mater Tenebrarum, Mater Lachrymarum, Mater Suspiriorum, but men call us by a single name, a name which strikes fear into everyone's heart. They call us Death!!!

With these words *Mater Tenebrarum* reveals the real identity of the matriarchal trinity which dominates the world with sorrow and pain. When she says the word Death, her

reflection on a mirror suddenly burns and she turns into Death personified.¹³⁹ A fire starts up in the building and Marks escapes, leaving *Mater Tenebrarum* inside, where, defiantly among the flames, she stands up with her hands in the air, suggesting eternal victory (Figure 41).

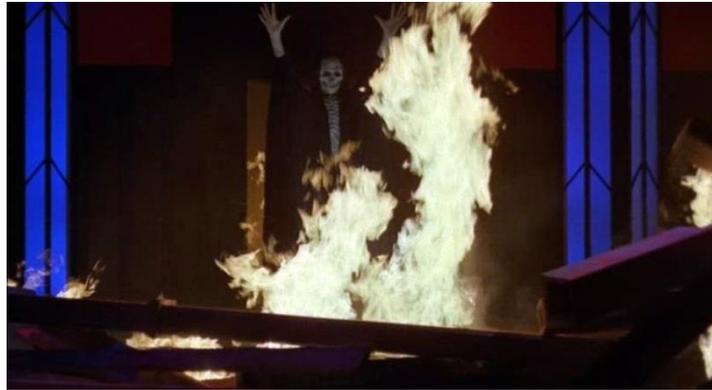


Figure 41 – *Mater Tenebrarum* – *Inferno* (1980)

Conclusion

While in *Suspiria* the smile of Life reigns over evil, in *Inferno* delirium, fire and Death triumph over all (Lucantonio, 2001: 52). In both cases, however, Life and Death end up victorious, demonstrated as being complementary parts of human existence. These opposite forces exist together and never operate alone. In the same way as Life never comes without the promise of Death, Death never comes without the promise of Life. Hence, Death and Life have to be considered as essential and inseparable components of the natural cycle of human existence. In his films, Argento refers to them with a variety of symbols (floral images, wombs, pubic triangles versus abject maggots, putrefied corpses, alchemical signs, and so on), which, through their persistent presence, reinforce the indissoluble unity and strength of Life and Death.

In ancient mythologies, Life and Death were two main forces of the Great Mother. Life was associated with the Good Mother, and Death with the Evil Mother. In

¹³⁹ The special effects in the last sequences of the film, such as *Mater Tenebrarum*'s disappearance and reappearance in skeletal form after bursting out from inside a mirror, are credited to Mario Bava.

the trilogy, the Three Mothers embody evilness and death on earth. Their residences are invested with anthropomorphic qualities expressed by the interior and exterior designs, which metaphorically represent the distorted architecture of their minds. Thus, exploring the houses becomes a metaphor for a journey into the maze of their contorted and ghoulish psyches. Both *the residence of sighs* and *the residence of darkness* are depicted as illogical heterotopias where disorder and darkness reign. The chaos, the abject and the irrational topography are all elements which suggest a sense of unease and loss of direction. The protagonists feel confused, disoriented and lost; the same goes for the viewer, who, unsettled in the surreal atmosphere, is suspended in a dream-like universe. However, the acceptance of the troubled journey into the monstrous buildings will lead them to achieve inner awareness and maturity.

The evil residences have the dual function of killing and giving birth. Hence, acting as destroyers and creators, they can be interpreted in terms of wombs: “the gates, the gullets, which actively swallow, devour, rend and kill” (Neumann, 1983 [1963]: 171 – my plural). Entering the buildings is a traumatic experience, connected to the fear of the feminine Mother. As Neumann suggests, this fear

expresses an archetypal experience of the whole species, male and female alike. For in so far as the woman participates in this development of consciousness, she too has a symbolically male consciousness and may experience the unconscious as negatively feminine (Neumann, 1983 [1963]: 148).

In other words, the fear of the feminine Mother ought to be considered a natural part of the process of the development of individual consciousness. Thus, Suzy and Mark’s transit in the womb-like heterotopias represents a formative journey towards rebirth and regeneration. The protagonists will abandon the buildings exhausted, but eventually reinvigorated and aware of the mystery of life.

CHAPTER 5

RECOLLECTION OBJECTS

It is only in the world of objects that we have time and space and selves.

T. S. Eliot

Introduction

This chapter aims to explore the symbolic meaning of objects and their circulation in the horror genre. How do people associate negative feelings with material things? How can they be scared of something inanimate? How can objects evoke feelings of terror? In order to answer these questions, the following pages will advance a variety of hypotheses, drawing from concepts such as *fetishes*, the *auratic* (Benjamin, 1930) and *fossils* (Deleuze, 1989). My analysis will start by taking into consideration the definition of objects as metaphors of fear. To develop my investigation, the attention will focus on two case studies that are rich in objects often perceived as horror icons: M. Bava's *Lisa e il diavolo* (1972) and D. Argento's *Profondo rosso* (1975).

The examination of the first film will allow us to explore the concept of *auratic* objects, with particular reference to inanimate objects which come to life. The second case study examines the reliability of visual evidence, emphasizing the importance of *fossils* as essential repositories of truth. These two concepts, *auratic* and *fossil*, have similar characteristics: they emanate memory fragments that are difficult to understand. Throughout my work this similarity will be approached in different ways. A further analysis will underline the importance of decontextualized objects in horror films. It will look at how the process of defamiliarization generates new shapes of fear, suggesting the use of everyday objects in a subversive way. The common sense of

things is therefore suspended. The familiar and comfortable are deformed, becoming uncanny and affecting the spectator's cognitive view.

5.1 Fetish objects as metaphors of fear

All objects, all phases of culture are alive. They have voices. They speak of their history and interrelatedness. And they are all talking at once.

C. Paglia

If the non-functional, as Orlando (2006) suggests, is something useless in relation to culture, especially in an age "increasingly devoted to technological progress", its prominence in Western literature designates literature as the dimension in which "the primary non-functionality of a material lack of value turns into temporal value of its secondary refunctionalisation" (Orlando, 2006: 114–115). By entertaining these observations, I would suggest that cinema, and in particular the horror genre, similarly to literature, provides an ideal dimension of recirculation of primary non-functional objects. Cinema constitutes a reliquary, which preserves witness treasuries of the past. It is the place where all that we have tried to archive and set aside emerges disguised as the spectral remains of epochs that refuse to die. In this sense, horror cinema can be interpreted as "a special site for an irrational return of the repressed" (*Ibid.* 15). It is the heterotopic dimension where the obsolete, the repelled and the abject reappear in concealed forms.

Drawing from a variety of multidisciplinary archives, the horror genre brings to the screen the debris of the past, making it recirculate at a second level. Thus, the discarded, the non-functional and the superseded assume a new metaphorical status. The Italian gothic tradition is rich in examples of this process. Widely circulated in

eighteenth-century literature and visual fine arts, ruins, relics and abandoned castles found a visual representation in the horror productions of the early 1960s. Neither static nor mute, these settings and objects encoded features and meanings of a specific historical moment, becoming fetish emblems of that time.

Gothic symbols held, in fact, particular characteristics which made them different from symbols of other subgenres. The architecture, for instance, as discussed in chapter 4, is characterized by singular shapes, sharp forms and an emphasis on verticality. Similarly, objects such as gravestones, coffins and skulls represented iconic symbols of the movement. Emphasized by lighting, camera perspectives and ghoulish sounds that were directly inherited from German Expressionism, these fetishes reproduced the gloomy atmosphere which was emblematic of the gothic tradition. Due to their impressive imageability, these features were able to evoke strong images in any observer (Lynch, 1960).¹⁴⁰ Their physical qualities, in fact, could be easily registered in the viewer's mind.

The exploitation of objects characterized by a strong imageability facilitates the development of relevant metaphors of fear. Some objects (candles, skulls, draperies, etc.) strengthen the dreadful mood (gothic, for example); others, (dark raincoats, hats, sunglasses and gloves, to mention a few) define the protagonists' personalities (monsters/victims) and others (weapons, masks etc.) still emphasize themes and concepts (good/evil). Objects, then, are useful tools which serve as slaves to the needs of horror directors (Orlando, 2006: 21). Their effectiveness, however, varies according to a number of factors: beliefs, cultures and epochs. As repeatedly argued throughout my work, the horror genre is dynamic, and subject to constant evolutions, which run parallel to the changes societies undergo.

This explains how objects as metaphors of fear differ across the world, being effective for some audiences and unimpressive for others. Their meaning changes as they circulate within and between cultures (Marks, 2000: 79). In other words, through being diffused, owned and used, objects become unique, gaining a life story. They preserve the shadow of their past and of those people who produced and came into

¹⁴⁰ To read more about the concept of imageability in relation to haunted spaces, please see chapter 4.

contact with them (*Ibid.* 96–97). It follows that their connotations are encoded not metaphorically, but through physical contact (*Ibid.* 79). When they become the subject of obsessive veneration, this contact transforms ordinary objects into fetishes.¹⁴¹ The fetish derives from a displacement of desire, which generates an irrational reverence for material objects that are attributed supernatural powers. This compulsive devotion can be of different natures: religious, economic¹⁴² or erotic.¹⁴³

The fetish is ... first of all, something intensely personal, whose truth is experienced as a substantial movement from inside the self (the self as totalized through an impassioned body, a “body without organs”) into the self-limited morphology of a material object situated in space outside (Pietz, 1985: 11–12).

In other words, it is the concrete expression of something that takes shape from the inside – the tangible manifestation of internal emotions and memories. Regarded with superstitious trust, fetishes are considered singular and, for this reason, distinguished from those objects which have to be treated as mere utensils.

Such distinctions are embedded within cultural codes that are emergent in sets of practices within the culture. This is precisely why the fetish object cannot be decoded by a realist perspective in any transcultural way; what is ‘real’ in one cultural code is unreal in another (Dant, 1996: 501).

¹⁴¹ The concept of fetishes has been discussed in chapter 2.

¹⁴² For more notions about the Marxist concept of *commodity fetishism*, see Marx (1867). Marx uses the expression *commodity fetishism* to criticize more general beliefs about capitalist markets and culture, and the use-value of objects emerging from consumption (Marx, 1973: 92, p. 8).

¹⁴³ The use of the term fetishism in reference to sexual contexts appeared for the first time in a paper published by Alfred Binet in 1887 (Nye, 1993: 21). The sexual fetish constitutes a symbolic surrogate for the normal sex object. In other words, personal accessories, clothes, underclothes, etc. are connected to the person for whom they serve as a substitute and can arouse sexual desires (cfr. Dant, 1996: 9). In *La frusta e il corpo* (1963), for instance, Kurt’s crop constitutes for Nevenka an agent of sexual arousal. This fetish object, in fact, is able to arouse Nevenka’s sexual proclivities.

Some objects, in fact, as previously mentioned, have a value to some cultures which cannot be understood by others.¹⁴⁴ The unique way in which people see and worship them creates an energy through which they acquire special meanings and sacredness. This power, derived from the approach and displacement of desires, can be of two kinds: collective or individual. The former leads to the development of fetishes that are recognized by the society; the latter generates fetishes which have special value for the single individual.

Developed in religious and supernatural contexts, the concept of fetishes was originally related to ordinary objects venerated as talismans and amulets. As Pietz (1985) suggests, in Western countries, the veneration of fetish objects was illegal and heretical in the Middle Ages (Pietz, 1985: 6). Hence, whoever made use of them was persecuted. With regard to this, interesting examples can be mentioned in relation to witchcraft and black magic practices. Witches believed that the use of fetishes could extend their power and enable them to harness more energy with their will. Thus, the employment of inanimate objects as powerful talismans became essential during their rituals. The horror genre drew from magical and superstitious archives. The early gothic productions in Italy in particular were concerned with fetishes associated with superstitions and witchcraft. Examples can be drawn from films such as Bava's *La maschera del demonio* (1960) and Margheriti's *I lunghi capelli della morte* (1964). Set during the Spanish Inquisition, and related to witch burning and persecutions, both films involve persistent use of fetishes. Crosses, talismans and magic potions could guard against the forces of evil. These symbols were particularly effective for an audience because of the extraordinary value charged on them: a "sacredness that is not an intrinsic property of things but a quality attributed or superposed on them; a quality which therefore can change over time, be acquired or lost" (Durkheim, 2011 [1975]: 295).

The interactions we entertain with fetishes engender an energy, which affects our lives. This power derives from our approach and belief system. The level of

¹⁴⁴ Western and Eastern cultures represent a remarkable example of this. Both of them have developed symbols which are recognizable from their respective traditions. This topic has already been discussed throughout my work; please see chapters 1 and 2 in particular.

emotional energy (positive or negative) we put into objects makes them *auratic*. With regard to this, the following pages will aim to extend this concept by discussing the auratic objects that feature in Mario Bava's *Lisa e il diavolo* (1973).

5.2 Auratic objects (*Lisa e il diavolo*, 1973)

The aura given out by a person or object is as much a part of them as their flesh.

L. Freud (2010) [1954]

Through their ability to reawaken memories and dreams, some objects can be considered *auratic*, a term that refers to

the sense an object gives that it can speak to us of the past, without ever letting us completely decipher it. It is a brush with involuntary memory, memory that can only be arrived at through a shock (Marks, 2000: 81).

It follows that *auratic* objects "can never completely satisfy our desire to recover the memory. Hence the sense that they maintain their distance no matter how closely we embrace them: it is a distance from us in time even as it is present in space" (*Ibid.* 80 my plural).

Bava's *Lisa e il diavolo* (1974) is littered with *auratic* objects containing allusions to religion, mythology and art. These objects speak to us of the past, without ever letting us entirely recollect it. Their elusiveness, in fact, reawakens fragments of memories that are difficult to grasp. What results is a gap that evokes feelings of uneasiness and distress. Representing the Devil carrying the dead to Hell, it becomes a symbol of human existence. If *auratic* objects, as Benjamin argues, acquired "their power from the human presences and material practices that constructed them", one

could claim that the fresco gained its aura from the practices and beliefs of humankind (Marks, 2000: 80).

Discerning and differentiating between good and evil, humanity attempted to create a figurative illustration of the Devil.¹⁴⁵ Thus, a symbolic representation, charged by a strong emotional energy, emerged, which was widely circulated over time.¹⁴⁶ Believed in many religions, myths and cultures to be a supernatural entity, enemy of God and humankind, the Devil as an icon of evilness, depravity and corruption has appeared in several figurative versions. Horror directors, aware of the resonance it has with viewers, have exploited it in many symbolic ways (darkness, possession, immorality, perversion, etc.).¹⁴⁷ *Lisa e il diavolo*, for instance, opens with a standard image, which contains a subtle diegetic meaning: the inescapable presence of Death and evil in human existence.

Lisa, a tourist, wanders away from the group, attracted by music coming from a small antique store. The melody comes from an ornate music box that plays the adagio from Joaquin Rodrigo's *Concierto de Aranjuez* (1939).¹⁴⁸ In the shop Lisa observes the construction of a dummy and meets Leandro for the first time. The man bears a strong likeness to the devil portrayed in the medieval painting (Figure 42).¹⁴⁹ To emphasize the uncanny resemblance, a shot superimposes the image of the Devil onto Leandro's face (sequence 00:04:38 – 00:04:43).

¹⁴⁵ Derived from the biblical context, the dragon-serpent is probably one of the most recurrent figurative representations of the Devil. Other interesting representations associate the abject and darkness with the evil entity of Satan.

¹⁴⁶ The concept of emotional energy has been discussed in the first part of the thesis. Please see chapter 2.

¹⁴⁷ To read more about the exploitation of the figure of the Devil in Italian horror cinema, please see chapter 2. As evinced throughout my work, the reaction to specific religious figures is not universal. Films about devil possession, for instance, are effective for some people and insignificant for others. The effectiveness depends on cultural and religious beliefs inculcated in the human mind.

¹⁴⁸ The *Concierto de Aranjuez* was Rodrigo's best-known work. This masterpiece initiated his career, establishing Rodrigo as one of the most popular Spanish composers of the twentieth century.

¹⁴⁹ Iaccino (2002) explores the simultaneous threat and appeal of the *Shadow Trickster* figure, represented by Leandro in *Lisa e il diavolo* (1973). To read more about the topic, see Iaccino (2002).



Figure 42 – The fresco on the church wall and Leandro in the antique shop
Lisa e il diavolo (1973)

Lisa’s attention, however, is focused on the music box in the antique shop (Figure 43). This object belongs to Leandro and symbolically represents the medieval dance of death, also known as the *danse macabre* (Sconce, 2007: 152).¹⁵⁰ The allegory of the *danse macabre* reminds people of the fragility of lives and the universal power of Death. During the film, this message is reinforced through a series of events, which demonstrate the futility of life’s struggle against the forces of *Thanatos* (Θάνατος).



Figure 43 – The macabre music box. Close-up of the small figurine of Death
Lisa e il diavolo (1973)

¹⁵⁰ The *danse macabre* has been performed (by live people) and shown in art and literature as far back as the 1400s. The earliest visual evidence of the *danse macabre* was a mural in the cemetery of the Church of the Holy Innocents in Paris (1424–25). Unfortunately, the mural is now lost. Subsequently, allegorical representations of the Dance of Death appeared in paintings on canvas, frescos, woodcuts and other media, such as music (*Mattasin oder Toden Tanz*, 1598) and cinema (*Danse macabre*, 1922). For more on the *danse macabre* in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, see Clark, James (1950).

The music box has an incomprehensible aura which evokes eeriness. The combination of the music and the circular movement of the little figurines seems to almost hypnotize Lisa, who, after leaving the shop, is completely disorientated, as if absorbed by a new dimension. The feeling of bewilderment is repeated in another sequence, when Lisa is in the Countess's old villa. Lisa is totally entranced by the mechanical fetish object. It calls to her mind "an endless stream of associations, as if it were actually endowed with the autonomous capacity to speak to her by means of its own aesthetic language" (Wolin, 1994: 238).

While observing the small statuettes revolving on the clockwork platform, Lisa has a flashback which shows Elena and her lover Carlo involved in an intimate relationship. Carlo is the exact duplicate of Leandro's mannequin, while Elena is a dead ringer for Lisa. The flashback, shot in soft focus to emphasize the dreamy atmosphere, becomes a revelatory moment for the spectator: it suggests Lisa as the reincarnation of Elena. Lisa's *déjà vu* derives from the *auratic* presence of the music box, which, shot in extreme close-up, seems able to capture invisible phenomena. "Close-ups are often dramatic revelations of what is really happening under the surface of appearance" (Balász, [1924] 1948: 56). They reveal something subtle, which hides behind the outward appearance. The mysterious object assumes a face-like property, which can be explained by Deleuze's concept of *visagéité*, or:

the combination of a reflecting, immobile unity and of intensive expressive movements which constitutes the affect ... Each time we discover these two poles in something ... we can say that this thing has been treated as a face [visage]: it has been 'envisaged' or rather 'faceified' [visagéifiée], and in turn it stares at us ... even if it does not resemble a face (Deleuze, 1986: 87-88).

The music box becomes for Lisa a face-like fetish dense with affect, which has been deposited in it from another existence: that of Elena. As Deleuze (1986) suggests, a facial image returns the look. In the same way, the music box, treated like a face, returns the look to Lisa, evoking memories and feelings of a past which, although inaccessible, is still persistent in the present. This characteristic, typical of auratic

objects, makes Lisa's "relationship to it like a relationship with another human being", in this case Elena (Marks, 2000: 80). Elena's past, in fact, emerges from an incomprehensible memory in Lisa's mind. The viewer, then, is driven into a journey where reality and unreality are blurred. Throughout the film, this confusion grows further when real bodies and mannequins are mixed up. To explore this aspect, the following section will focus on the objectification of human bodies.

5.2.1 Human objectifications

The presence of mannequins is a common theme in horror films.¹⁵¹ Many people find them disturbing, due in part to their similarities to the human body. These inanimate objects, in fact, retain anthropomorphic qualities, which, perceived as "uncomfortably strange", attract and distance the viewers at the same time. Mannequins and sculptures are familiar motifs in Bava's films. The director's obsession with these objects can be traced back to his childhood. According to Alfredo Leone, speaking on the audio commentary to *La casa dell'esorcismo* (1974), Bava grew up surrounded by the workshop artefacts of his father Eugenio.¹⁵² This experience led the director to develop an interest in the motif of the inanimate which comes to life. In many of his productions, lifeless objects such as dolls (*I tre volti della paura*, 1963), mannequins (*Lisa e il diavolo*, 1974) and corpses (*La goccia d'acqua*, 1963) become animated.¹⁵³

As mentioned in chapter 3, the vision of such imagery affects the viewers at an unconscious level. Inanimate objects have a key role in their ability to evoke uncanny

¹⁵¹ Mannequins have appeared in many horror films, including Ferroni's *Il mulino dalle donne di pietra* (1963), *Il rosso segno della follia* (1969), Cavara's *La tarantola dal ventre nero* (1971) and Lenzi's *Spasmo* (1974).

¹⁵² Eugenio Bava (1886–1966), originally a sculptor, entered the film business in the early days of the Italian film industry. As Tim Lucas said in an interview, he was "the father of special effects photography in Italy" (Lucas, 2007). Eugenio started his cinematic career as a set designer for the Pathé Frères in 1906, at that time one of the most successful film companies in the world. He worked as a cameraman on *Quo Vadis* (1913) and *Cenere* (1916) by Enrico Guazzoni. He also assisted Segundo de Chomon on the special effects of Pastrone's *Cabiria* (1914), notably the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius. In 1926, he became the director of optical effects at the Fascist-government-sponsored Istituto LUCE.

¹⁵³ Many of the dummies in *Lisa e il diavolo* were actually the same ones Bava grew up around.

feelings. This occurs because they are connected to our childhood, when we were not yet able to distinguish between the animate and the inanimate. In our adult life, our desire to see lifeless objects coming to life is surmounted (Freud, 2003 [1919]: 141). However, this wish never totally abandons our unconscious, and the vision of something that reminds us of it sets off in our mind an uncomfortable feeling of uncanniness. It is therefore understandable that the presence of dummies and duplicates in horror films can be particularly effective at provoking an emotional response.

Lisa e il diavolo involves numerous mannequins from the beginning of the film. For example, when she is lost in the labyrinth of cobblestoned streets in Toledo, Lisa comes across Leandro, who is carrying a life-sized dummy. Leandro is almost always seen transporting mannequins (Figures 44, 45). This image mirrors the one on the fresco in the initial sequence, which depicts the devil carrying a dead body (Figure 42).



Figures 44, 45 – Leandro carries his mannequin through the cobbled streets of Toledo – *Lisa e il diavolo* (1973)

When Lisa asks for directions to the village's main square, the dummy held under Leandro's arm seems to assume real characteristics. The passage from inhuman to human is particularly evident in two consecutive shots of the same scene (Figures 44, 45). As is visible from figure 44 (frame 00:08:26), the puppet is made of wax. The face is shiny and the glassy gaze totally vacant. Conversely, the second image, figure 45, shows a body with human textures (frame 00:08:40). This sequence anticipates a following one, when Lisa runs into a man exactly the same as the mannequin Leandro was carrying. His name is Carlo and he repeatedly claims to be Lisa's lover, although

he insistently calls her Elena. The woman rejects and pushes the man, who, falling down a flight of stone steps, apparently dies. The encounter with Carlo leads to a series of ambiguities, which take the protagonist into a new world where real and unreal collide.

The attention on fetishes, interpreted as human objectifications, becomes more persistent throughout the film. In one sequence, the camera focuses on the collection of artefacts and relics in Leandro's room. Wax heads and dummies appear everywhere. Leandro is repairing the mannequin of Carlo and complaining about his heavy workload. In a climactic monologue, he explains that the construction of duplicates is a ceremonial ritual required by the Countess. "Every dead must have his own mannequin ... Tradition," he says. "What does tradition mean to a poor devil like me?¹⁵⁴ Work and fatigue!" With these words, Leandro ironically introduces himself as "a poor devil", slave of the Countess's whims. Actually, he is the *deus ex machina* of the whole scenario. He collects the dummies not just to satisfy the macabre desire of the Countess, but to perform a symbolic *danse macabre*. As the narration develops, it becomes clear that the guests in the villa are just pawns in his hands.

Looking oddly human, the mannequins in Leandro's room are a source of uncanny feelings. They are identical to the guests of the villa. To reinforce the similitude and to create confusion between human and non-human, Bava uses rapid shots on details of real bodies and puppets (Manti, 2003: 188).¹⁵⁵ It follows that the spectator is disorientated and his perception suspended between the two categories. Bava had already used this technique in earlier films. In the opening credit sequence of *Sei donne per l'assassino* (1964), for instance, the motionless models of the fashion *atelier* are easily mistaken for the mannequins in the warehouse. The same happens in *Il rosso segno della follia* (1970), where the dummies in wedding dresses are confused with the

¹⁵⁴ Leandro's words and his similarity to the Devil suggest a connection to the fresco in the opening scene.

¹⁵⁵ Another stratagem to create confusion is the persistent use of objects and surfaces which reflect the images of the characters. Real protagonists and mannequins are confused. Sometimes, the reflections appear distorted or unclear and are therefore difficult to distinguish. The protagonists are reflected in a pond close to the garden fountain, in the glass cabinet of an ancient pendulum clock in the villa and in a pool of spilt red wine, which suggests blood. Leandro's image, reflected in a pool of spilt red wine, recalls the final image from Argento's *Profondo rosso* (1975), when Marcus, sitting on the floor, stares at his reflection in a pool of blood.

models. The montage, the lighting and the camera movements blend the images together, merging the inanimate with the animate. The mannequins represent the static *doppelgängers* of the objectified human bodies in the mansion. As Freud (1919) argues, the double was originally “an insurance against the destruction of the Ego” (Freud, 1919). When this stage was surmounted, it reversed its aspect, and, from having been an assurance of immortality, it became the uncanny harbinger of death (Freud, [1919] 1990: 357). In this sense, these fetish duplicates constitute continuity between Life and Death and eventually the eternal cycle of Death.

Lisa, lost in Leandro’s room, faints when she meets Carlo. In her inability to distinguish the human from the non-human, the woman enters a dimension in which what is known as the norm begins to be subverted. Undefined objects (categories) awaken uncanny feelings, which mainly derive from our inability to redefine their already existing definitions. As dummies and duplicates appear more humanlike, our sense of their familiarity increases until we come to a valley, defined by Mori (1970) as the *uncanny valley*. Mori assumes that “a person’s response to a humanlike dummy (robot) that looks and acts almost human would abruptly shift from empathy to revulsion as it approached”.¹⁵⁶ This is what happens to Lisa. Evoking feelings and memories of an unknown past, the presence of Carlo attracts and distances the woman at the same time. Lisa, then, feels lost in the *uncanny valley*. Trapped in her blurred perception and in the fragmented memory of an unreachable past, she is unable to distinguish between categories (death/life, present/past).

The protagonists in *Lisa e il diavolo* are deceptive *objects*, suspended between reality and unreality. Often seen gathered together, lined up or in a semi-circular position, they echo the figurines of the music box. Throughout the film, their movement follows the processional rotating movement of the eerie mechanism. When the car breaks down in front of the villa, for instance, the characters are disposed in a way similar to the statuettes; then, when Leandro takes the guests to their rooms, they are lined up, moving slowly across the bridge; and, similarly, during George’s funeral,

¹⁵⁶ Masahiro Mori is a robotics professor at the Tokyo Institute of Technology. He wrote an essay about people’s reactions to humanlike robots. The essay was published in 1970 in a Japanese journal called *Energy*.

their silhouettes are aligned, with Leandro leading them in a symbolic dance of death.¹⁵⁷ The circular disposition of the protagonists, symbolic of the *Circle of Death*, reaches a climax through an overhead shot which features all the guests' corpses arranged at the dinner table, before the Devil carries them away (Figure 46). This sequence represents a parody of *The Last Supper* (1494–1498) by Leonardo da Vinci. Disposed in a semi-circular arrangement, the bodies/mannequins suggest, once again, the carved figurines of the music box. Covered with a black veil, Elena is now placed at the centre of the group, in personification of *Thanatos*. On the table, a wedding cake with cockroaches suggests the presence of the abject and accentuates the feeling of death and decay.



Figure 46 – The symbolic last supper in *Lisa e il diavolo* (1973)

The view of the protagonists gathered together will be repeated at the end of the film, when the damned souls will be seen in the plane. Are they mannequins or corpses? Once again the distinction between categories is unclear, generating ambiguity and uneasiness in the viewer's mind.

¹⁵⁷ Their shadows through the stained-glass window emphasize the gloomy atmosphere of the sequence.

5.2.2 Fetish objects of pleasure

The old Gothic mansion, which vaguely recalls Villa Graps from *Operazione paura* (1966), is one of the main focuses of the film. Entering the villa is symbolic of being trapped between life and death. This claustrophobic trap is represented by a series of objects which, circulating around Lisa and the other guests, symbolize a temporal fracture between the two worlds. As Silver and Ursini argue:

the unusual and disquieting visuals of Bava's films seem rooted in a conception of life as an uncomfortable union of illusion and reality. The dramatic conflict for his characters lies in confronting the dilemma of distinguishing between the two perceptions (Ursini, 2000: 96).

In this sense, the *mise-en-scène* of *Lisa e il diavolo* reflects and extends the hallucinatory and dreamy world of Bava's fantasy. Full of mystery, the villa is a space filled with *auratic* ornaments and decors in a gothic style, which evoke a sense of death and decay. "The entire setting is so right for a tall tale of gloom and perdition," observes Sophia, one of the guests in the villa. Almost every space is left to "an affective reliquary of de-functionalized things, as a result of which the places feel like bazaars and chapels" (Orlando, 2006: 28 my plural). The mansion encloses in one site objects that belong to different periods and styles, preserving, therefore, a mix of epochs and histories. It follows that time accumulates, involving heterochronies.¹⁵⁸ The house, then, becomes a heterotopia, where past and present relentlessly coexist and are suspended, neutralized and inverted (Foucault, 1967: 17).

Persistent funeral images pervade the film, stimulating "our virtual sense organs of taste and smell" (Powell, 2005: 85). These images repel us "as we fill in the absent smell virtually by visual and aural clues" (*Ibidem*). The smell of death is particularly perceptible in two spaces of the house: Elena's bedroom and the chapel where George's funeral is celebrated. We are introduced to Elena's bedroom by Max,

¹⁵⁸ To read more about *heterocronies*, please see chapter 4.

who, opening a mirrored door, enters the secret room.¹⁵⁹ This scene echoes a sequence in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871), when Alice steps into a mirror to discover an alternative world. Similarly, Massimiliano steps into a world which simultaneously embraces nonsense and logic: nonsense for the viewers and logic for his own psychotic mind.

Elena's room represents the subversion of the spatio-temporal logic. The space, which has remained the same since Elena died, preserves secrets that involve necrophilia. Everything smells of old memories: the bridal flowers from her wedding day, the candelabras and all the remains of a joyful past. The presence of these objects alleviates the loss, helping Massimiliano to renew his connection with Elena and the good times they spent together. However, once the young man meets Lisa, this link with the past becomes unbearable and Massimiliano wants to break it.¹⁶⁰ He burns a photograph of Elena. To give emphasis to this moment and to highlight the association between present and past, Bava shows the photograph in a soft colour palette. The pathos is further emphasized by the music of Joaquin Rodrigo, which gives a melodramatic tone to the whole sequence. The camera movements and the repeated cutting shots between the photo and Lisa's face allow a connection between the two protagonists. This technique favours the association and, at the same time, the confusion of identities.

Elena's dead body is still preserved in the room. The viewers do not see it, as dark draperies hanging from the ceiling hide her. The strategy of concealing things with fabric heightens the suspense. Lights are other important devices which reinforce the mystery of objects. Candles and lanterns are the most popular sources of light in horror films. They create shadows, favouring the ambiguities of shapes and figures. This produces obscurity, which emphasizes the presence of something indefinite and threatening. The same occurs with colours and textures. Red, for instance, is often

¹⁵⁹ Heterotopic spaces have been discussed in chapter 4.

¹⁶⁰ Another crucial scene which suggests Massimiliano's desire to break with the past is shot in the chapel, where the ritual funerals take place. "The trimmings should be for a wedding and not a funeral," shouts Massimiliano, while removing the wreaths. He explicitly manifests his wish to get rid of all the emblems of death which surround him.

associated with blood and violence while black is suggestive of funereal omens of death.¹⁶¹

Elena's skeleton lies on the bed, dressed in a full bridal gown (Figure 47). Its presence is the mere sign of Massimiliano's refusal of the loss of Elena's love, and, at the same time, it represents the eternal dichotomy of death and life in human existence. The allusion to a decayed corpse reminds the viewer that life is not eternal. The body's decomposition represents the abject, suggesting its weakness and ephemerality. As an object decays, in fact, it changes in texture and emits odours. Thus, the view of Elena's decomposed body and the funeral objects in the room assault the viewer's virtual senses, engendering physical sensations.



Figure 47 – Elena's decayed skull – *Lisa e il diavolo* (1973)

Massimiliano acts as if Elena was still alive. In a peculiar scene, he takes a slice of cake to her bedroom. Through this ritualistic practice, he celebrates and worships the object/corpse, confirming its fetish properties. The ritual, in fact, engages his desire and veneration for the dead woman, now objectified. He talks to her: "Did you know he was back? I will not let him come between us again," says the man, referring to Carlo. Carlo is Massimiliano's stepfather and Elena's lover. Once Massimiliano discovered the relationship between them, he murdered Elena and kept her skeletal corpse in a secret room. His relation with the dead body, then, became indicative of his neuroses and morbid necrophilia, and the decayed skeleton represented the fetish object of his pathology.

¹⁶¹ It is not by chance that Argento chose the title *Profondo rosso* for his film.

Preserving Elena's corpse, Massimiliano takes control of the risk of being castrated. The dead body, in fact, is not a threat anymore; instead it represents a "token of triumph over the threat of castration and a safeguard over it" (Freud, 1963: 216). What is preserved in the fetish is something which the fetishist knows is lost: in this case, the relationship with Elena. The act of preserving her body allows Massimiliano to control and dominate Death. What is preserved is not only the physical corpse, but the desire to stay with Elena forever. In other words, the fetish represents the embodiment of the desire to deny the absence. As Freud (1927) suggests, the fetish object is a symbolic substitute for the missing penis in the female genitalia. In the childish phase, the boy perceives his mother's lack of a penis as his own possible risk of being castrated. The female genitalia represents, therefore, a motive of fear which is substituted by a fetish object.

The encounter with Lisa convinces Massimiliano of the possibility of regaining his masculinity in a new relationship. Crossing the mirrored door, he leads the woman to the secret room and chloroforms her, taking unsuccessful sexual advantage of her unconscious body. In a sequence where Eros and Thanatos mix together, the rotting remains of the ancient past surround the couple; candles and dusty lanterns adorn the room, setting the gloomy atmosphere. A shot focuses on a frozen clock, which suggests Massimiliano's desire to stop time, in a moment of male predominance.¹⁶² The fetish objects/bodies become symbols of Massimiliano's fantasies and repressed desires. Their presence is necessary to reaffirm his masculinity. However, this attempt fails. The failure is reinforced by a sequence which features Elena coming to life, and recalling Massimiliano's impotence: Elena laughs at him, and the man, in his fragility, cries. Elena and Lisa appear to be one and the same. Both of them establish Massimiliano's subordinate role compared to their objectified position.

Lisa recovers from her unconscious state and wakes up nude in Elena's room. The mansion appears as though it has been destroyed and has not been inhabited for years. Close-ups on the surrounding ruins and broken statues give the impression that

¹⁶² Broken watches appear throughout the film. One of the most recurrent is Carlos's broken pocket watch. This object suggests a temporal fracture of real time, which introduces Lisa and the viewers to a dreamy world. The characters' conscious perceptual notions of time, in fact, are disconnected from reality, which appears illusory and deceptive.

time has stopped. These objects do not carry a diegetic density. They assume a spectatorial function, attracting the viewer's gaze. Framing, camera movements and editing emphasize a narration based on *monstrating* (Gaudreault, 2009) rather than telling.¹⁶³ This scene metaphorically suggests the Garden of Eden, where Lisa appears as an Eve, who, reborn from an unreasonable past, is now ready for a new life. As she walks among the ruins she stumbles on Massimiliano's rotten mannequin and sees the last rose of the season, the one which her young lover had preserved for her.

Lisa abandons this remote place, while a group of little girls refer to her as a ghost. Again, the question of her character is raised. Is she real or unreal? This question will find an answer in the last sequence. Lisa boards a plane and suddenly realizes she is the only passenger. The music anticipates something horrible happening. Walking through a series of empty compartments the woman eventually comes across all of the ghostly guests of the mansion. She runs off, looking for help, and finds Leandro at the helm of the plane. Shocked, she falls down on the floor. Her body, frozen like a mannequin, is now dressed as Elena. This scene reinforces the ambiguity between the two protagonists: has Lisa turned into Elena, or has she always been her since the beginning of the film? The confusion reaches a climax in this ultimate objectification of the human body. Like the other mannequins, in fact, Lisa is a dummy herself, moved square by square, pawn-like, in the game of life. In a meditation on the universality of Death, the spectator, like the protagonist, is left lost in the *uncanny valley*.

5.3 The signature of all things

"Nothing is without a sign [...] since nature does not release anything in which it has not marked what is to be found within that thing" (Paracelsus, 1859: 131). It follows that everything conceals a hidden meaning – in Paracelsus's terms, a hidden signature. If all things "become known through their signatum", signature can be considered the

¹⁶³ André Gaudreault's concept of *monstrating* has been discussed in chapter 4.

science which goes straight to the core of all things, revealing their occult virtues (*Ibid.* 133). In order to develop these considerations, the following pages will discuss the importance of reading signatures in *Profondo rosso* (1975). As we have repeatedly argued, the horror genre is a special reliquary of signatures. It is the place where ordinary objects are given voice, transformed into menacing and frightening horror icons. In other words, it is where marks reveal the essence of all things by creating relations between objects, spaces and events.

In the gothic tradition, apparently non-functional secondary and waste objects assume new meanings, becoming marked by a powerful signature. As mentioned throughout my work, horror directors draw these objects from a variety of archives and, after a ritual manipulation, make them recirculate in their films. Thereby, obsolete objects, rarities, ruins and trash proliferate, taking on new meanings in cinema. Horror filmmakers give voice to these signs, which, otherwise, without any signature, would remain void and dumb. The sign, as such, is mute and sterile: an old dusty instrument that does not express its essence. To be understood and acknowledged, it needs to be animated through the power of a signature. It follows that

a signature is a sort of sign within the sign; it is the index that in the context of a given semiology univocally makes reference to a given interpretation. A signature adheres to the sign in the sense that it indicates, by means of the sign's making, the code with which it has to be deciphered (Agamben, 2009: 59).

Thus, the signature does not correspond with the sign only, but is also what makes the sign comprehensible. "The instrument was prepared and marked at the moment of creation, but produces knowledge only in a subsequent moment when it reveals itself in the signature" (Agamben, 2009: 42). As such, horror directors give voice to their instruments and make the audience listen to their sound. This occurs through rituals which make, of ordinary things, essences. Rituals, in fact, add something more to an existing thing by way of a form or sign. It follows that, in their act of filmmaking, directors give a voice and power to dumb and void objects, which are otherwise incomprehensible to the viewer (*Ibid.* 42). To investigate this aspect further, I would

like to use an example drawn from Argento's *Suspiria* (1977). The bizarre decorative peacock which appears in one of the last sequences of the film seems to be an insignificant and useless object. Picking up a long needle from its iridescent tail, Suzy makes of it a weapon which will lead at the conclusion to the death of *Mater Suspiriorum*. In this regard, Argento's signature is what marks this mute and outmoded ornament, making of it an efficacious and expressive device in the film. It is what marks the object, giving it a voice and power.

The director's signature challenges the passionate and knowledgeable fans of the genre to read the panoply of relations that the director creates between objects and events. A more thorough investigation, in fact, would reveal further messages hidden behind the peacock decoration. We can recognize in it a presumable referential tribute to Argento's first film *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo* (1970).¹⁶⁴ We can talk in this case of a meta-cinematic signature (intratextual), which elects the peacock as a referential repository of the director's previous success.¹⁶⁵ The identification of these hidden meanings depends on the ability to read signatures and the whole set of relations which they create. *Signature* is nothing else than the marks left by an operation, or, as mentioned above, by a ritual. The film is the sign of the filmmaker's mind, wherein his abilities and art are determined. Thus, the signature is the achievement itself of the ritual process: it is what confers an essence to all things. As painters sign their own paintings, horror directors do the same with their films. They make their products different from those of anyone else. This allows the audience to understand who has produced a specific film and gives distinctiveness and uniqueness to the product. In order to develop these arguments, the following pages will discuss the importance of reading/interpreting signatures in *Profondo rosso* (1975).

¹⁶⁴ Another similar intertextual reference can be found in *Profondo rosso*. Alone in his house and perceiving the presence of a stranger walking on the roof, Mark picks up a statuette to defend himself from a possible attack. The statuette has the shape of a bird's head, perhaps an allusion to Argento's first film *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo* (1971).

¹⁶⁵ With the expression "meta-cinematic signature", I refer to the self-referencing motifs which reappear in the productions of the same director. Many examples of meta-cinematic signatures are identifiable in Argento's films. One of the most recognizable is the killer's gloved hand. This image is present in all of his films and is always played by the author himself.

5.4 Revealing objects (*Profondo rosso*, 1975)

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.

Carlo in *Profondo rosso* (1975)

Recollection objects are material objects that encode both collective and individual memories (Marks, 2000: 78). They condense time within themselves, bearing traces of the past (*Ibidem*). In other words, they carry stories and social relations, becoming bearers of a multitude of memories, which have been generated during their origins, development and circulation. These memories can also be activated in our mind through object-images. With regard to this, visual technologies such as photography and cinema play an important role: they favour and inform what Walter Benjamin (2005) [1931] calls the optical unconscious, allowing unresolved pasts to surface in the present of the images. Exposure to horror films, for instance, confronts the viewer with object-images that are able to call up memories and evoke uncanny feelings. Due to their immediacy these images are not transformed into cognitive information. This occurs because, being extremely quick, they firstly affect our unconscious and only after further analysis lead to more detailed (cognitive) information.

The view of objects recalls virtual images, which affect our perception, activating a complex of memory-images in our mind. Their ability to awaken memories derives from the interactive contexts within which they have been produced, used, manipulated and circulated (Appadurai, 1986). Engaging all sense perceptions they have to be considered *multisensorial* (Marks, 2000: 147). As Laura Marks suggests in her examination of the work of Henry Bergson (1990) [1896], the cinematic perception “takes place not simply in a phenomenological present but in an engagement with

individual and cultural memory” (Marks, 2000: 157).¹⁶⁶ This means that the audience’s response to the film exposure involves a multitude of components which engage past, present, individual (internal archives) and collective experiences (external archives).¹⁶⁷

Sometimes object-images are used “as part of the *mise-en-scène*, where they appear as mute witnesses to a character’s history” (*Ibid.* 81). Apparently meaningless, some of them assume essential qualities and connotations during the development of the film. To extend this argument, the following page will focus on Argento’s *Profondo rosso*. In the film a variety of objects function as recollection devices of memories. My analysis will turn on those symbols which are essential to the solution of the mystery. With regard to this, the concept of the fossil, as a dynamic and dangerous witness of the past, will be developed.

Profondo rosso (1975) pays homage to Antonioni’s *Blow-Up* (1966).¹⁶⁸ Both films cast the British actor David Hemmings as the main protagonist, and both of them debate the reliability of visual evidence, perception and recollection. Marcus (*Profondo rosso*) and Thomas (*Blow-up*) witness an ambiguous murderous scene that is difficult to decode.¹⁶⁹ Taking a picture in a park, Thomas unintentionally captures details of a potential murder. He blows up the picture to find out if the man in the photo is holding a gun. Similarly, after witnessing Helga’s murder, Marcus tries to remember all the details of the scene. Hence, both protagonists are trapped by something they saw and by their ability to recollect it in their memory. While the object of truth in Antonioni’s *Blow-up* is a photograph, in Argento’s *Profondo rosso* it is a mural in the screaming boy’s room: two visual evidences which speak of a crime. However, while Thomas’s efforts to discover the truth are in vain, and the mystery unsolved, Mark eventually unravels the case. To develop my arguments about the reliability of visual evidences, the following pages will focus on the importance of recollection objects as essential repositories of truth.

¹⁶⁶ The importance of memorability has been investigated in chapter 1.

¹⁶⁷ Please see chapter 1 for more information about internal and external archives.

¹⁶⁸ To read more about the thematic links between the role of David Hemmings in *Profondo rosso* (1975) and in *Blow Up* (1966), see Smuts (2002) and Barber (1992).

¹⁶⁹ This theme is reminiscent of many *giallo* films. Thomas and Marcus recall the artist-detective in *L’uccello dalle piume di cristallo* (1971).

The opening sequence of *Profondo rosso* is presented by a floor-level shot, which shows an important event around which the whole film will turn. The event takes place in a family home, during the Christmas holidays. In a dining room, some shadows on the wall show an undefined killer in the moment of stabbing someone. The bloody knife falls on the parquet floor and the legs of a child suddenly enter the frame, stopping just beside the knife. The image fades and a child's lullaby plays on the soundtrack. This sequence, which interrupts and violates the conventions of opening credits, introduces images which, throughout the film, will prove to be revealing.

We do not recognize who the killer is; however, we are introduced to his/her world. One of the following sequences focuses on a series of objects, which presumably belong to him/her. Through an overhead shot from an off-screen figure's point of view, the camera pans over a procession of fetish things which lie on a black surface: a toy crib, a voodoo doll, a gruesome child's drawing, a metal statuette, a scarlet figurine of a demon and a series of knives (Figure 48). The extreme close-up on these objects generates a spatio-temporal and figurative disruption. "It dislocates the objects of the gaze, fragmenting and carving them out of their surroundings" (Beugnet, 2012: 90 my plural). As Sergei Eisenstein (1974) and Béla Balázs (1972) suggest, this specific type of zooming

derives its powerful impact from its ability to establish itself as an entity in itself, appearing outside of notions of relative scale and realist space (Eisenstein [1940] 1974: 229; Balázs [1923] 1972: 57), to abstract [its object] from all spatio-temporal co-ordinates (Deleuze, 1986: 96).¹⁷⁰

It follows that close-ups expand spaces, suspending the audience's sense of scale. This feeling is prolonged until a hand picks up a little doll, disclosing the real sizes of the objects around.

¹⁷⁰ Please see Beugnet (2012: 90).



Figure 48 – Occult, satanic and murderous objects – *Profondo rosso* (1975)

In this scene, the close-up is a key cinematic technique that is able to emphasize the *auratic* qualities of the objects.¹⁷¹ Mostly wicked, many of them evoke ominous feelings, setting the eerie atmosphere of the sequence. Among them, one in particular attracts the viewer's attention: a hand-drawing which depicts a crime, with a figure stabbed to death. Unlike the other items, which have a non-diegetic function, the child's drawing is a crucial revealing object. Its meaning, initially undefined, will be revealed at the end of the film. *Profondo rosso* introduces a series of symbols which need to be deciphered and understood. Many of them, in fact, conceal hidden histories. Erased or lost, they leave subtle traces which haunt the present like ghosts. Marcus takes on the role of amateur investigator and, in the attempt to read the signatures of these objects, invites the audience to follow his journey in his adventure towards the truth.

Marcus is in the square with Carlo when he sees Helga asking for help. He rushes into the building, but it's too late. The woman is dead, with her neck cut off on the broken window glass. This sequence is emphasized by the progressive-rock music composed and performed by Goblin. For the first time, Argento collaborated with the

¹⁷¹ In *Profondo rosso* (1975), ordinary objects are defamiliarized and decomposed through the use of macro-lens shots, which show parts of them that would otherwise be invisible to the viewer's gaze. An example is the piano in Marcus's house. An extreme close-up focuses on the mechanisms of the piano and slowly glides across the score Marcus is working on. The sound of the piano becomes amplified and semi-visualized in the piano frame.

Italian band, using their score to set the pace in his film. A shot focuses on the extravagant furniture in Helga's apartment. A table in the shape of the Star of David and the stylized menorah design on the wall suggest the woman's Jewish origins.¹⁷² However, the attention turns to a long hallway full of paintings. The portraits represent distorted faces which recall the works of Munch and Goya.¹⁷³ The use of objects of art as revelatory objects of truth is recurrent in many of Argento's films. Once again, in the director's cinematic tradition, a painting has a central role in the solution of the *giallo*.¹⁷⁴

As the camera follows the hallway, the audience sees through Marcus's point of view. For a short instant the face of the killer is visible in a mirror. However, seen along a line of paintings, the face is misread and perceived as a portrait. Marcus proceeds to reach the woman impaled on the window glass. As he lifts her body, he sees a silhouette crossing the square. Marcus suspects the figure to be that of a man, even though the figure is unrecognizable.

Marcus: Did you see a man coming towards the fountain?

Carlo: A man?

Marcus: Yeah, a man in a brown raincoat ... He may have been the murderer. I don't know.

Carlo: Yeah, yeah, for a second. From the back.

Crucial here is Daly's misidentification of the suspect as male.¹⁷⁵ The dark raincoat, hat, sunglasses and gloves are iconic accessories which characterize the killer figure in the *giallo* films. Introduced by Bava in *Sei donne per l'assassino* (1964), this disguise was conventionalized as a fetishistic stereotype of the genre. As will be examined in more

¹⁷² During Helga's funeral, it is revealed that the sensitive is Jewish. The Menorah on the wall is the stylized representation of the seven-branched candelabra of the Jewish tradition. As mentioned in the Bible, the Golden Menorah was constructed for the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. The seven branches, which symbolically represent "the seven days of creation, were lit one day at a time, until all seven lights were glowing at the end of the week" (Nozedar, 2008: 126).

¹⁷³ Please compare Helga's paintings with Munch's *The Scream* (1893) and Goya's *Black Paintings* (1819–1823).

¹⁷⁴ In many of Argento's films objects of art play a distinctive role in the narration. They are often crucial in solving the mystery. An example is *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo* (1971), where a macabre painting triggers the protagonist's latent insanity.

¹⁷⁵ Role (victim/victimizer) and gender (male/female) confusions are common in many *giallo* films. This argument will be developed in chapter 6.

detail in chapter 6, the fetishization of this disguise is often associated with the masculine, aggressive victimizer, in contraposition to the helpless female victim. Psychoanalytically, this opposition can be interpreted as a reassurance against castration anxiety. In other words, the association male/aggressor re-establishes the role of male penetrator and female penetrated.

After the police arrive in the apartment, Marcus feels that something has been missed. He wonders if anything was removed from the flat. He is convinced that it is one of the hallway paintings. Marcus defines this feeling as, "Just an impression." As Bergson (1998 [1911]) suggests, "when a recollection-object falls apart breaks down, through the engagement with memory, memory generates sensation in the body" (Bergson 1998 [1911]: 179). An image, in fact, is not visual but multisensory: it involves all the information that one's senses perceive about a specific object. Thus, while the objective reality is present in all its qualities, the perceived image isolates only that in which one is interested. In other words, when we see an object we "do not perceive it as a whole but discern it" (Marks, 2000: 146). Walking through the hallway, Marcus looks without seeing. What is left in his memory is only what has captured his attention: what he presumes to be a painting, which might have been important in identifying the killer. The importance of this vague recollection is further confirmed by Carlo's words during a conversation with Marcus.

Marcus: There's something else that's funny you know. It's very strange and I don't know if it's true or not, but when I went into her apartment at first I thought I saw a painting and then a few minutes later it was gone. Now how could that be?

Carlo: Maybe the painting was made to disappear because it represented something important.

Marcus: Sorry? What?

Carlo: Something important!

Marcus: No, no, I don't think so. If I remember well, it was ... it was some sort of composition of faces. Something very unusual.

Carlo: Look, maybe you've seen something so important you can't realize it.

Carlo's words suggest going over appearances, implying that the surface of things can conceal deeper meanings. In other words, he suggests reading and interpreting the signature of all things. Unfortunately, Marcus's memory is blurred and the missing object undefined in his mind. This perceived absence will be confirmed as a real essential presence only in one of the last sequences, when Marcus will finally solve the case.

5.4.1 Objects of truth

Profondo rosso introduces a variety of clues that are essential to the resolution of the mystery. The recurrent lullaby heard throughout the film, for instance, is an important piece of evidence which, through a series of connections, helps Marcus to proceed in his investigation.¹⁷⁶ Giordani suggests that the childish rhyme must be something the killer needs to hear in order to provoke his murderous impulse. He gives a psychological explanation to the song:

This little song may very well be the leitmotif of the crime. You see we are starting from what I presume to be a correct supposition: The murderer is a schizophrenic paranoid. Anyone who kills in this manner surely does so in a state of temporary madness ... in everyday life this person could appear normal, as normal as you or I or anyone else and when he kills he must recreate the specific conditions which will trigger the release of all his pent-up feelings. A particular time of day, a particular day of the week, even clothing. Something that recreates the same images that, in the past, were the occasional frame of his provoking trauma.

After this explanation, typical of the *giallo* films, Professor Bardi suggests to Marcus that he reads a book on folklore: "Ghosts of Today and Legends of the Modern Age"

¹⁷⁶ The lullaby in *Profondo rosso* is Goblin's song *School at Night* (1975). In the film, this child's nursery rhyme functions as a murder carol for the victims.

by Amanda Righetti.¹⁷⁷ The first chapter, “The House of the Screaming Boy”, talks about a villa from which neighbours would hear a child’s lullaby.¹⁷⁸ Apparently, a murder had been committed there and after that event the place was considered haunted.¹⁷⁹ While wandering around the villa, Marcus notices something on a wall that has been covered with plaster. The close-up calls and directs the viewer’s attention to the wall. It takes the eye where it would not normally look. Goblin’s music reaches a crescendo while Daly, scratching the wall, finds a dreadful painting concealed underneath the plaster (Figure 49). Rendered in a childish way, the drawing depicts a man stabbed to death and a child holding a bloody knife (frame 01:27:46). The grotesque image, which vaguely recalls the primal scene from the opening credits, constitutes a fossil trace of incomprehensible histories. It suggests that the past it represents is not over, and invites Marcus to excavate the past, even at his own peril (Marks, 2000: 81).



Figure 49 – The mural in the screaming boy’s room – *Profondo rosso* (1975)

After Marcus leaves the room, a small portion of plaster falls from the wall, revealing the presence of a third person, next to the dying man. The mural is a fundamental recollection element which holds a “primarily visual relation to the originary event it represents” (*Ibid.* 83). Like a palimpsest, it encloses images which preserve histories of the past. Its function, then, can be compared to that of a *fossil* witness, “gradually

¹⁷⁷ For more about the conventions of the *giallo* films, please see chapter 2.

¹⁷⁸ The book proves to be a telltale sign in the Three Mothers trilogy. *Suspiria* (1977), *Inferno* (1980) and *La Terza madre* (2007) deal with a mysterious book which holds the secrets of a triumvirate of ancient and evil witches.

¹⁷⁹ For more about haunted houses and stigmatized spaces, please see chapter 4.

covered with sedimental layers” (*Ibid.* 84). The recollection image which emerges works as a powerful symbol, able to reinforce the narrative and depth of the story.

Misreading the drawing, Marcus does not realize that the murder includes a third person. This will become evident later in the investigation (Figure 50). Once the pianist enters the bedroom of the caretaker’s daughter, he notices a drawing hanging on the wall which is identical to the one in the house. “She’s a strange child. She likes the macabre,” says Rodi (the caretaker), giving an explanation for that odd illustration.¹⁸⁰ Marcus finds such a similarity between the two images impossible. The little girl says she reproduced the original drawing after seeing it at the Leonardo Da Vinci School, while she was cleaning up the archives. Inadvertently Olga drew the scene of the crime that the screaming boy witnessed when he was a child. However, she missed the the third clue –the third person- only visible in the original drawing (Figura 50).



Figure 50 – In the original drawing in Leonardo Da Vinci School a third person involved in the scene of the crime is visible – *Profondo rosso* (1975)

¹⁸⁰ Olga displays sadistic proclivities, sticking a pin through a lizard. This is an auteurist motif that appears in other Argento films, such as *Inferno* (1980), *Phenomena* (1985), *Opera* (1987) and *Trauma* (1993). The lizard has numerous symbolic meanings across cultures. This animal appeared in many myths and folk tales, assuming different connotations over time. Usually positive, its symbolic meaning is often associated with hopefulness, strength and wisdom. However, being a crawling animal, the lizard can be easily connected to snakes and reptiles in general, which conversely have negative connotations. To read more about lizard symbolism, please see *Lizard* by Greenberg (2003).

The drawing can be considered *radioactive*, a term that refers to the quality fossils (object-images) retain. Similarly to the auratic, fossils have in common a disturbing light: “in the fetish it is called aura, in the fossil radioactivity” (Marks, 2000: 81). The radioactivity of the drawing/object derives from the fact that it arouses further memories, “causing inert presences on the most recent layers of history themselves, to set off chains of associations that had been forgotten” (Marks, 2000: 91). For children who have experienced a trauma, the act of drawing is particularly significant in its ability to convey “the complexities of crisis, repressed memories, or unspoken feelings” (Malchiodi, 2001).

The childish drawing appears in the film four times: the first time in the opening credits, the second time in the mural in the abandoned house, the third time in Olga’s room and the final time in the Leonardo Da Vinci School. When Marcus finds the original copy in the archive, the signature immediately connects it to Carlo. However, Carlo is only a victim. He is a bystander to his mother’s insanity. After witnessing his father’s murder, he interiorized the scene of the crime and tried to externalize it through a visual language: drawing. A flashback shows what happened years earlier. Carlo’s father forced Marta to give up her acting career. After this event the woman became psychotic and her husband wanted to put her in a psychiatric hospital. Marta refused and in a moment of rage stabbed him. The man fell near to his young son Carlo, pulled the weapon out and dropped it onto the floor. The little boy picked up the knife and, internalizing this crucial moment, drew this event first on the wall and subsequently on paper. The drawing, then, preserves histories that should have remained unspoken. It reveals its own past, through remnant material traces of something that happened in reality. It follows that, in its way of radiating memories of the past, it can be considered a storytelling object revelatory of truth.

Carlo was with Marcus in the square when Helga was killed, so he could not have been the murderer. Recalling this moment, Marcus rushes into Helga’s apartment. Looking at the gruesome paintings lined up on the wall, he finally recalls the missing object. He realizes that what he perceived as an absence in the room was

actually a tangible presence: a mirror (Figure 10).¹⁸¹ This object represents the ultimate clue to solve the *giallo*. Its presence, in fact, is essential to identifying the killer. While walking through the hallway, immediately after Helga's murder, Marcus assumed that the face in the mirror was a painting. What he actually saw was the killer's reflection. Argento provides this revelation at the beginning; however, only a flashback at the end helps Marcus to recollect his memory and to uncover the truth. Fundamental in this case is the use of camera movements in relation to what the audience sees. Argento's strategy is to subvert the viewer's visual perception through quick sequences of images and misleading elements (Grainger, 2001: 115–116). As highlighted in chapter 4, the mirror is an object which, functioning in relation to what it reflects, alters the common sense of things. It "is a symbol of the imagination – or of consciousness – in its capacity to reflect the formal reality of the visible world" (Cirlot, 1993: 211). Its function is therefore deceptive. Similarly, the portraits on the wall constitute misleading devices, and perfect backdrops for the killer to hide in. The viewers see through Marcus's point of view and, missing the mirror, they get lost in their blurred perception.

Unlike Argento's earlier films, which mainly offered verbal explanations of the crimes, *Profondo rosso* provides visual details. In the form of a flashback, a slowed-down image of the first scene of the hallway of paintings shows the killer's reflection in the mirror (frame 02:01:37). Through this memory the image – a witness to forgotten histories – surfaces (Marks, 2000: 84). The mirror becomes a radioactive fossil in Marcus's mind. Misread at the beginning of the film, it is indeed a fundamental object, a repository of truth (Figure 51). It functions as a recollection device, able to develop images from itself: it emphasizes its witnessing qualities, leading Marcus to the solution of the case (Marks, 2000: 82).

¹⁸¹ Argento pays tribute to Clara Calamai. Her presence in the role of Martha, an ex-actress, allows Argento to make further intertextual references. The camera pans across a series of photos and portraits of her films, including Luchino Visconti's *Ossessione* (1943).



Figure 51 – Marcus realizes that what he wrongly perceived as a painting is actually a mirror – *Profondo rosso* (1975)

In many *giallo* films “objects of truth” initially hide the identity of the killer only to later reveal the secrets they contain. Every object, then, has to be considered an important piece of the puzzle. Once the detail is grasped it is put into efficacious relation to a specific event (the crime) and subject (the murderer). Thus, the missed and ignored detail (the mirror) reveals itself to be essential only through a series of connections established by signs. Signatures, then, set up relations which allow us to understand and decipher all things. “There are no resemblances without signatures. The world of similarity can only be a world of signs” (Foucault, 1966: 26). It follows that the knowledge of differences and similarities is based on identifying and deciphering signatures (*Ibidem*). In this attempt, Marcus fails. He misreads the image, remaining trapped in his puzzled perception, and so do we.

5.4.2. Decontextualization and meaning extension of objects

Violence and danger are everywhere in the modern world, and we constantly experience this peril in our daily life. To emphasize this evidence, and to elicit fear and distress in the audience, horror cinema often decontextualizes and manipulates everyday objects. As Powell suggests, “everyday domestic objects are deformed by exaggeration into superfluity or impractical discomfort, making strange the familiar. Each distortion agitates the viewer’s cognitive patterns” (Powell, 2005: 27). As a

consequence of this, the comfortable and reassuring become threatening and dangerous, assuming unusual connotations and symbolic images in the viewer's mind.

With regard to this, many of Argento's films present ordinary things as unusual spectres of death. The defamiliarization of objects generates meaning extensions which create new symbols of terror. Fountain pens (*Non ho sonno*, 2001), coat hooks (*Opera*, 1987), necklaces (*Profondo rosso*, 1975) and so on assume new connotations, suggesting the possibility of converting household utensils into weapons of death (Koven, 2006: 74). In an interview on Blue Underground's *Profondo rosso* DVD, Argento's co-writer Bernardino Zapponi¹⁸² explains how the use of everyday objects and common settings can affect the viewer:

We started to write the story, looking for all the essential elements that would be scary. For example, if someone gets shot by a gun, there are very few people that can relate to that sensation or experience, but if we stick someone's head in the middle of boiling water, it's a sensation that everyone's had – almost everyone has burnt themselves with hot water. For example, when someone bumps into a sharp corner, it's a sensation that everyone's experienced.

These words affirm a new sensibility in the audience's response. As will be further examined in chapter 6, the 1970s saw vast changes in horror productions. New shapes of terror took place. The use of modern settings and ordinary objects became popular, distressing the audience in a more effective way. These new forms of fear emphasized the presence of danger in familiar spaces. The house, for instance, was often represented as a threatening cage, suggesting an association between the home and the grave. Similarly, everyday objects were defamiliarized from their usual contexts, embodying ominous menaces of death.

We have all experienced dangers in our homes: stumbling on a stair, perhaps, or being burned by hot water. The sight of similar accidents in horror films recalls the

¹⁸² Bernardino Zapponi was mostly famous for his collaborations with Fellini. His first remarkable screenplay for Fellini was *Tre passi nel delirio* (1968), part of the *Toby Dammit* sequence. This was followed by other great successes such as *Satyricon* (1969) and *Roma* (1972).

dangers of everyday life and, for this reason, is particularly effective at provoking an emotional response. Many sequences in *Profondo rosso* are extremely realistic, evoking a deep sense of fear and distress. An example is the scene of Amanda Righetti's death (sequence 01:04:44 – 01:05:25). Trying to escape from a violent killer, Amanda manages to find refuge in the bathroom. The murderer reaches the woman. He knocks her head against the wall, fills the tub and dunks her head in the hot water. The shocking effects of the boiling water are accentuated by a close-up which shows the red burnt flesh of Amanda's face.¹⁸³

Another peculiar scene, which features hidden perils in the house, is that of Professor Giordani's murder (sequence 01:34:50 – 01:35:46). The gloved killer comes up from behind the curtain and attacks his victim. He repeatedly smashes Giordani's head against several sharp surfaces: first the fireplace and then the corner of the wooden desk (Figure 52). In this case, the furniture is defamiliarized. Its ordinary meaning is extended to a new symbolic one, which transforms the moment of death into a more realistic and impressive event. The sequence, shot from the killer's point of view, shows an extreme close-up of Giordani's bleeding mouth, emphasizing the physical violence inflicted on his body. Another shot focuses on the gleaming knife plunged in the professor's neck. This scene is connected to an earlier one, when Marcus associated the act of playing the piano with the act of bashing his father's teeth. Apparently, Marcus's psychiatrist once explained to him that striking the keys on the piano was an emblematic way to release the hatred of his father.

Symbolic oral trauma appears in many of Argento's productions. In *Tenebre* (1982), for instance, the protagonist recalls a moment of his youth when he was orally violated by a woman wearing a red stiletto heel (Figure 53)¹⁸⁴; in *Non ho sonno* (2001) the young murderer repeatedly smashes an oboe into his friend's mother's mouth (Figure 54). All these objects (heels, musical instruments, furniture, and so on), which

¹⁸³ This shot alludes to a previous one, which introduced Marcus being scalded by the coffee machine in a bar.

¹⁸⁴ The red stiletto is a stereotypical fetish object which recalls sexuality. Associated with the feminine sex, this object is used in this context as a penetrative instrument. In other words, its fetishistic connotation is extended to the form of a penis substitute.

symbolically represent the phallus and the act of penetration, are decontextualized, becoming lethal weapons of death.



Figure 52 *Profondo rosso* (1975) Figure 53 *Tenebre* (1982) Figure 54 *Non ho sonno* (2001)
Three moments of oral violation with decontextualized objects

Horror films often substitute “sexuality with violence as a primary source of pleasure” (Halberstam, 1995: 155). This occurs through the use of objects which, associated with sexuality, make reference to male and female sexual organs. “Knives and needles, like teeth ... are personal extensions of the body that bring attacker and attacked into primitive animalistic embrace” (Clover, 1995: 198). In other words, as discussed already in chapter 2, weapons, daggers and sharp objects in general have a phallic symbolism, suggesting the masculine penetrating the feminine. A slasher sequence (00:36:55 – 00:36:31) in Bava’s *Reazione a catena* (1971), for instance, introduces an example of double penetration.¹⁸⁵ A loving couple is stabbed to death with a spear (Figure 55). In this context, the phallic quality of the penetrative weapon merges with the physical one of the canonic sexual intercourse. Interesting in this scene is the use of the camera, which follows the spear going through the bottom of the bed, while the blood flows from the lifeless corpses.

¹⁸⁵ Steve Miner pays homage to Bava by producing a similar scene in his film *Friday 13th Part 2* (1981).



Figure 55 – The double penetration in *Reazione a catena* (1971)

These examples demonstrate how horror cinema decontextualizes and extends the common meaning of objects. This process generates new shapes of terror, which, once internalized, appeal to the unconscious, creating effective metaphors of fear. What results is a feeling of uncanniness, which, originating from the new connotations we associate with these objects, affects us in a more successful way.

Conclusion

As highlighted in relation to spaces in chapter 4, objects do not retain uncanny qualities. However, some of them elicit negative emotions: they emanate an inexplicable sense of uncanniness. In order to develop this argument, this work has focused on concepts such as the auratic and fossils. After taking into consideration the definition of objects as metaphors of fear, I have investigated the effects objects can elicit in the viewer's mind. As evinced by my investigation, some of them retain *auratic* qualities that are difficult to explain from a cognitive point of view. Invested with a mysterious aura which is resonant of the past, they incite "us to memory without ever bringing memory back completely" (Marks, 2000: 81). What results is a feeling of uncanniness which suspends our cognition and understanding of things. With regard

to this, the analysis of *Lisa e il diavolo* by Bava has been useful in developing the comprehension of this concept and exploring the psychic dynamics *auratic* objects initiate in the human mind.

Similar to the *auratic* are *radioactive fossils*: silent witnesses to unspoken histories of the past. Argento's *Profondo rosso* has provided numerous examples of fossils in the form of recollection images. Embodying different pasts, these objects function as essential memory devices. They can revive repressed events, enacting a mechanism of multisensory remembering. Thus, the protagonist's experience becomes a backward revelatory journey through object-images which lead him to the resolution of the case. The meaning of objects slowly surfaces, revealing the hidden truth of an unspeakable past.

Another interesting aspect brought to light through the analysis of *Profondo rosso* is that of decontextualized objects. It is due to the implications objects have in real life that they can carry uncanny connotations. The uncanniness, in fact, as previously mentioned, is not a quality of the objects themselves. It derives, instead, from their associations in the viewer's mind. The defamiliarization from usual contexts creates new symbols of horror which suspend and subvert the original meanings of all things. Hence, new metaphors of fear derive, assuming new functions in the viewer's mind. By focusing on the development and circulation of objects in the horror genre, this work has aimed at exploring old and new metaphors of fear. Interpreting signatures and going over appearances, we will never see objects as we did before.

CHAPTER 6

HORRIFIC IDENTITIES

I am especially interested in movie stories that focus on one person: if I could, I would only tell these stories. What interests me is the fear experienced by a person alone in their room. It is then that everything around him starts to move menacingly around, and we realize that the only true 'monsters' are the ones we carry in ourselves. Alas, the marketplace demands terrible papier-mâché creatures, or the vampire with his sharp fangs, rising from his casket.

M. Bava (*Positif*, 1971)

Introduction

Designed to elicit strong emotional reactions, the horror genre draws from everyday fears and anxieties, assuming different connotations and shapes over time. "Every change in film history implies a change in its address to the spectator, and each period constructs its spectator in a new way" (Gunning, 1990: 61). "This evolution runs parallel to the evolution of the medium as a whole", but, above all, it runs parallel to the changes in society (Perron, 2009: 41). Tastes and sensibilities are, in fact, subject to a continual process of transformation in respect to the social background. The cinema industry, aware of this, adopts new modes of address, which seem gradually shaped towards the viewer's gratification (*Ibidem*). Thus, new techniques, narrative ideas, film technologies, special effects and shapes of horror take place in response to the viewers' demands. A fundamental period of transition between two different perspectives of horror in Italy – gothic and modern – is identifiable in the 1970s. This period is crucial

in the history of Italian horror cinema, in terms of novelties and evolutions. This study will observe these changes, mainly focusing on the analysis of roles and identities in Italian horror films from the late 1950s until the 1980s. This investigation will allow us to delineate a variety of monstrous figures that circulate in the genre, undergoing evolutions over time.

My analysis will start by taking into consideration the definition of monstrosity as delineated by Noël Carroll (1990). To understand what he means by the monstrous and art horror, I will use concepts such as otherness, abjection and interstitiality. After these preliminary considerations, I will move a step further, including other kinds of monstrosity which have not been included in Carroll's categories. With regard to this, Charles Derry (1977) and Brigid Cherry's (2009) works will be helpful in delineating new shapes and categories of horrific identities, which will provide my study with a more exhaustive frame. In the last part of this chapter, by referring to the concepts of otherness and the double, I will investigate how subtle the boundary between monsters and victims is. In the 1970s in particular, Italian horror productions featured victims who became monsters in turn. Observations on this argument will bring out the interrelations of "I" and "non-I", of "self" and "other", as inseparable parts of the construction of personality. Identity is not immutable, but a process of growth that is never completely accomplished. Thus, monsters and victims will be interpreted as two faces of the same individual.

6.1 Framing monsters

They [the monsters] are un-natural relative to a culture's conceptual scheme of nature. They do not fit the scheme; they violate it ... monsters are in a certain sense challenges to the foundations of a culture's way of thinking.

N. Carroll, 1990: 34

A key concept to understand and define the horrific in monsters is the notion of otherness. In the realm of otherness, normality and monstrosity come into conflict, and it is the relationship between these two realities "that constitutes the essential subject of the horror film" (Wood, 2002: 31). As Hutchings suggests, "a horror film deals with notions of the other because that is what horror films do, and if a film is not doing this in some way, then it is probably not a horror film at all" (Hutchings, 2004: 102). Thus, one could say that horror could not exist without otherness. As delineated in chapter 3, different shapes of otherness can be distinguished. All of them represent a threat to normality, creating, for this reason, a sense of fear and bewilderment in the viewer's mind. The most obvious visual representation of otherness, in the horrific panorama, is the figure of the monster, which assumes different connotations in different instances. The horror genre develops in parallel with the spirit of the time and its conventions. It follows that the monster, in its national representation, embodies "a certain cultural moment – of a time, a feeling, and a place" (Cohen, 1996: 2). Thus a unique and immutable representation of monstrosity is impossible to identify.

In *Dark Dreams* (1977) Charles Derry distinguishes three categories of the contemporary horror genre: horror of personality, horror of the demonic and horror of Armageddon. Each one of these groups is represented by a specific kind of monster. The first refers to psychologically disturbed humans – in other words, those individuals that Russel defines as deviant. Films such as *Il rosso segno della follia* and *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo*, both released in 1970, can be included in this category.

The second group comprises supernatural entities such as witches, demons and vampires. Italian horror directors have drawn extensively from fantastic and supernatural archives. With regard to this, exemplary representations of these typologies of monsters can be found in films such as *La maschera del demonio* (1960), *Demoni* (1985) and *Wurdulak* (1963). The last category, horror of Armageddon, refers to forces or creatures that are capable of destroying the world. *Caltiki - il mostro immortale*, released in 1959, can be included in this group.

Very schematic and simple, Derry's categories do not encompass all of the films released during the decades I will analyse (1960s–80s). If we take into consideration all the sequels¹⁸⁶, remakes and influences which have affected the genre, his categorization must be considered incomplete. All of this implies that categorizations cannot be limited to a reductive number of groups. In fact, being constantly subject to changes, they undergo evolutions over time and so do typologies of monsters. Despite this, in her guidebook *Horror* (2009), Brigid Cherry offers a more comprehensive overview of horror films' categories. She identifies a variety of subgenres which cover different stages of evolution, from horror's origins up to more recent developments: gothic (Freda's *Lo spettro*, 1963), supernatural (Bava's *Operazione paura*, 1966), occult (Argento's *Suspiria*, 1977), psychological horror (Argento's *Profondo rosso*, 1975), monster films (Freda's *Caltiki - il mostro immortale*, 1959), slasher (Bava's *Reazione a catena*, 1971), body horror (*Tenebre*, 1982), gore (Fulci's *...E tu vivrai nel terrore! L'aldilà*) and films of exploitation (Deodato's *Cannibal Holocaust*, 1980). In order to delve into these categories my attention will focus on some key concepts of monstrosity, including abjection and interstitiality.

¹⁸⁶ Sequels heighten the interest of the audience. By returning, the monster satisfies "audience expectations about the impossibility of narrative resolution" (Lake/Crane, 1994: 10).

6.1.1 Interstitial monsters

Carroll (1990) correlates horror with the presence of monsters. He suggests that the appeal of the genre derives from the “transgressiveness of its monsters”, which, perceived as repulsive because of their abnormal nature, constrain attention and elicit curiosity (Carroll, 1990: 195). “As Hume noted of tragedy, the source of our aesthetic pleasure in such examples of horror is primarily the whole structure of the narrative in which, of course, the apparition of the horrific being is essential and a facilitating part” (*Ibid.* 190). Crossing the boundaries of the natural and the conventional, horror, with its iconic features of anomalies, distortions and deformities, creates interest, fascinating and distressing the audience at the same time.

However, Carroll also argues that not all monsters signify horror. Fairy tales and science fiction, for instance, contain monsters, but they cannot be considered as horrific, because they are not supposed to art-horrify.¹⁸⁷ Carroll considers horror monsters to be all those creatures that, crossing the natural order of things, are in a constant transgression with their surrounding world (Freda’s *Caltiki - il mostro immortale*, 1959). When they are “a harmonious part of their surrounding universe the fiction leaves horror and enters the realm of the fairy tale” (*Ibid.* 16). Therefore, while in myths and fairy tales monsters are ordinary creatures in an extraordinary world, in horror films they are extraordinary entities in an ordinary world (*Ibidem*).

An essential quality that identifies these monsters as horrific is that of impurity. Carroll (1990) defines the notion of impurity by drawing from Mary Douglas’s work *Purity and Danger* (1966). According to the British anthropologist the concept of boundaries allows us to construct order by defining binaries such as “within and without, above and below, with and against” (Douglas, 1966: 4). The break of these binaries generates forms which are impure and interstitial. With the term interstitial,

¹⁸⁷ Carroll (1990) distinguishes natural horror from art-horror. While the former is an emotion felt in response to real horror events, the latter refers to emotive reactions to fictional representations. Individuals cannot be art-horrified by entities that they do not consider believable and threatening. Thus, in order to feel this kind of feeling, they need to entertain monsters as believable in their thoughts.

Carroll denotes the “in-betweenness” of categories. In other words, he refers to the “mixture of what is normally distinct”, the unclear and not defined (Carroll, 1990: 33).

The horror genre is littered with creatures which are “categorically interstitial, [...] contradictory, incomplete or formless” (*Ibid.* 34). It deals with figures which either belong to a category mistake or which involve “a conflict between two or more standing cultural categories” (*Ibid.* 43). They confound species, transgressing the norms and crossing the boundaries between normal and abnormal, natural and unnatural. The concepts of unnatural and abnormal derive from the culture’s conceptual scheme of their opposites. Any object or being which transgresses an ordinary scheme – in other words, a scheme in which the object or being is commonly recognized as appropriate and safe – is considered to be unnatural. Monsters, identified as outside of the natural order, violate and subvert common knowledge, sense and morality, becoming interstitial and unnatural.

Some categories of monsters encompass oppositions such as life/death (Bava’s *La goccia d’acqua*, 1963), human/inhuman (Bava’s *Terrore nello spazio*, 1965) and animate/inanimate (Argento’s *Profondo rosso*, 1975). Werewolves, for instance, have the characteristics of both men and animals, while vampires (Bava’s *Wurdulak*, 1963), ghosts (Bava’s *Operazione paura*, 1966) and zombies (Fulci’s *Paura nella città dei morti viventi*, 1980) are neither alive nor dead, but undead. My investigation of the typology of monsters will start by considering the figure of the vampire. This study will highlight innovations in style and narrative, which will represent a landmark in the national Italian production.

6.1.2 Lust for blood and revenge: diabolic women

“Rising from the grave to a potentially immortal existence, the vampire perfectly epitomises the kind of categorical contradiction described by Carroll” (Fahy, 2010: 89). As mentioned in the second chapter of this work, the myth of the vampire finds its roots in man’s written and oral history. Prevalent in almost every culture, this figure

was invested with a sense of universality which spread in a variety of contexts: literature, poetry, cinema, etc. Cinema, drawing from folklore and literature, epitomized the myth as an icon of horror. The vampire as archetype, as superstition and as possible reality became, indeed, one of the most exploited characters of the genre (Silver, 1997: 19).

I Vampiri by Freda was released in 1957. The film is of historical importance for the Italian film industry and the horror genre in general. Far from being a film of ordinary vampires, it introduces evil without necessarily appealing to fantasy or the supernatural. Freda conveys horror through simple and modern devices that involve neither monsters¹⁸⁸ nor real vampires. The culprit is here a product of the modern world: a woman who wants to keep her beauty and youth forever, at any cost. From this representation, it is evident that Freda's moral vision of evil is rooted in society. According to him, the real monsters have to be found among ordinary people. His idea of horror, in fact, mainly derives from the sense of guilt which overwhelms humankind. Freda's protagonists are therefore condemned by the monstrosity of their souls to a horrible end, and in his films old age and death are interpreted as divine punishments from which humans want instinctively and vainly to escape.

Many sequences in the film recall *Frankenstein* by Shelley (1818).¹⁸⁹ However, the foremost source of inspiration for the film is the Countess Bathory: a seventeenth-century Hungarian noblewoman who apparently murdered over 650 women in a brutal and cruel way (McNally, 1994: 128). The countess believed that the blood of young virgins could keep her young forever, and the circulation of stories about her blood lust gave birth to her legend (Abbot, 2002: 19). The reworking of the Bathory legend is modernized using a juxtaposition of styles, protagonists and actions. *I Vampiri* demonstrates how "ancient myths and religious rituals could still prevail and [possess] influence in a seemingly agnostic contemporary society" (Black, 1999: 41). The discovery of women bleeding to death causes rumours to circulate about the existence of a vampire. "Vampire Continues His Killing Spree, Police Investigation

¹⁸⁸ In this case the term "monsters" refers to Carroll's concept of monstrosity.

¹⁸⁹ The first edition of *Frankenstein* was published anonymously in London in 1818. Shelley's name appeared only a few years later, on the second edition, published in France in 1823.

Yields No Clues. Is the Monster Unstoppable?" Having appeared in local newspapers, this headline introduces the notion of vampirism, but, in this case, is totally externalized by its conventional gothic context (Abbott, 2002: 20). As Carole Jenks (1992) notes, *I Vampiri* is

a film so isolated generically, with no national tradition to back it up and predating the Anglo-American horror revival, that it can only be accounted for as a final step from melodrama into overt Gothic, for the purpose of enabling a new female figure to be added to the cinematic repertoire (Jenks, 1992: 163–180).

The film, in fact, rejects the supernatural monsters typical of Hammer productions, portraying modern and realistic features. Crime-drama, romance and *giallo* merge, bringing substantial innovation to the conventionalized narrative of vampirism. The vampire myth and the gothic clichés are thus reinvented and modernized, anticipating the contemporary theme of serial killers and family murders.

A new character, innovative for those times, is created. Unlike the vampire archetypes, the main protagonist does not suck blood by biting her victims directly; instead she drains their vital energy through a modern device. A scientist kills women and extracts their blood in order to help Marguerite Du Grand to satisfy her perverted desire to keep herself young. The consequences of vampirism are showcased through special effects, which transform the old and creepy Marguerite into the young and beautiful Giselle. The duchess is reinvigorated with youth and beauty when Lorette's blood enters her veins. Through artificial lighting devices, her hair becomes dark and her skin lifts, making the wrinkles disappear. However, the most effective shots show the opposite process. The experiments have a shorter duration and Giselle needs more blood to keep herself young. She ages rapidly, her body becoming decrepit as she transforms into the old duchess (Figure 56). This is a focal sequence which lets viewers understand that Giselle and Duchess Marguerite Du Grand are the same person. In this moment of revelation, Marguerite confesses her real identity to Fontaine, explaining that she acts in this wicked way because she is driven by her love for Pierre Lantin.



Figure 56 – “I murder girls to be young. Murder anybody whose blood I can use so I am not dried out ... And all for love, love for Pierre and his father!”
Duchess Du Grand – *I Vampiri* (1956)

To highlight Marguerite’s transformation, the red light is replaced by a green one. This creates an effect which ensures the make-up is easily visible and, consequently, the passage from a young, beautiful face to a creepy and wrinkled one is more evident (Lucas, 2007). Despite these fundamental innovations in special effects and narrative techniques, the main component of novelty in the film is the fact that a woman is the main focus of the plot. In opposition to the classic film paradigm of a mad scientist, *I Vampiri* features a female character: the countess Marguerite Du Grand.¹⁹⁰ This is a peculiarity of the Italian horror genre. Charged by a strong visual power, the female protagonist achieves a central position in her provocative role of monster. The female monster is something rare in the pre-1960s foreign horror cinematic panorama. Conversely, the Italian horror genre makes it a central point of the narration.

Films released between the 1960s and the late 1970s featured a significant number of female monsters. As anticipated in chapter 2, this phenomenon has often been associated with an adverse reaction against the changes women were undergoing in Italy in those years. Their role in the society, subordinate until the end of the 1950s, changed dramatically in the following years. This provoked a total break with the old

¹⁹⁰ Melodrama was a fundamental influence on the first Italian horror productions. The image of the femme fatale, invested with sinister attributes, provided a source of inspiration for the monstrous-feminine.

traditional rules and resulted in a more liberal lifestyle. Women gained freedom, power and rights that had previously been denied to them.¹⁹¹

Their growing predominance and emancipation was seen as a menacing force by the patriarchal system. These concerns found expression in a variety of shapes in the Italian horror genre. Women were often portrayed as monstrous figures. “From vampires to witches, from femme fatale to madwomen”, female protagonists became the driving forces behind all sinister events (Frazzini, 2004: 59 my plural). Even when the killer was a man, there was always a woman behind his actions. As Creed suggests, “the presence of the monstrous-feminine in the popular horror film speaks to us more about male fears than about feminine desire or feminine subjectivity” (Creed, 1993: 7). In other words, it represents the misogynistic projection of male anxieties in response to the new and emancipated role of women in society.

In a standard male-dominated society, the feminine is perceived as other and monstrous. Thus, according to Creed, time after time, horror films show the female as castrating mother, witch or demon. In this sense, *I Vampiri* by Freda introduces the monstrous-feminine, emphasizing the duplicity and ambiguity of women. The duchess acts as a femme fatale who wants to manipulate men through her seductive power. This dualism and the dichotomy of good and evil are even more evident in Bava’s film *La maschera del demonio* (1960). In order to develop this study, the following pages will analyse the ambiguity of the monstrous-feminine in Bava’s masterpiece.

¹⁹¹ The first significant national demonstration over the abortion issue took place in Rome on 6 December 1975. On 3 April 1976, over 50,000 women from all over Italy marched through the streets of Rome demanding the right to abortion.

6.1.3 Behind the mask (*La maschera del demonio*, 1960)

With a monstrous vampire/witch who returns to life, determined to get revenge, Mario Bava sets the conventions of the Italian gothic genre. *La maschera del demonio* (1960) is Bava's first fully directed film and, indeed, one of his most popular productions. The plot, loosely based on Nikolai Gogol's *Vij* (Вий, 1835), is nonetheless distinct from the original text.¹⁹² As Alberto Pezzotta suggests, Bava was inspired not so much by Gogol's story as by those peculiar details that are able to create striking atmospheres (Pezzotta, 1995: 21). In other words, he was interested in all of those elements which, apparently marginal, were the matrix of Gogol's horrific aesthetic, including the wolves' howling, the wailing of wind in the pipe organ, the abandoned church and the drop of blood on the witch's face (Renna, 2004: 4–5).¹⁹³

Bava was passionate about Russian literature and, in line with the *Gogolian* tradition, he featured the Moldavian setting. However, other aspects of the narration were subject to innovation.¹⁹⁴ The theme of the feminine double, for instance, which is only mentioned in Gogol's *Vij*, is more explicit in *La maschera del demonio*.¹⁹⁵ The same happens with the allusion to romantic motives such as the love story between Asa and Gorobec, the theme of vampirism and the sense of predestination which pervades the whole film. Set in early seventeenth-century Moldavia, the film opens with a gruesome scene, which introduces Princess Asa and her lover Javuto as they are being sentenced to death following accusations of witchcraft and vampirism. Before being burnt at the

¹⁹² Bava often drew inspiration from characters and stories from literary archives. Along with Edgar Allan Poe, Nikolai Gogol was a major influence on Bava's supernatural productions.

¹⁹³ "The night was infernal. Far off a whole pack of wolves howled. And even the dogs' barking was somehow frightening" (Gogol, 1998: n.p.).

¹⁹⁴ In the late 1950s the Slavic-Italian school favoured an outstanding circulation of Russian books in Italy. This allowed many horror directors to take inspiration from classic Russian literature. Influences can be traced in the works of directors such as Riccardo Freda (*Aquila nera*, 1951), Mario Bava (*La maschera del demonio*, 1960), Nunzio Malasomma (*Il diavolo bianco*, 1947) and Alberto Lattuada (*Il cappotto*, 1952; *La tempesta*, 1958; *La steppa*, 1962; *Cuore di cane*, 1976) (Renna, 2004: 1,2).

¹⁹⁵ With regard to the doppelgänger motive, *La maschera del demonio* seems closer to Gogol's *Dead Souls* (Мёртвые души, *Myortvyje dushi*, 1842) or Dostoyevsky's *The Double* (Двойник, *Dvojnijk*, 1846) than to the *Gogolian Vij*.

stake, Asa metes out her revenge and casts a curse on her brother (the Grand Inquisitor) and his descendants (Clarens, 1967: 192).

In the name of Satan, I place a curse upon you. Go ahead. Killing doesn't mean it's over, because you will never escape my curse or those of Satan. [...] My revenge will strike down you and your accursed house and in the blood you give your sons and his son and his sons will continue to live immortal. They will restore to me the life that you will take from me. And I shall return to torment you and to destroy throughout the nights of time.

According to tribal beliefs, the curse placed before dying is supposed to be extremely powerful, because "the curser's vital energy goes into the curse" (Joshi, 2007: 130). With her words, Princess Asa promises to return and live again through the bodies of her descendants.

Horror is strictly connected to the flesh and the skin, and from the opening sequence, the body achieves centrality in the film. If the body is interpreted as an object, then the identity of the subject resides in the face. The face plays a very important role in the narration. It is the part of the body that gives identity, and throughout the film it is the part that is most subject to torture. The violence in the film is always inflicted on the face.¹⁹⁶ Close-ups on Asa's face emphasize the dreadful moment of the execution. A subjective shot shows the mask from behind, approaching closer to the witch's face. Immediately after, the camera reveals the mask from the front (Figure 57).

¹⁹⁶ Torture is mainly inflicted on the face. After being vampirized by Asa, Dr Kruvajan is submitted to a ritual exorcism. To ensure peace and to protect his body from further agony, his left eye is pierced with a coffin nail. The piercing of the left eye of a servant of Satan was required to destroy a witch or their undead accomplices. This ritual has a symbolic meaning. According to ancient superstitions, the expression "evil eyes" is often connected with curses or sinister forebodings (Joshi, 2007: 130). By piercing the eye, the evil is defeated.



Figure 57 – Asa’s face is hammered with the mask of Satan
La maschera del demonio (1960)

The witch is tied to the stake. A group of hooded men, holding flaming torches, surround the woman, while an executioner repeatedly hammers the mask of Satan on her face. Asa dies when the spikes of the mask penetrate her brain, spurting blood everywhere (Creed, 1993: 76). This gory sequence marked the cult vampire cinema of the 1960s.¹⁹⁷ The images in the opening scene constitute a perfect example of what Benjamin (1969) calls the “physical shock effect” (Benjamin, 1969: 238). The viewing of a film is a tactile experience. Despite being immaterial, the images on the screen have a physical and corporeal effect on the viewer’s mind. They assault the spectator, “without leaving any space for reflection” (Shaviro, 1993: 49). In this sense, the experience of such excessive visual graphics “disrupts the traditional, historical sedimented habits and expectations of vision”, shocking the viewer in a totally sensorial way (*Ibid.* 34).

Two hundred years later, after Asa’s death, as they are riding through the Moldavian wilderness on their way to a medical conference, Dr Kruvajan and his assistant Dr Gorobec stop in the vicinity of the Vajda chapel, because their carriage has a broken wheel.¹⁹⁸ Wandering around, the doctors discover an ancient crypt, where the remains of Princess Asa are preserved. In attempting to fight off a bat, Kruvajan

¹⁹⁷ The presence of gore is evident throughout the film, for example in the violence perpetrated against Asa’s body, Vajda’s burned corpse, Kruvajan’s pierced eye and Asa’s skeletal body.

¹⁹⁸ A stone crucifix is positioned above the coffin to prevent Princess Asa from resurrecting and continuing her vengeance. Ancient legends, in fact, argue that the view of a cross may repel the forces of evil. For this reason, witches and vampires were buried in coffins which always had a view of a cross. To read more about these kinds of superstitions, see Guiley (2004: 89).

accidentally breaks the cross and the glass pane on the coffin, injuring his hand.¹⁹⁹ Curious and deeply fascinated by the Vajda legend, Kruvajan removes the metal mask from the witch's face. He admires in surprise how, despite the pierces, wounds and insects crawling on her skulled face, Asa's body is still intact after two centuries.

While Kruvajan and Gorobec return to the carriage, a close-up back in the crypt shows the blood dripping down onto the witch's face. Asa's body slowly resurrects. This sequence opens a visual rhetoric of abjection. The abject constitutes a consistent part of the film's horrific and monstrous content. Perfectly in line with the gothic tradition, Princess Asa resides in an abject place full of cobwebs, bats and insects. Her body, preserved in the family crypt, represents the absolute essence of the polluting abject:

a decaying body, lifeless, completely turned into dejection, blurred between the inanimate and the inorganic, a transitional swarming, inseparable lining of a human nature whose life is indistinguishable from the symbolic – the corpse represents the fundamental pollution (Kristeva, 1982: 109).

Each organ has a particular meaning and function. It is positioned in an appropriate site, in order to build up a complete human body (McCormack, 2008: 102). Thus, a dismembered body without organs is inhuman, and, in its incompleteness, it is impure and interstitial (*Ibid.* 103). With regard to this, the metamorphosis from the skeletal body to a newly fleshy one marks an essential point in terms of the abject and interstitiality. Bava develops Gogol's witch metamorphosis through mutation of the face (Figure 58).

¹⁹⁹ This unfortunate event is seen by the carriage driver as an ominous sign. "I prefer to meet face to face a hundred thousand French soldiers than meeting the witch," says the driver when Dr Kruvajan asks him to take a short cut through the Moldavian forest. The driver's reluctance to pass through the forest derives from the legendary superstition about Princess Asa. The camera glides smoothly through the haunting gothic landscapes. The Moldavian countryside, object of superstitions, is believed to be inhabited by supernatural forces and for this reason is stigmatized by the local population. For a further understanding of the concepts of abject places and stigmatization, please see chapter 4.



Figure 58 – Princess Asa’s unmasked face – *La maschera del demonio* (1960)

As Ursini suggests,

for many filmmakers the “fixed and dead” objects are the conventions of the genre. In a vampire film, the cobwebs, the creaking doors, the rubber bats flapping their wings at the end of all-too-visible strings can be suffocating restrictions and overused to the point of becoming laughable clichés. Bava’s tactic was a reliance on fresh rendering or novel manipulation of traditional images (Ursini, 1997: 95).

Bava rejects the static use of camera typical of the early gothic films of foreign production, and through skilful use of lights and camera movements makes objects seem alive. The use of a dissolve, for instance, emphasizes the passage from death to life, suggesting the presence of an invisible energy hidden behind the static human corpse. The image of the skull slowly fades, leaving space for a new rejuvenated face. The empty sockets refill, the skin reappears and the body, from being dead and decomposed, takes form [sequence 00:22:44 – 00:24:02].²⁰⁰ This vitality physically explodes: the stone tomb cracks and Asa returns to life (Figure 58).

Horror always hides and preserves a terrific beauty which attracts and repels at the same time. This ambivalence is the main focus of the narration and it finds form in the body of Asa, played by the British actress Barbara Steele. With Barbara Steele “Italian horror focused on the devastating effects of a sexually provocative witch/vampire woman on hapless masculinity” (quoted in Weiner, 2010: 22). As Lola

²⁰⁰ Eggs were used to achieve the effect of the eyeballs refilling the empty sockets.

Young (1996) suggests, female stars are often physically foregrounded and idealized, with emphasis on particular parts of the body (Young, 1996: 16). In this sense, Steele is set up as a fetish, representing the theme of the body and taboos in terms of violence and sexuality (MacCormack, 2002). Extreme close-ups on her eyes, lips and breast, for instance, emphasize her perverse beauty and erotic appeal. With regard to this, Hogan discusses the actress's roles as the dark and perverse seductress:

At the core of her appeal, inescapably, is her ability to express a tantalizing sort of evil, and a sexual ambivalence that is at once enticing and ghastly. She has come to personify – with more edge and clarity than any other genre star – the link between sex and death, as well as the culture's paradoxical attitude toward female sexuality, a potent force that is feared as strongly as it is desired. Steel, in her many roles as sexual savior and succubus, represents the beauty we love to hate (Hogan, 1997: 64).

In other words, Steele, in the double role of Asa/Katia, epitomizes one of the most ambivalent representations of the sexualized female demon, whose "sexuality is constructed as good/bad, pure/perverse attributes [...] reinforcing the virgin/whore myth of woman" (Hayward, 2000: 164). Veiled by a devilish aura, Asa seems endowed with magnetic power. Depicted as a sexual creature with sadistic undertones, she hypnotizes Kruvajan through her perverse beauty and gaze (Figure 59).

Her face is abhorrent – a glowering, hole-pocked death's head ... She is utterly repugnant, a living corpse, yet Bava shows us what Kruvajan [a doctor whom she seduces to do her bidding] sees, the attraction that drew him irresistibly nearer and nearer to his doom. Below her ghastly visage is a voluptuous body, breasts heaving with expectancy, her long nails scratching at the jagged stonework of her obliterated resting place. "Kiss me," she commands (Lucas, 2007: 320).



Figure 59 – Asa’s hypnotic gaze captures Dr Kruvajan – *La maschera del demonio* (1960)

The connection between body and soul is found in the eyes, often emphasized by a special light that leaves the rest of the face under a full shadow. The gaze is indeed the real tragic element in Bava’s films. It can lead to perdition as well as salvation. Through her irresistible gaze, Asa captures doctor Kruvajan: “Look into my eyes, Kruvajan! Embrace me! You will die, but I can bring you pleasure mortals cannot know!” This sequence [00:42:00 – 00:43:12] could be interpreted as a gothic parody of the fairy tale *The Sleeping Beauty*.²⁰¹ Doctor Kruvajan reawakens the princess with a kiss. Looking straight into her eyes, he is bewitched, hypnotically entering into a dream-like state from which he will never awaken. Hypnotized by her perverse beauty, he revives her entombed corpse, and, in the act of kissing her, he seals his destiny forever.

Through Asa, the film “seems to imply that lurking behind all women is the otherness, this archaic power” (Hutchings, 2004: 67). In the horror genre, the woman as representation “signifies castration, inducing voyeuristic or fetishistic mechanisms to circumvent her threat” (Mulvey, 1975: 493). In *La maschera del demonio*, Asa brings to mind Freud’s castration anxiety (Paszyk, 2009: 81). The torture inflicted on her body, in the opening sequences of the film, can be interpreted as “attempts to make her castrated” (Hutchings, 2004: 67). Men try to master her, wounding her face and

²⁰¹ *The Sleeping Beauty* was first published by Charles Perrault in *Histoires ou contes du temps passé* in 1697. Perrault actually revised and transformed Giambattista Basile’s tale *Sole, Luna e Talia* (1636). The main difference in the plots is that in Basile’s original tale, the Prince reawakens Beauty not with a kiss but with a sexual initiation, from which a pregnancy results. For more about fairytales and their influence on the horror genre, please see chapter 1.

marking her body with the sign of Satan. However, she reveals herself to be stronger than the masculine forces: "Her resistance ... reveals a non-phallic potency that ... is ultimately the power of the archaic mother" (*Ibid.* 67).²⁰²

By adopting both narrative and editing devices, Bava builds up ambiguity throughout the film. The physical doubling, for instance, reinforcing the supernatural motive in the film, creates confusion, encouraging misreading and enhancing suspense. For the dual role of Asa/Katia, Bava chose the British actress Barbara Steele, who, in her erotic performance, became the iconic face of the Italian gothic tradition.²⁰³ In the film, Steele plays two opposing protagonists: the virginal and vulnerable Katia and the seductive and provocative witch/vampire Asa.

Bava confuses their identities. Asa and Katia, in fact, despite being opposite in character and behaviours, are depicted with the same physical appearance and for this reason are barely distinguishable. The viewers are compelled to identify the two protagonists and distinguish, therefore, between purity and danger. The first confusion of characters is manifested in one of the early sequences of the film, when Katia appears standing on a hill, accompanied by two mastiffs (Figure 60). This shot disorients both heroes and viewers, suggesting that Katia might be the witch Asa, resurrected on earth two hundred years later. The confusion comes up again at the end of the film, when Asa pretends to be Katia, and the two women are confused for the second time.

²⁰² Due to its universal applicability, the *archaic mother* is one of the most important psychoanalytical concepts. She is a fundamental figure in the early stages of the Oedipus complex. To know more about this concept, please see Klein (1952).

²⁰³ Barbara Steele worked with some of the most popular directors at that time, including Freda (*L'orribile segreto del Dr Hitchcock*, 1962), Margheriti (*I lunghi capelli della morte*, 1964), Corman (*The Pit and the Pendulum*, 1961), Caiano (*Amanti d'oltretomba*, 1965) and Cronenberg (*Shivers*, 1975).



Figure 60 – Princess Katia with her mastiffs at the entrance of the mausoleum –
La maschera del demonio (1960)

This long-shot is suggestive of the macabre painting of the gothic era (Figure 60).²⁰⁴ Emphasized by the contrast of black and white and Bava's expressionistic use of camera, the fog and mist in the air give a perturbing aura of creepiness and unease to the atmosphere. Underneath the gloomy clouds, the silhouette of a cloaked woman appears, standing framed below the crumbled ruins of a church [frame 00:14:43]. A close-up confronts the viewers again with Steele's face. However, this time it won't be Asa, but the pure and virginal Katia instead.

If the role of Asa is mainly related to the concepts of abjection and interstitiality, the character of Katia seems more connected to the idea of the uncanny. Feelings of uncanniness, in fact, are persistent in her life. The girl is obsessed with the mysterious presence of Asa, whom she perceives everywhere. Everything in the house suggests Asa's ghostly aura, emanating a premonition of death. In particular, Katia is scared by an old portrait of Princess Asa in her house. "I have always been afraid of that painting," she says. "It seems as if it is always following me."²⁰⁵ Superstitions and in particular the fear of one's own portrait or photograph are universally developed in every culture (Frazer, 1973: 297–303).

This fear can be traced back to the primitive belief that the image of a man corresponds to his soul and for this reason could be damaged or destroyed by anyone who took possession of it. Some cultures believe that the end of a portrait, or the fact

²⁰⁴ To know more about Gothic architecture and paintings, see Tolman (2011).

²⁰⁵ To read more about doublings, masks and portraits, see Bettini (1991).

that it is in foreign hands, means death. According to animistic beliefs, the human soul is present in every representation of a human being.²⁰⁶ Thus, it is not difficult to understand that whoever takes possession of it can in some way damage it forever. In this case, the portrait itself seems to acquire power. Katia is obsessed by its presence. The portrait of Asa seems to possess life, emanating occult energies everywhere. "Something is alive about it. There is something mysterious in the eye," says Katia. Even the griffon in the painting seems to change position, turning from living to dead.

In *La maschera del demonio*, the traditional archetypes and mythological code of vampirism are manipulated. Asa does not suck blood; however, she has the ability to sap the vital energy out of her victims (Figure 61). In order to take her vengeance and ensure she becomes immortal, she conspires to drain Katia's life essence. In her attempt to do so, her lover Javutich helps by carrying Katia down to the crypt and laying her beside the witch. Asa grabs her arm, succeeding in breaking the curse of the mask (Humber, 2006: n.p.).



Figure 61 – "You will live in me." Asa and Katia – *La maschera del demonio* (1960)

In this sequence [01:16:37 - 01:17:04], Katia and Asa are depicted as being in competition with one another (Figure 61). All of this entails the disintegration of the female subject, pointing to rivalry, jealousy and aggression.

You didn't know you were born for this moment? You didn't know that your life has been consequeted to me by the Devil? ...

²⁰⁶ For more about animistic beliefs, please see chapter 1.

But you sensed it! You sensed it! Didn't you? That's why my portrait had a strange meaning to you! [...] You felt that your life and your body were mine! You felt like me because you were destined to become me ... a useless body without life. A love of a young man could have saved your life ... but I was stronger and now you will live such a beautiful life of evil and hate in me ...

(Asa's words to Katia)

Asa drains Katia's beauty and energy. Extreme close-ups allow the viewer to see in detail her face being rejuvenated, while Katia's becomes older. In order to achieve this effect, Bava used red-blue filters, already adopted in *I Vampiri* (1956).²⁰⁷ The wrinkles on Princess Asa's face were painted red. To make them disappear, Bava shone on them a light of the same colour. Thus, replacing the red light with a blue one created an effect which made the make-up easily visible and, consequently, made the passage from a young, beautiful face to a creepy and wrinkled one more evident (Lucas, 2007). Since the film was in black and white, the transformation was seamless.

Despite being influenced by classic Universal horror films of the 1930s and the British Hammer productions of the late 1950s, Bava took Italian gothic horror a step further. *La maschera del demonio*, in fact, employed a new visual style that hadn't been seen before. The visual excess and the intelligent use of camera movements give the film a peculiar aura of mystery and terror. The sequence at the beginning of the film, which shows the carriage ride in the Moldavian forest, is emblematic of this aura. The scene is presented in slow motion: an editing technique which suggests the supernatural and raises the fear level (Sipos, 2010: 127).

The mise-en-scène, the lighting and the diegetic sounds heavily emphasize the gothic and sinister mood. A few shots later, another notable use of slow motion presents Javutich driving Dr. Kruvajan in Vajda's carriage. The ghostly effect is the

²⁰⁷ To know more about this special effect by Mario Bava on *I vampiri* (1956), the viewing of this video is suggested: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DFVJdiH-XIE&feature=related>. The red filter effect was first employed by German cameraman Karl Struss in the 1925 silent *Ben-Hur* and in the 1931 version of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Red make-up and light shifts contribute to Jekyll's transformation into Hyde (Weaver, 2007: 137).

same. The tree branches move in the foreground and the eerie atmosphere intensifies, reinforced by the score, which heightens the dramatic sense of movement.

Due to the brutality of certain sequences and the violent scenes throughout the whole film, *La maschera del demonio* suffered censorship excisions in many countries.²⁰⁸ Shot in 1960, it was released, the same year, in a cut version. The sequence of the spiked mask hammered on the face of Princess Asa was so shocking that the American distributor A.I.P. banned the film for children under the age of 12, while in Britain it was first released only eight years later, in 1968. As Tim Burton commented, during an interview, “*Black Sunday* had lurid, vivid and stark images. That is what you want from a good horror movie” (Burton, 2005: 136). The excessive visual graphics, as well as the compelling eroticism of Asa’s body, became peculiar landmarks of the Italian gothic genre, marking the aesthetic of horror forever.

6.2 Victims and monsters Ambiguities

I say I am a man, but who is the other who hides in me?

A. Machen (1890)

“Whatever blurs the human frame, whatever disturbs the line between human and nonhuman, every unclear delineation between the not-us and the subject with constitutional integrity is horrific” (Lake, 1994: 35). The horror genre plays with ambiguities, extending their representational possibilities into a wide variety of forms. The complexity of protagonists in the horror genre is manifested by the ambiguous

²⁰⁸ The opening credits of *La maschera del demonio* (1960) warned the audience about the cruel images displayed in the film: “We feel a moral obligation to warn you that the picture you are about to see will shock you as no other film has. Therefore the producers recommend that it be seen only by those persons with mature minds.”

dualism which characterizes their roles and identities. In many horror films the first ambiguity derives from the gender characteristics, which are usually unclear. The killers are frequently depicted as indefinite figures, whose identity and sex are blurred and confused, or, to borrow Carroll's term, interstitial. The protagonists, therefore, are represented as being endowed with multiple personalities – as being a number of individuals acting as one.

In most horror films the role of the victim is often associated with women (or femininity) while that of monsters relates to men (or masculinity). In patriarchal societies, as Mulvey declares, "pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female" (Mulvey 1992: 27). Monsters, both males and females, usually appear masculine in dress and behaviour, while male victims are in part feminized. Also, their behaviour is often crossed. All of this suggests that gender is frequently connected to the functions the protagonists have in the films. In other words, as Rhodes argues, the main factor that determines the gender roles must be found in the level of evilness of the characters. Thus, gender roles do not depend on sex but derive from the monstrosity of the characters. "A figure is not a psycho-killer because he is a man; he is a man because he is a psycho-killer" (Rhodes, 2003: 173).

Behind these considerations is the gender-related preconception which sees males as the principal killers in horror films. The roles are often "classified according to the conventional binary opposition of sadistic male and helpless female passivity" (Shaviro, 1993: 49–50). In fact, the archetypal scenario of horror habitually represents male monsters and female victims. However, as indicated by a previous analysis (*La maschera del demonio*, 1960), in many cases women are depicted as agents of horror. Witches represent an interesting female horror paradigm in this regard.

Dressed in the iconic outfit of the killer – black hat, coat and gloves – women often blur their identity and gender. The opening sequence of Argento's *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo* (1970), for instance, introduces a figure dressed all in black. The outfit does not allow audiences to identify the gender of the protagonist. Thus, the viewer is forced to discover it by reading other clues: the character's actions, for instance, are a pivotal point to be considered. Genders and identities are crossed and unclear in the greater part of Argento's productions. In *Quattro mosche di velluto grigio* (1972), Nina Tobias is

“an androgynous woman raised up as a boy” by her psychotic father who wanted a son (Knee, 1996: 216). Suffering from the abuse, that she endured as a child, she directs her hatred towards her husband (*Ibidem*). In *Il Gatto a nove code* (1971), “the murderer is a man with an extra sex chromosome”. In *Profondo rosso* (1975), Carlo is a disturbed gay artist who protects the real murderer: his mother. All these examples demonstrate how the killers present evident signs of interstitiality. The ways in which these protagonists are portrayed suggest a denunciation of their gender hybridity and sexual tendencies. Despite the socio-cultural changes that took place in Italy between the late 1950s and mid-1960s, the Italian society “was still [...] full of taboos about sexual behaviour” (Ginsborg, 2003 [1990]: 244). The predominant patriarchal and heterosexual Italian culture prevented the emergence of “public debates on issues related to homosexuality” until the late 1960s, when the country witnessed the rise of a lesbian and gay rights movement (Killinger, 2005: 88).

However, the ambiguity of identities concerns not only to gender, but also to the role of both victim and victimizer. Many characters present interstitial qualities related to their dual nature of villain and victim. The following part of this study will analyse this dualism. In order to develop my arguments, I will take into consideration two different case studies. The first will draw from the supernatural gothic tradition (Bava’s *La Frusta e il corpo*, 1963), while the second will draw from the psychological horror subgenre (Argento’s *L’uccello dale piume di cristallo*, 1970).

6.2.1 The double: messenger of life or premonition of death? (*La frusta e il corpo*, 1963)

It is the phantom of our own ego, whose intimate relationship, combined with its profound effect on our spirits, either flings us into hell or transports us to heaven.²⁰⁹

The fragmentation of the Self causes individuals to create, unconsciously, a new personality: a spectral double. In Mario Bava's *La frusta e il corpo* (1963) this aspect is evident in the relationship between Nevenka and Kurt. In order to develop this topic, the following pages will explore the theme of the double in terms of monstrous complementarity. The film opens with Kurt's return to his family mansion, after being disinherited and banished by his father for driving to suicide the daughter of a servant whom he seduced and abandoned. After Kurt's departure, Count Vladimir arranges a marriage between Kurt's ex-fiancé Nevenka and his other son Christian. The couple gets married, despite being in love with other people: Nevenka still loves Kurt and Christian is in love with his cousin Katia. Both protagonists are unable to express their real sentiments. It follows that nobody is happy with their real existence. They all suffer because they deny what could make them happy and, in denying their real feelings, they experience a sense of failure, which pervades their lives and translates itself into symptoms of guilt and affliction (Carrol, 1985: 13).

Early in the film, a peculiar scene reveals Nevenka's ambiguous sexual proclivities. At the beach, in the vicinity of Mainliff castle, Nevenka encounters Kurt. The man repeatedly flogs her with a riding crop and, although she seems to reject him at first, immediately after she writhes in ecstasy beneath the lash.²¹⁰ "Are you afraid of me?" asks Kurt. "You were fond of me once." "Yes, once," she replies. After a moment

²⁰⁹ Quoted from "Sandman" in Rabkin (1979: 224).

²¹⁰ Due to the excess of visual violence and sexuality, *La frusta e il corpo* caused much controversy when it was released in 1963. The film was censored, undergoing a variety of editing, which damaged the sense of the film.

of intense silence, the romantic score by Carlo Rustichelli plays and they kiss passionately. Nevenka is attracted to her brother-in-law and she cannot resist him. With Kurt, she feels a sense of belonging that allows her to release her forbidden desires, which, for a long time, had been repressed in her relationship with Christian. The emotional involvement that binds Nevenka to Kurt is marked by contrasting feelings such as love and hate, fear and desire, pleasure and pain. When Kurt uses his crop on Nevenka's flesh, she feels both pain and ecstasy (sequence 00:13:11 – 00:15:13). Her shoulders, wounded by the lash, are the symbolic representation of her sadomasochistic urges (Figure 62). "You haven't changed," Kurt says. "You always loved violence." These words confirm once again Nevenka's sexual tendencies.²¹¹



Figure 62 – Nevenka is repeatedly flogged by Kurt –
La frusta e il corpo (1963)

The essence of masochism is the intimate relation between pain and pleasure. "There is pursuit of the pleasure in the pain, because the pain is unconsciously considered the necessary, indispensable condition for satisfaction or pleasure, and becomes inextricably associated with it" (Glick, 1988: 178). Nevenka is possessed by the combination of pain and pleasure inflicted by Kurt. Pain is necessary to achieve selfhood. "Perhaps *Doleo ergo sum* (I suffer, therefore I am) is a precursor of *Sentio ergo sum* (I feel, therefore I am) and *Cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am)" (Cooper, 2006:

²¹¹ As discussed in chapter 2, the archive of eroticism provided a rich source of themes and symbols easily exploitable in the horror genre. To read more about the influence eroticism and pornography had on the genre, please see chapter 2.

121). Thus, to feel alive and to reawaken her desire, passion and fear, she needs pain: the pain that only Kurt can inflict on her.

Nevenka is accompanied by a persistent sense of foreboding, as if something catastrophic is going to happen. Camera movements, lighting, sounds and editing devices reinforce this ominous feeling. "Changing the lights from blue to red, with their respective connotations of cold and warmth", Bava reflects the protagonists' interior state of mind and, at the same time, makes the atmosphere tactile (Ursini, 1997: 95). The sky turns from red to blue, almost to suggest something horrible to come. Kurt dies, murdered in mysterious circumstances by an unseen assailant. He is stabbed through the throat with the same dagger the servant's daughter used to kill herself. Each member of the family is suspected in his death, but the real perpetrator is still unknown.

After Kurt's murder, Nevenka has nightmares of him returning to haunt her (Figure 63). His ghost is viewed everywhere, supposedly seeking revenge against his killers. Nevenka feels persecuted by his presence, but although she claims Kurt has returned from the dead, nobody believes her. Christian thinks she is losing her mind. The woman's visions are apparently proven to be real when muddy boot prints are found on the floor of her room in the morning. The apparitions of Kurt are visually reinforced by physical manifestations, such as voices, laughs and boot prints. All of this confuses the viewer, who, despite seeing, hearing and perceiving the tangible presence of the double from Nevenka's point of view, cannot understand whether her visions are real or not. Is Nevenka going mad or has the spectre of Kurt returned to torment her and his family? To strengthen the ambiguity and the confusion, Bava adopts a combination of supersaturated colours and unnatural lighting schemes (Figure 63). All of this imbues the narrative with a sense of unreality and illogicality, affecting the visual and emotional response of the audience.



Figure 63 – Kurt's ghost illuminated by a blue light – *La frusta e il corpo* (1963)

Nevenka's sexual proclivities, as well as the sense of guilt derived from them, lead the woman to develop feelings of persecution anxiety, which are usually characterized by "a sense of indefinite and terrifying threat to the self from the inside" (Money-Kyrle, 1951: 155). These feelings produce "a need for expiation that manifests itself in obsessional behaviours" (Carrol, 1985: 20–21). One of the most common defences against persecution anxiety is "to project the sadistic superego to an outside person, group, object, divinity, or cosmic force" (Carrol, 1985: 35). In this way, Nevenka projects her afflictions, torments and sense of guilt on to an outside person: her persecutor. Kurt's ghost, therefore, is a mental projection of Nevenka's Ego, as the result of a psychological defence mechanism, to protect herself from the unacceptable implications of her own psychosis. In other words, he is a figment of her twisted mind, which returns in real life in the form of a hallucination (Hand, 2007: 189).

This external projection represents "parts of the Self that the society, and perhaps the individual as well, find unacceptable" (Joshi, 2007: 190). Repressed and kept hidden in the inner space of the Self, these unaccepted parts can take form, being projected and concretized on to another identifiable psychical being. This Other, with ominous and sinister features, becomes monstrous, horrific and outrageous; however, its presence will become essential to the construction of the Self. Blurring the lines of her Ego, Nevenka's character, interpreted as a fractured subject, represents the abject. Nevenka does not conceive herself as a subject. She exists in the function of Kurt. Thus, in her inability to be a subject in its wholeness, she builds the illusion of a perpetrating double. Kurt's ghost therefore can be interpreted in this sense as a premonition of life. Nevenka feels tormented by the spectre of her dead lover; however, she feels

ambivalent feelings of love and hate for him. These contrasting feelings derive from her defence against her persecution anxiety. She mentally splits her ghostly persecutor into two parts, one good/loved and one evil/hated. She feels tied and physically attracted to the good one and directs all of her loving impulses towards him, which allows her to writhe in ecstasy beneath the lash. At the same time she hates the evil Kurt and projects all her aggression on to him. Driven by her hostile impulse, she tries to kill him. There is no guilt in attacking an evil figure, which is what he deserves (Carrol, 1985: 37). The wicked man must be destroyed in order to let her be rejoined with the good Kurt forever. Kurt is part of her. They are complementary. Splitting Kurt into good and evil, she can express her ambivalent feelings of love and hate, but in destroying the evil one she also destroys both what she loves and, eventually, herself.

Described by critics as sadistic, Kurt seems instead to represent the quality of someone who has been victimized. His personality is indeed subject to that of Nevenka. As Deleuze points out: “a genuine sadist could never tolerate a masochistic victim” (Deleuze, 1989: 40). Thus, in response to Nevenka’s masochistic proclivities, Kurt doesn’t fit the role of sadist. Sadistic behaviours, in fact, are characterized by selfishness and complete disregard for the partner’s needs and satisfaction. Kurt, instead, whips Nevenka with the only purpose of satisfying her perverted pleasures. It follows that he is “the mechanism by which Nevenka defines herself. His function is to realise her erotic agency” (MacCormack, 2003: n.p.). Nevenka, therefore, if not the direct agent of the perverse action, is the instigator of the pain inflicted on her body.

Depicted as a persecutor double, Kurt is indeed a complementary part of Nevenka’s Self. An exemplary sequence (00:51:30 – 00:51:57), which delineates the complementarity between the two protagonists, is shot in Nevenka’s room the day after Kurt’s funeral. After an initial close-up on Nevenka’s face, the camera slowly pulls back, showing her alone, caressing her body in front of the mirror. She misses her lover and she feels lost without him. Suddenly, Kurt appears. He is the ghostly manifestation of her perverse desires. A medium shot reveals both reflections in the mirror, representing two faces of the same protagonist (Figure 64). The viewers see from both Nevenka’s and Kurt’s points of view. A juxtaposition of light and darkness focuses on Kurt’s half-shadowed face approaching the woman. Slowly, the man drives

her to the bed; then the perspective changes, offering his point of view. He violently whips her bare back, while his image gradually fades, disappearing in the darkness of the room.



Figure 64 – Nevenka fondles her own body in front of the mirror
La frusta e il corpo (1963)

The transition from one image to another is relevant in terms of abjection and interstitiality. The abject in the film, in fact, is also represented through editing techniques (Hantke, 2009: 23). The dissolve, for instance, better represents this phenomenon. The images gradually fade, and, blending together, they erase the boundaries between two shots. As King remarks, the dissolve embodies what Kristeva calls “the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” – in other words, it stands for the abject (King, 2004: 24). In *La frusta e il corpo*, this technique is powerful in its ability to merge Kurt’s and Nevenka’s bodies, in their role of complementarity. The monstrous complementarity is even more evident in the last sequence of the film, when Nevenka’s morbid proclivities reach their climax in the extreme act of killing Kurt. The subjective use of the camera allows identification with the woman’s point of view, when she kisses Kurt’s ghost. Immediately after, an objective angle reveals that she is actually embracing the empty air.

“Effectively turning the tables on her dominating lover, Nevenka uses the knife, the symbol of Kurt’s destructive sexuality, as a means of stifling his libido. In taking control of the phallic blade, Nevenka usurps Kurt’s role as a sexual predator” (Howarth, 2002: 93). The woman behaves as though she has a phallus, “thus rejecting

the notion of the castration” (Hand, 2007: 189). In the act of stabbing her lover, since he is just a “reflection” of her imagination and is not there, Nevenka kills herself. “Her sadistic desire of having pain inflicted upon her, and to inflict pain upon others are now totally accomplished within her” (Hallam, 2004: n.p.). Nevenka is not a victim of Kurt; she is a victim of herself. Her difficulties in facing her subjectivity initiate a struggle in her mind. The abjection that emerges, then, can be read as an attempt to construct her subjectivity. In other words, the double, as the most recognizable and uncanny manifestation of otherness, functions as an essential means of showing the viewers how the illusion of integrity of a complete I is impossible (Hallman, 1981).

6.2.2 Deviant monsters (*L’uccello dalle piume di cristallo*, 1970)

The monsters to which Carroll refers are supernatural entities that do not exist according to contemporary science (Carroll, 1990: 41). This means that he is only referring to those impure and physically disgusting creatures, which function as particular objects that are able to art-horrify. Although, on the one hand, his theory helps us to identify monsters as forms of horror rather than fantasy in films such as *Caltiki, - il mostro immortale* (1957) and *Suspiria* (1977), on the other hand it fails in helping us to identify other kinds of monsters, including those portrayed in films such as *Il rosso segno della follia* (1970), *L’uccello dalle piume di cristallo* (1970) and *Profondo rosso* (1975). If, as in Carroll’s terms, horror films are defined by feelings of horror, such as nausea, repulsion and disgust, which are a reaction to encounters with a revolting monster, then Argento’s films do not fit into this category (Bertellini, 2004: 212). A great part of his productions, in fact, do not present monsters as defined by Carroll. Most of Argento’s protagonists are humans who behave monstrously.²¹² Carroll does not consider this category of villains as monsters able to art-horrify, hence his notion of the monstrous has to be considered reductive and inexhaustive.

²¹² In this sense, many theorists have associated his productions with the *giallo* tradition.

Several scholars (Russel, 1998; Hills, 2005) have criticized Carroll's definition, arguing that monsters do not have to be supernatural or physically repugnant to be included in the horror genre. "Some types [...] may be explained as *real* ... [in that they] are not remarkable in any physical sense. Their threat to normality is manifested solely through abnormal behavior challenging the rules of social regulation through *monstrous* and transgressive behavior" (Russel, 1998: 241). Russel refers to these types of monsters as *deviant*, including in this group psycho-killers, stalkers and slashers. Argento's protagonists can be included in this typology of monsters as being cruel and immoral. In the 1970s, these monsters seemed to be more effective and successful from the viewers' point of view. As Tudor (1989) suggests, at the base of this success is the "shift from an external threat to an internal threat", a shift which parallels society's evolution from "security" to "paranoia". In other words, "while the pre-1960s horror movie is dominated by science and, to a slightly lesser degree, by supernatural threats, the years after 1960 witness the rise of the psychotic and the development of a more overt sexual dimension" (Tudor, 1989: 27).

Turning to human dimensions in order to give monsters an appearance that would not only terrify but would also be credible, many horror films produced in the 1970s presented the typology of monsters as defined by Russel (Neale, 1980: 45). Thus, a new form of realistic and naturalistic horror took shape. Mainly based on serial murders, the films released in those years introduced psychopathic serial killers as monsters. These villains, intended as Others who are outside the system, are conflicted men who often act brutally in response to traumas they experienced in the past. Whether it is aggression (*L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo*, 1970), an abusive childhood (*Quattro mosche di velluto grigio*, 1971) or a shocking visual fragment from the past (*Profondo rosso*, 1975), these traumas build the personality of the protagonists, highlighting their double facet of victim and monster. These horrific protagonists are invariably men or women who look "as normal as the average persons on the street" (Derry, 1977: 173). In other words, they are ordinary people who live in ordinary spaces. However, due to their common nature, their categorization as monsters is the most difficult to define.

In the 1970s, the theme of disturbed humans, such as psychopaths, deviant killers and split personalities, became popular in Italian horror films, though some hybrids had appeared before, for instance in Bava's *La ragazza che sapeva troppo* in 1962. What distinguishes these protagonists from those delineated in Carroll's theories is the scientific explanations of their deviancy. At the end of *La ragazza che sapeva troppo*, in a manner which recalls *Psycho*, a psychiatric explanation sheds light on the psychic deviancy of the killer's personality, revealing the reasons which caused the monster to act in that particular way. The analysis of these horrific identities will allow us to conduct a journey into their deviant minds. In order to delve more deeply into this aspect my attention will focus now on analysing *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo* (1970).

L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo is the first film directed by Dario Argento. The storyline is loosely adapted from Frederic Brown's novel *The Screaming Mimi* (1949). The film opens with a sequence which introduces some of the main themes of Argentinian productions: a black-gloved killer, serial murders and the hapless protagonist who tries to solve mysterious crimes. As often happens in *gialli* (Bava's *La ragazza che sapeva troppo*, 1962), the protagonist is a foreign tourist in Italy. This detail gives information about a social phenomenon that developed in Italy as a result of the *Economic Miracle* (1958–1963), which was mentioned in chapter 2. The economic growth in the country between the late 1950s and mid-1960s had an impact on tourism: it favoured the mobility of Italians abroad as well as the influx of foreign tourists in Italy (Ginsborg, 2003 [1990]: 242–243). Sam Dalmas, an American writer visiting Rome in search of inspiration, is ready to fly back to the States, when he witnesses an attempted murder at an art gallery. Dalmas sees a man, dressed in black, who struggles with a woman. The woman is stabbed in the stomach and the villain escapes, while Sam, in an attempt to save the lady, is trapped between the sliding glass doors of the gallery. He cannot do anything to help the woman and, in his helpless condition, he is forced to watch the scene as a spectator, while Monica, stabbed and struggling on the floor, begs for help (Figure 65).



Figure 65 – Monica Ranieri, begging for help after the attempted murder –
L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo (1970)

In the process of remembering the attack, Sam mistakes the identity of the killer. He fails to notice that the woman had the knife in her hand. Thus Sam, like the police, assumes that the killer is a man. This assumption mainly derives from the traditional ideology, which sees women's nature as "non-violent, peaceful and unaggressive" (Creed, 1993: 156). Moreover, it is further reinforced by the fact that, except for one man, the victims are all young and attractive women. All of this strengthens the idea of a male killer, perhaps a maniac.

Argento uses point-of-view shots which allow the viewer to see through the characters' eyes. Hence, the spectator identifies with the protagonist as well as with the victims. The opening sequence of the film, for instance, presents point-of-view shots from the killer's perspective. The killer stalks and photographs a girl outdoors. After this first sequence, the scene moves indoors, where in a room the killer selects the photographs of the next victim (Figure 66).



Figure 66 – The killer touches the surface of the image in a fetishistic way –
L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo (1970)

Following the *giallo* tradition, the villain wears black clothes and is absolutely unrecognizable. The villain's identity and gender remain unknown until the end of the film, when the viewer eventually realizes that the villain is a woman. As a youth, Monica was the victim of a sexual assault. The vision of a painting which portrayed a woman attacked by a villain reopened the wound of her traumatic experience. However, Monica identified herself not with the victim but with the attacker. Monica

misidentifies with the gender role in the painting, refusing to identify herself with the victim, a member of her own sex who in fact is a representation of herself, and identifying instead with the aggressor, a member of the opposite sex (Cooper, 2012: 34).

The transgression of gender categories makes Monica an impure and interstitial creature. She presents characteristics of both male and female. The misidentification leads her to behave as the aggressor. Thus, according to an abnormal psychosexual process, she attacks other women in the same way as she was attacked (*Ibid.* 35). The perpetrations on women are often sexualized. An interesting example in this regard is the fourth murder (Figure 67).



Figure 67 – The attack on the killer's fourth victim is perversely sexualized –
L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo (1970)

The killer selects the knives in a fetishistic way, cleaning and caressing the blades, almost suggesting foreplay. Before killing the victim, the deviant aggressor undresses the woman with a knife. The camera slowly follows the woman's body, leading the viewer to participate in the ritualistic murder (sequence 00:30:36 – 00:31:07). The knife, symbolically associated with the phallus, suggests the act of penetration. Thus, the act of stabbing can be interpreted as a form of phallic aggression: rape and murder performed at the same time (*Ibid.* 36).

The viewer follows the crime from the killer's point of view; however, when the murder is about to be accomplished, the point of view changes and the viewer identifies with the victim. In this way the spectator shifts from a position of sadistic voyeurism (Mulvey, 1986) to a complementary position of masochistic victimization (Clover, 1992). By assuming that the killer's dress code and behaviour suggest masculinity, one could argue that gender is connected to the way of acting and behaving. Judith Butler (1990) provides interesting arguments on this topic. As she puts it,

gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame ... gender proves to be performance – that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed (Butler, 1990: 25).

With these words, Butler aims to deconstruct the notion of fixed and stable identity as well as to renegotiate gender norms. It follows that integrity is an ephemeral illusion and interstitiality part of the Self. This vision reinforces the idea that identity is mutable and never completely accomplished. Thus, the deviancy caused by the trauma, opening the binary to I and non-I, Self and Other, presents victims and monsters as two faces of the same individual.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the circulation of roles and identities in Italian horror cinema from its origins (1957) until the 1980s. Concepts such as otherness, the abject and interstitiality have been used to develop the understanding of monstrosity, and particularly the figure of the vampire as sexualized female demon (*La maschera del demonio*, 1960). The first analysis has highlighted how the categorization of monsters cannot be limited to a reductive number of groups. Being constantly subject to changes, categories in fact evolve over time, and so do typologies of monsters. However, my attention has focused on two main groups: supernatural and psychotic (or deviant).

In order to develop my arguments, I have taken into consideration two case studies: the first drew from the supernatural gothic tradition (*La frusta e il corpo*, 1963), while the second drew from the psychological horror subgenre (*L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo*, 1970). Despite the different tones of representation of monstrosity, roles and identities, both case studies have led to the same conclusion about the ephemeral illusion of integrity. The investigation has underlined the interrelations of "I" and "non-I", of "self" and "other", as inseparable elements in the construction of personality. Thus, as identity is not immutable but a process of growth that is never completely accomplished, monsters and victims have been interpreted as two faces of the same individual.

CHAPTER 7

PERFORMING ACTIONS BEYOND THE TRAUMA

These films [are] not about their villains. They [are] about the acts of the villains. Dismayed, I realized that the visual strategy of these films displaced the villain from his traditional place within the film – and moved him into the audience ... The lust to kill and rape becomes the true subject of the movies. And the lust is not placed on the screen, where it can be attached to the killer-character; it is placed in the audience.

R. Ebert, 1981: 56

Introduction

Actions in horror films play a fundamental role in holding the viewer's attention and eliciting fear. In order to develop this argument, the following pages will focus on the act of killing as a form of art and on the effects graphic actions have in the human mind. This chapter will consider two different case studies: Bava's *Operazione paura* (1966) and Argento's *Opera* (1987). The first draws from the supernatural gothic tradition, while the second is influenced by the Italian *gialli* tradition. The investigation will introduce different ways of interpreting the protagonists' *modus operandi*, with a main interest in the motif of trauma. In order to delve into this aspect, I will adopt two main theoretical approaches: a psychoanalytical one, inspired by Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok's theories of psychic phantoms and trans-generational transmission (1994), and a pragmatist one based on Norbert Wiley's concept of inner speech (1994) (or internal conversations).

7.1 The secret of others (*Operazione paura*, 1966)

Such a crypt exists within all of us, and we place over it a guard, emblem of the strength of our resistance to the arrival of the apparition, to the return of the undead ...

Wolfreys, 2002: 26

Operazione paura, directed by Bava in 1966, is a low-budget gothic masterpiece, considered to be one of the most effective ghost stories of the Italian productions of the 1960s.²¹³ The main aspect I am interested in exploring in the following analysis is the motif of trauma. This study will provide new ways of reading the internalization and effects of horror images in the human mind. The film opens with a sequence which shows a woman, Irena Hollander, who mysteriously commits suicide. The viewer follows her subjective point of view. Screaming and running in a state of trance, Irena reaches a doorway at the top of a staircase. Her view blurs and the woman falls down. A close-up focuses on her body impaled on an iron gate. The reasons for her extreme act are unknown and will be revealed throughout the film. The little village of Karmingen is plagued by a series of unsolved deaths.²¹⁴ Dr Eswai, called to perform an autopsy on Irena's corpse and to investigate the mystery of her suicide, discovers that it is the result of a ghostly apparition and superstitions relating to it. When Eswai arrives in Karmingen, the villagers give him a hostile welcome, showing him to be harbouring secrets related to the sinister Villa Graps and other mysterious deaths.

With the assistance of Monica, who has recently returned to the village after leaving at an early age, Dr Eswai performs the autopsy on Irena's corpse. The doctor makes a curious discovery: a silver coin embedded in the woman's heart. Monica explains that, according to a local legend, "only with money in the heart can a body

²¹³ *Operazione Paura* was frequently cited to have influenced later films by Fellini (*Toby Dammit*, 1967), Martin Scorsese (*The Last Temptation of Christ*, 1988) and David Lynch (*Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*, 1991).

²¹⁴ The shots of Karmingen actually show Calcata, a medieval village located in the south of Tuscany (Lucas, 2007: 667).

that has suffered a violent death ever rest in peace". The coin, then, acts as a talisman, meant to protect against the evil spirits and supernatural forces of Baroness Graps. The scene of Irena Hollander's autopsy is interrupted by a cutaway to Melissa, who, not yet introduced to the viewers, plays on a swing (Figure 68). A POV shot of the girl overlooking a graveyard allows the viewer to identify with her (sequence 00:15:07 – 00:15:35). Lights and shadows confer the landscape with a sinister and surreal atmosphere. The ominous mood of the sequence is further emphasized by Carlo Rustichelli's score.²¹⁵ The camera zooms forwards and backwards, following the swing's movements, before a straight cut abruptly reverts back to Irena's corpse. The transition between the two shots almost suggests that Melissa is touching the dead body.



Figure 68 – Melissa Graps playing on a swing alone in the dark
Operazione paura (1966)

The fears and superstitions of the local population are explicit from the beginning of the film. The villagers believe that Karminingen has been cursed, following the death of a seven-year-old girl, Melissa Graps, 20 years earlier. Since then, they have felt haunted by the vision of her spirit, seeking revenge for her premature death.²¹⁶ Before the

²¹⁵ Carlo Rustichelli (1916–2004) was one of the most prolific film composers in Italy from the end of the 1930s until the mid-1990s. He scored over 200 films, collaborating with popular directors such as Pietro Germi (*In nome della legge*, 1948), Pierpaolo Pasolini (*Mamma Roma*, 1962), Mario Bava (*La frusta e il corpo*, 1963), Billy Wilder (*Avanti*, 1972) and many others. The collaboration with Bava started in 1963, when Rustichelli scored the main theme of *La frusta e il corpo*, and it continued a few years later with the soundtracks for *Sei donne per l'assassino* (1964) and *Operazione paura* (1966).

²¹⁶ A number of critics suggest that the popularity of evil-child films increased in the 1970s as a consequence of the financial and critical success of Polanski's film *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) (Wood, 1979: 11;

victims commit suicide, they always see and hear Melissa's spectre, who, with her derisory chuckle, strikes terror, appearing as a premonition of death. Her supernatural presence is reinforced by the use of symbols which stand for her: the grave, the painting, the eerie dolls, the swing and the bouncing ball.²¹⁷ Moreover, to set the sinister atmosphere, creepy music and a recurrent giggle anticipate her apparitions, acting as Melissa's main theme. The soundtrack guides the viewers, anticipating the danger before it is seen in the images.

Scared of Melissa's ghost and overwhelmed by their superstitions, the villagers live in a total conspiracy of silence, even avoiding saying the name Graps, as if it was the vocative of Satan. This silence creates the impossibility of *introjecting* the oppression of the unspeakable, caused by their ignorance. This fearful subjection is particularly evident in a scene involving the local witch, Ruth, and the innkeeper's daughter, Nadine. "You don't come back from Villa Graps!" says Nadine to Dr Eswai. After saying these words, the young girl is overwhelmed with guilt. She feels she has said the unspeakable and, terrified of being the next victim, flees the room. The ghost of Melissa appears to Nadine, staring at her through the window.

Nadine's parents discreetly contact Ruth to exorcize the malevolent spirits.²¹⁸ In order to save Nadine from Melissa's rage, the witch carries out a special ritual, casting a protective spell over her (Figure 69). The girl is forced to wear a cilice round her waist. The cilice was used in some religious traditions to induce discomfort or pain as a sign of mortification and repentance.²¹⁹ Ruth says several prayers over Nadine and

Sobchack, 1987: 183; Renner, 2011: 83). The consistent production of films featuring children, in the roles of both victims and villains, has grasped the attention of many critics (Paul, 1994; Jenkins, 1998; Jones, 2001; Lury, 2010; Renner, 2011; Heller-Nicholas, 2013).

²¹⁷ The theme of the little creepy girl playing with a white ball inspired Fellini's *Toby Dammit* (1968), the third episode of *Tre Passi nel delirio*, loosely based on Poe's short story *Never Bet the Devil Your Head* (1841). Another interesting depiction of the devil as an "innocent"-looking girl appeared years earlier in Buñuel's *Simón del desierto* (1965). In Buñuel's film, the girl rolls a hoop instead of playing with a bouncing ball. However, as Lucas suggests, the circular hoop is analogous with Bava's main theme.

²¹⁸ Witchcraft is linked to evil practices. However, in this case, Ruth represents a good witch who wants to bring peace to the village.

²¹⁹ As the theologian Philip Rohr (1679) states in his *Dissertatio Historico-Philosophica De Masticatione Mortuorum*, the cilice was also used to prevent the transformation into a vampire.

then whips a bundle of herbs across her bare back. However, despite the witch's efforts to keep the evil spirit away, Melissa appears once again and Nadine commits suicide.²²⁰



Figure 69 – Ruth, the local witch, carries out a ritual to save Nadine
Operazione paura (1966)

The whole film pivots around the mystery of Baroness Graps and her unexpressed secret. She lives alone in her huge and desolate mansion, surrounded by her memories and *haunting phantoms*. She has never recovered from the loss of her daughter, Melissa. Thus, her mourning has never been brought to a normal conclusion, creating a trauma and a “rhetoric of hiding” (Rashkin, 1988: 42). The trauma, as Abraham and Torok (1994) state, is identified in every “experience that is impossible to psychically metabolize [...] and transform into a bearable aspect of the subject’s experiential world” (Yassa, 2002: 83). These experiences, not properly assimilated because they are not symbolized, are named psychic phantoms, and they are preserved in “isolated psychic regions” of the “I” named crypts (Abraham and Torok, 1994: 130).²²¹ Hence, the Baroness’s inability to introject the loss of her daughter causes the dead object of the trauma, Melissa, to be incorporated in an inner crypt of her Ego.

The unsuccessful mourning is represented by Melissa’s old room, where the dolls have been left the same as when Melissa was alive (sequence 01:06:05 – 01:06:55). As the baroness shows the dolls to Monica and Dr Eswai, Melissa herself is visible among them (Figure 70). The fast zoom into an extreme close-up of Melissa’s eyes is intended “to grab the audience’s attention and to underscore that what the character is

²²⁰ This sequence has been discussed in more detail in chapter 4.

²²¹ The concept of psychic phantoms has been discussed in chapter 3.

looking at is very important” (Koven, 2006: 150). Melissa is there, staring at us. Her spirit has assumed its power from the baroness’s refusal to accept her loss and to forgive the villagers for letting her die (Lucas, 2007: 666–667). As discussed in chapter 3, the preservation of her phantom in the crypt occurs through the psychic process of incorporation, which differs from introjection. From the moment of the incorporation, Melissa appears as the living dead, haunting her mother from within.



Figure 70 – Melissa Graps surrounded by her dolls²²² – *Operazione paura* (1966)

The process of the incorporation develops at an unconscious level and, for this reason, is distinguished from the repression model elaborated by Freud. The psychic phantom is “a formation of the unconscious that has never been conscious” (Abraham and Torok, 1994: 173) while Freud’s uncanny is related to something “once well known and familiar to the psyche” that has been repressed and then returned to consciousness (Freud, 2003 [1919]: 124). However, in both cases, after having been an assurance of immortality, this double shows its capacity to persecute, becoming a harbinger of death.

²²² The role of Melissa Graps was played by Valerio Valeri, who was the seven-year-old son of the production office’s caretaker.

7.2 Psychic phantoms' haunting transmission

As Abraham and Torok (1994) argue, psychic phantoms, deriving from traumas, restrained emotions and unspoken words, can be trans-generationally transmitted.

Should the child have parents with secrets [...] he will receive from them a gap in the unconscious, an unknown, unrecognized knowledge. [...] The buried speech of the parent becomes a dead gap, without a burial place, in the child. This unknown phantom comes back from the unconscious to haunt and leads to phobias, madness and obsessions (Rashkin, 1988: 39).

In other words, the phantoms that are present within a parent's unconscious can be transmitted to the child's unconscious in the form of a gap, "a mute zone [...] inaccessible and incomprehensible" to the child itself (Yassa, 2002: 83). It follows that "what haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others" (Abraham, 1987: 287). The analysis of another sequence from *Operazione paura* will be helpful in understanding this process.

Monica, the girl who has come to Karminen to assist Dr Eswai during the autopsy on Irena's body, is a repository of unspeakable secrets. She has grown up believing herself to be the daughter of the Shuftans, two servants who smuggled her out of the villa immediately after Melissa's death. Her real mother, however, is Baroness Graps.²²³ The secret of Monica's true parentage and the unspoken trauma of her real mother have been hidden. Thus, a crypt has been created within Monica's unconscious: a burial place which "entombs the phantom, the unspoken family secret passed down from earlier generations because unspeakable". The baroness's trauma has been trans-generationally transmitted to Monica, without ever having been spoken about. The girl, then, has grown up preserving within her Ego a gap communicated by her mother in a silent way: a mute zone that, despite being incomprehensible, affects the girl through nightmares and bad omens.

²²³ Immediately after Melissa's death, Monica was rescued from the villa by the servants.

The shameful silence of the baroness becomes disclosed in her daughter's symptoms (Abraham and Torok, 1994: 16). Monica is plagued by ominous premonitions and unsettling dreams (sequence 00:38:23 – 00:40:06). The filmic representation of the irrationality of her troubled unconscious and dream state is achieved with the use of excessively slow-speed shots and the dissolve technique (Hayward, 2006: 418). The transition between the frames suspends the spatio-temporal logic. Distorted images of Baroness Graps and her daughter Melissa gradually fade, blending with other in- and out-of-focus images: an old photograph with her older sister, a portrait of young Melissa, a spiral staircase, a bouncing ball and an eerie porcelain doll (Figure 71). When Monica awakens, the doll from her dreams is resting at the foot of her bed, but it suddenly disappears when she touches it.



Figure 71 – Monica's nightmares – *Operazione paura* (1966)

Monica's nightmares are repositories of the past of the family Graps. As Lucas suggests, they "are all prophetic in nature, perhaps a gift unknowingly inherited from her mediumistic parent" (Lucas, 2007: 678). They silently talk to Monica. The undisclosed turns into a deafening silence, which functions as a ventriloquist hidden within Monica's Ego (Kamuf, 1979: 38). This haunting phantom, inducing her to hallucination, takes form in the image of the spectral ghost of her sister Melissa. Just at the end, when Baroness Graps reveals her dark secret and the truth about Monica's parentage, Monica will be able to introject the situation and defeat her psychic phantoms forever.

These preliminary considerations provide new evidence on the perception of horror films as traumatic. The same processes, as explained from a cinematic point of view, are identifiable in the viewer's mind according to their internalization of horror films. Horror films always leave traces in the viewer's memory. Undeniably negative, some of these traces generate reactions and obsessive thoughts similar to those produced by real traumas. Once internalized within the mind, they can be difficult to erase (Cantor, 2004: 301), assuming a haunting quality and possessing the subject with their insistent presence and repetition (Whitehead, 2004: 12). In Abraham and Torok's psychoanalytical terms, it follows that, acting in the same way as real traumas in being impossible to metabolize or in some way assimilate, some of these traces are incorporated within inner crypts. Here they live like psychic phantoms, haunting the subject from within. Furthermore, once incorporated into the Ego, they can be trans-generationally transmitted in the form of a gap: a silent presence totally incomprehensible to the individual who inherits it. Hence, it is not only personal traumas deriving from horror films that can be internalized in the human mind, but also the traumas of others. As argued in chapter 3, by integrating Abraham and Torok's psychoanalytical theories with the pragmatist concept of inner speech (internal conversation) as elaborated by Norbert Wiley, our understanding of the process of internalization of horror films in the human mind will be extended. In order to do so, the following analysis will consider Argento's film *Opera* (1987), with a particular focus on the traumatic gaze.

7.3 Horror of attraction: the aestheticization of violence (*Opera*, 1987)

In his article "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator, and the Avant-Garde", Tom Gunning (2006) states, "this is a cinema that displays its visibility, willing to rupture a self-enclosed fictional world for a chance to solicit the attention of the spectator" (Gunning, 2006: 382). In other words, this early cinema was meant to attract its spectators by showing something exclusive, stimulating on a level that was merely

exhibitionist. It involved a direct interaction between the viewers and the images they watched. Aware of the audiences, in fact, this cinema created images specifically for them to see. The cinema of attractions predominated until 1903, followed by a transitional period which lasted until 1908. After this phase, the cinema of narrative prevailed. However, as Gunning further argued, the cinema of attraction did not totally disappear. Rather, it went underground, especially into avant-garde practices “and as a component of narrative films, more evident in some genres (e.g., the musical) than others” (Gunning, 2006: 382).

Considering the non-narrative dimension and hyper-sensorial effects of Argento’s films, his productions can be categorized under the term “horror of attractions”, which is defined as the ability to attract spectators through action-images which are indeed pieces of *performance* art. Several critics (Knee, 1996; McDonagh, 1991; Gallant, 2001) have identified Argento’s general disinterest in cohesive narrative, which he sacrifices for his trademark baroque visual spectacles (Della Casa, 2000: vii). Argento’s unconventional way of filming is worth considering in relation to Bordwell’s description of art cinema text, according to which “the authorial code manifests itself as recurrent violations of the classical norms” (Bordwell, 1985: 374). Disrupting the traditional schemes of the horror genre through persistent deviations from the classical canon, through unusual angles and atypical camera movements which suspend cinematic cause–effect logic, Argento’s films assume an authorial status. The narration, often unclear, unidentified and ambiguous, is mainly based on excessive visual violence. Argento’s strategy, in fact, consists of attracting viewers’ attention through a hyper-sensorial aesthetic. The cruelty in his films is staged in a highly sophisticated and theatrical manner, in order to shock and entertain at the same time. As Maitland McDonagh (1991) argues,

the seductiveness of these films lies ultimately in the realm of their excess: the spatial and temporal warping, the curious disjunction between soundtrack and image (*Inferno*, 1980) [...] the violently saturated colour palette (*Suspiria*, 1977), the obsessive examination of surfaces (*Profondo rosso*, 1975) [...] the full panoply of non-narrative

detail that generates the overwhelming sense of weirdness evoked by Argento's work (McDonagh, 1991: 21 emphasis added).

It follows that, in Argento's films, the visual acts in a narrative way, attracting and telling the story.²²⁴ Argento introduces the aestheticization of sadistic violence as a spectacle. This often occurs towards female characters. "The focus on female deaths as either misogynistic or aesthetic is an astonishing specularisation of women over that of male characters" (Mendik, 2004: 109). Due to the gruesome ways in which Argento's female protagonists are killed, the director has often been accused of misogyny (Clover, 1992: 42; Guins, 1996: 147). His response to that was that "he loves beauty, and women make for aesthetically more attractive victims" (Weiner, 2010: 56). This affirmation recalls Mulvey's (1975) issues about the objectification of women in Hollywood films, because of the full control of cinema by heterosexual men. Mulvey accuses conventional American cinema of voyeurism and scopophilia, whereby the male figure derives pleasure from looking at the female body. Her position is an open denouncement of "the visual focus on women on-screen" (Vandermassen, 2007: 1).

Aware of certain fears and anxieties in the viewer's mind, Argento exploits them in a variety of ways. His main strategy is to manipulate the viewer's sensibility through visual excesses and technical devices. The use of multiple point-of-view angles, for instance, allows the spectator to experience the roles of both victim and victimizer. As Hunt suggests,

what makes *Terror At The Opera* so remarkable is its extreme play with such vacillating positions of identification. *Terror At The Opera* violates the spectator but at the same time aestheticizes sadistic violence as spectacle (Hunt, 1992: 74).

Argento plays with the viewers' expectations. Sometimes he uses retardation devices and non-diegetic sequences which delay the answer to the mystery. Instead of focusing

²²⁴ The process of hyper-aestheticization also involves spaces. Theatrically elaborated, the environments as much as the actions seem expressly designed for the audience. Stefano's house, for instance, recalls the idea of a museum. However, the opera house provides the most spectacular mise-en-scène in the film. The extravagance and grandiosity of the set pieces is emphasized by Brian Eno's extraordinary soundtrack.

on a murder scene, Argento introduces mundane objects, which arrest the narrative, creating suspense or simply entertaining the viewer. An interesting example is a sequence in *Opera* (1987) which takes place immediately after Mira's death. Betty is apparently alone in her flat. She turns up the opera tape to full volume, and then throws one of her pillows off the balcony. The wind blows the feathers everywhere. This shot is not directly connected to the main narration, but merely addressed to the viewer. In other words, the main purpose of this shot is to bring the viewer into the film not through the character's eyes, but through his own eyes. Thus, music, colours, *mise-en-scène*, montages and lights, with their hyper-sensorial qualities, become predominant compared to the narrative development of the film, which is replaced by the aestheticization of the events.

7.3.1 Performing death

If any human act evokes the aesthetic experience of the sublime, certainly it is the act of murder. And if murder can be experienced aesthetically, the murder can in turn be regarded as a kind of artist – a *performance* artist or anti-artist whose specialty is not creation or destruction.

J. Black, 1991: 14

The representation of murder constitutes an essential element in Dario Argento's films. Featuring the aestheticization of sadistic violence as spectacle, Argento presents the act of killing as an art form. The murders are stylized and staged with visual details. All of this confers death and violence with an aura of terror and beauty. In *Opera* (1987), for instance, the murder scene is always represented as a *performance*. In other words, it is staged as a visual spectacle. One could talk about a horror film *performing* a horror film.

Visually, the spectator takes part in this *performance*, becoming an active participant of the action itself. The framing, the camera movements, the editing, the *mise-en-scène*, the lighting and the music play an important role in the construction of the spectacle. All of these devices emphasize a narration based on showing rather than telling. This process, referred to by André Gaudreault (2009) as *monstrating*, involves the audience in the act of killing, allowing identification with both the victim and the victimizer.

Death becomes, therefore, an event, where the word “event” is intended as an intensification of several factors, which involve *mise-en-scène*, camera movements, music and lights. All these elements interact, creating, time after time, new events. It follows that the act of killing has to be considered not as a simple action but, as Eliana Lima suggests, as “the intensification of elements that comprise the framed image in relationship with the rhythm of the movement and the passivity of time” (Lima, 2011: n.p.). These considerations reinforce the idea of intertextual dynamism, which distinguishes Argento’s films from those of other directors.

The hyper-sensorial visual becomes an attraction, which stimulates and involves the audience. In order to extend what has been discussed thus far, the analysis of a peculiar shot which enacts a theatrical murder will be helpful. The sequence in question represents an outstanding demonstration of the act of killing as a *performance*. The sadistic psycho-killer Inspector Santini is the detective assigned to solve the murders he has committed. This assignment gives him the possibility of taking control over Betty and over the development of the murders’ research. After the application of some drops to her dry eyes, Betty’s view is blurred. This happens when a detective gets into her apartment. At this point of the narration Argento creates a moment of ambiguity, introducing a second detective who stands outside the apartment.²²⁵ The presence of two detectives creates confusion, encouraging misreading and enhancing suspense. The spectator identifies with Betty, who, confused, wonders if the killer is the man inside or outside the apartment.

Betty’s agent, Mira, goes to the door to look through the spyhole and make sure that the man outside is the detective. The viewers see through her point of view. In this

²²⁵ The discourse about role ambiguities in Dario Argento’s productions has been discussed in more detail in chapter 6 (6.2.1 Ambiguities).

moment the man is revealed to be the psycho-killer. He shoots a bullet through the eyehole and brutally kills Mira (sequence 01:07:28 – 01:08:24). The spyhole in a door is always used to allow people inside the house to look outside, without being observed and without necessarily opening the door. In other words, it permits an individual to perceive other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze (Mulvey, 1989: 16). Thus, observing the killer through the eyehole, Mira is put in a position similar to that of a peeping Tom: she has the illusion of being a privileged voyeur. Fitted with a fisheye lens, the spyhole allows the woman to have a wide field of view from the inside, ensuring little to no visibility from the outside. However, in this sequence this function is dissolved: the border is crossed and the spatial threshold invaded by the external presence.²²⁶ The object of Mira's gaze, in fact, has returned the look, subverting the role of her dominant view and punishing her curiosity (Figures 72, 73).



Figures 72, 73 – The psycho-killer pretends to be the policeman. The killer's assault – Argento's *Opera* (1987)

The scene is so extremely slowed down that it is possible to see the details of the fired bullet spinning through the spyhole and then straight through Mira's eye (Figure 73). A long shot shows the bullet reaching a telephone, which explodes in the air. The slow-motion technique is used to enhance the *performative* quality of the shot.²²⁷ The viewing of such impressive images constitutes a strong visual hyper-sensorial experience that is aesthetically enjoyed separately from the surrounding context, characters and plot.

²²⁶ For more about the suspension, neutralization and inversion of the qualities of heterotopic boundaries, please see chapter 4 (4.1.5 Opening and closing heterotopias).

²²⁷ Slow motion is an editing technique frequently used in Dario Argento's productions. In *La Sindrome di Stendhal* (1995), for instance, there is a slow-motion scene of a bullet entering and exiting both cheeks of a victim, as well as a sequence that shows a shooting from inside the body. To read more about the supernatural effects derived from the slow-motion technique, see chapter 6.

Through this technique, even the gorier images of violence can be aesthetically pleasurable.

“The spectatorial affect of terror is an irrecuperable excess, produced when violated bodies are pushed to their limits” (Shaviro, 1993: 61). An example of this visual excess is the sequence depicting Julia’s murder. The whole frame is carefully staged to attract and shock the viewer. In attempting to repair Betty’s costume, Julia finds attached to it a gold bracelet which belongs to Santini. The killer is determined to have it back and, in order to retrieve it, he performs another spectacle for Betty. He ties and places Betty inside a glass cabinet. The girl, objectified, looks like one of Julia’s many mannequins.²²⁸ The spectacle begins.

In a moment which anticipates Julia’s death, the loud sound of the killer’s heart becomes tangible, materialized in the throbbing movement of the camera itself. As Sevastakis suggests, “the shot’s purpose [...] is to convey the force of the intruder’s raw emotions and sexuality as they materialize into a visible form” (Sevastakis, 2002: n.p.). To reach this purpose, Argento also adopts a Snorkel, or endoscopic camera. This device allows the film to enter and view the victim’s/killer’s “body in an investigation of the anatomy of fear” (Past, 2012: 217). The use of the Snorkel is evident in the sequence which precedes Betty’s entrapment inside the glass cabinet (00:51:44 – 00:51:53). A close-up of blood rushing through arteries seems to suggest the brutal impulses of the killer. These frames, apparently out of context and detached from the main action, are actually used to heighten the tension which anticipates the death scenes.

The sequence reaches its visual climax during the struggle between Julia and Santini. The golden bracelet falls down Julia’s throat and in the attempt to retrieve it, the killer uses a pair of scissors, piercing her throat in a brutal way (Figure 74). This action demonstrates the extent to which “Argento’s hyperbolic aestheticization of murder and bodily torment exceeds any hope of comprehension or utility, even as it ultimately destabilizes any fixed relations of power” (Shaviro, 1993: 60–61). Due to the extreme violence of the bodily mutilation, the image of Julia’s face in close-up is

²²⁸ To read more about the objectification of the body, see chapter 5.

particularly unsettling. Her eyes, wide open in a fixed gaze, are lost in the void, while the last torture on her body is *performed*. The act of penetration is an obvious reference to the masculine sexually penetrating the feminine, with the scissors assuming the meaning of the phallus. Phallic imageries have always been persistent in the horror genre. As already discussed throughout my study (chapters 2, 5, 6), horror films disclose a fundamental anxiety about phallic masculinity, and, to express this fear, they adopt a variety of symbolic substitutes for masculine power (Creed, 2005; Smelik, 2007). With regard to this, weapons, daggers and sharp objects in general represent the main emblems of substitution.



Figure 74 – Close-up of Julia's face – *Opera* (1987)

Another sequence which represents a *performance* in the film is the revelation of the killer's identity. In order to stop the psycho-killer, Marco decides to enact his own plan and set the ravens loose during a theatrical *performance*. The spectators see the opera house through the birds' point of view. The birds fly around, swooping down towards the audience and almost touching their heads. A crescendo of music and the persistent cawing of the ravens reinforce the already intense atmosphere. The images and the aerial shots generate a sense of claustrophobic oppression. Through dynamic camera movements, Argento manages to transform the birds into "credible supporting characters" (Cosgrove, 2007: 108). He gives them a pivotal role in the film's climax:

identifying Santini as the killer.²²⁹ A raven plucks and eats the inspector's eyeball (Figure 75), providing one of the most unsettling images of the film: a close-up of the killer's face, disfigured by the raven.



Figure 75 – A raven removes and eats the psycho-killer's eye – *Opera* (1987)

The eyes are the most vulnerable organs of the body. They can be metaphorically penetrated (by the vision of others) and literally physically penetrated (by external material entities). In this specific frame, we are faced with an ocular mutilation. As Freud (1919) suggests, the loss of one's eye (or generally the fear of going blind) is a source of the uncanny, tied to the dread of being castrated.²³⁰ Santini, being deprived of his eye, therefore becomes castrated. If his eyes and specifically his voyeuristic gaze confer him with a masculine status (in the sense of a dominant male gaze), through the ocular mutilation the inspector loses this position. The sensorial effect of the abject bodily dismemberment is emphasized by the camera movements, which follow the sequence of the ravens' assault in detail. According to Dolf Zillmann's theory of dispositional alignments, "the disposition toward characters mediates moral judgment" (Zillmann & Vorderer, 1978, 1983, 1988, 2000). It follows that spectacles of violence can be enjoyed if they are directed against those who are believed to deserve such treatment (Zillmann & Vorderer, 2000: 79). Santini, in this case, is the antagonist

²²⁹ Once again Argento gives animals a fundamental role in the resolution of the crime and revelation of the killer's identity. Other interesting examples of Argento's films which involve animals in a crucial role are *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo* (1970), *Quattro mosche di velluto grigio* (1971) and *Phenomena* (1985).

²³⁰ The fear of going blind is a central motif in E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann* (1815). Freud has adopted this theme to extend his consideration about castration anxiety. To read more about the topic, please see Freud (1919).

to be punished. Thus, the violence inflicted on his assaultive gaze is perceived as a pleasurable fact.

After the ocular mutilation, Santini kidnaps Betty and takes her to an isolated room located in the theatre. He blindfolds and ties her to a chair, and then he stages his own death, setting fire to the room and apparently to himself. What actually burns is a mannequin. Santini's faked death is the last piece of *performance* art in the film. The theatrical way of presenting the act of killing confers to the killer himself an artistic veil. The director, then, identifies with him and with his *performative* way of staging death.

7.3.2 Trapped in the gaze: the traumatic pleasure

Argento seems obsessed with seeing and exploits the gaze motif as a terror mechanism. In order to focus on this aspect, the following pages will consider Argento's film *Opera*. Released in 1987, the film presents, indeed, interesting elements to be analysed: the gaze, the interaction between narration and spectator, and the theme of superstitions. All these elements will allow us to extend our knowledge of the internalization of horror images in the viewer's mind.

Teatro Regio in Parma is technically the *mise-en-scène* of the actions in *Opera*.²³¹ However, as always happens with Argento's films, the actions are not limited to a single space, but are extended beyond the main ambience of the play. The film opens with a wide-angle view of the majestic opera house from above. The theatre, the orchestra and the cast, rehearsing an avant-garde version of Verdi's *Macbeth*, are reflected in a black raven's eye in close-up (Figure 76).

²³¹ The film *Opera* seems inspired by Argento's failed attempt to direct a version of Verdi's *Rigoletto* for the Sferisterio Theatre in Macerata.



Figure 76 – The opera house reflected in the black raven's eye – *Opera* (1987)

This first sequence, introducing the gaze as a fundamental trope in the film, recalls some remarkable intertextual influences. The ravens, for instance, are presumably a reference to Edgar Allan Poe's poem *The Raven* (1845). Argento was passionate about Poe's works, and, taking inspiration from his characters and stories, he paid homage to the American writer on many occasions.²³² Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963) constitutes another influence throughout *Opera*. In using real birds rather than mechanical models, Argento admitted to being inspired by Hitchcock's aerial shots (Boyd, 2006: 213). The raven's eye in close-up, then, recalls the human eye in the opening scene of Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* (1960).²³³

Annoyed by the presence of ravens on the stage, Diva Mara Cecova leaves the theatre and is hit by a car. As the film begins, we see from her point of view, but we actually never see her on-screen. Her physical absence from the screen could be interpreted as Argento's response to the actress Lynn Redgrave, who abandoned the project before filming started.²³⁴ After Cecova's accident, young Betty is called in to replace her. The girl is insecure and she doesn't believe she is ready to take centre stage in such an important role. Her insecurity is reinforced by the superstitions which

²³² One of the best examples is *Due occhi diabolici*. Shot in 1990, the film was more than a simple adaptation of Poe's *Black Cat* (1843). Argento, in fact, envisioned a full-scale homage, incorporating "allusions to more than a dozen of the author's works" (McDonagh, 1991: 33).

²³³ *Peeping Tom* (1960) opens with a close-up of a human eye. It is that of Mark Lewis, a serial killer who, affected by sadistic *scopophilia*, murders women, using a camera to record their expression of terror in the moment of their death. Eventually he will film himself committing suicide while the police arrive.

²³⁴ Argento introduces Mara Cecova through a disembodied point-of-view shot. Moreover, no performer name is given for Mara. After all, the protagonist was a kind of phantom figure in the film.

circulate around the play. *Macbeth* is historically known for its sinister reputation of bringing misfortune in theatrical contexts.²³⁵ Argento, aware of these beliefs, exploits them and expresses his own views on the argument, with Marco as the director's mouthpiece.²³⁶

Betty: It's the opera – *Macbeth* brings bad luck.

Mira (Betty's agent): What are you talking about?

Betty: Everyone says it – *Macbeth* brings bad luck. It's a great opera, but I would much rather make my debut in something else.

Marco: So, you think this opera brings bad luck, huh?

Betty: It's what everyone says.

Marco: Well, I don't say it [...] You must make the most of this opportunity – it usually only happens to people in the movies.

Betty's fears, however, prove to be well founded when violent incidents happen on stage and in her private life. During the first *performance* of *Macbeth*, a light falls from one of the upper balconies in the theatre, injuring a man. The culprit of this event is a voyeur and fetishist psychopath, who, in the obscure foreground of the theatre, secretly stalks Betty.²³⁷ "You finally returned," he says, when seeing the girl on stage. With these words, the killer refers to both Betty and her mother, recalling in this way his old trauma.

After her *performance* as Lady Macbeth, Betty is violently attacked by the man. The killer ties Betty to a pillar, places two sets of needles on her lower eyelids and

²³⁵ Argento himself, talking about *Opera*, said that the production of the film was "a very unpleasant experience". A series of technical problems occurred. Vanessa Redgrave quit the project before filming began; Argento's father, Salvatore, died during the production of the film; and personal problems affected the long-term relationship between Argento and his girlfriend, Daria Nicolodi, leading to the couple separating.

²³⁶ Recalling many earlier films, such as *Tenebre* (1982), *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo* (1970), *Quattro mosche di velluto grigio* (1971) and *Profondo rosso* (1975), *Opera* is considered one of Argento's most self-referential films. Another point worth mentioning with regard to *Opera* concerns the protagonist, Marco. Marco can be interpreted as a stand-in for Argento himself. He is an ex horror film director, in search of success by attempting to stage an avant-garde version of Verdi's *Macbeth*. Opera glasses in hand, he recalls the anonymous puppet figure watching Roberto.

²³⁷ The killer in this sequence recalls the unknown stalker who, in a bizarre puppet-like mask, stalked Roberto Tobias from the theatre balcony in *Quattro mosche di velluto grigio* (1971).

forces the girl to watch the torture inflicted on her lover's body (Figure 79).²³⁸ This sequence, one of the film's most iconic, echoes the Ludovico technique in *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) (Figure 78).²³⁹ Like Alex in Stanley Kubrick's work, Betty is compelled to keep her eyes open and to watch violent atrocities. However, the two treatments are antithetical. The main difference lies in the motives of the "therapy" itself: while Alex is forced to watch graphically cruel images to eliminate his violent instincts, Betty is compelled to watch in order to have her sadistic impulses manifested (Hennessey, 2008: n.p.).

This scene is also suggestive of one of the most shocking and celebrated sequences of Buñuel's surrealist masterpiece *Un Chien Andalou* (1929): a man with a razor, played by Buñuel himself, forces a woman to keep her left eye open (Figure 77). At this point the frame changes, showing a cloud slicing through the middle of the full moon, and then it reverts back to the razor, slashing the woman's eye in extreme close-up. The sequence seems metaphorically to represent the director opening the eyes of the viewer to another world. It is a surreal world, in which nothing is what it seems. The series of images in *Un Chien Andalou* are surrealist. They follow dream logic in narrative flow. The plot is therefore inexistent, leaving space to the attractive imagery of the shots.

²³⁸ The ventilator grill above Betty's bed and the scratches under Santini's eyes after he has been attacked by the raven recall the needles placed under Betty's eyes.

²³⁹ The Ludovico technique is a fictional therapy from Anthony Burgess's novel *A Clockwork Orange* (1962). The treatment consists of forcing the patient to watch violent images in order to release him from any violent impulses. Dr Brodsky administers an injection of a drug to Alex DeLarge and forces him to watch cruel images and graphically violent films, making Alex incapable of violence. The therapy is supposed to reduce the societal crimes, making Alex feel sick when experiencing brutal images.



Figure 77 – *Un Chien Andalou* (1929); Figure 78 – *A Clockwork Orange* (1971); Figure 79 – *Opera* (1987). Three different examples of open eyes being penetrated

Several theories have been advanced concerning exposure to horror and its effects on the human mind. Many of them (Hill, 1968; Feshbach & Singer, 1971) argue that the viewing of fictional horror can help to overcome fears and phobias, creating a cathartic relief (Hill, Liebert & Mott, 1968). One of the main supporters of this theory is Seymour Feshbach, who states that the exposure to visual violence may prevent the compulsion to act aggressively (Feshbach & Singer, 1971: 156). Working as a safety valve for our aggressive impulses, the dramatic arts generate a kind of symbolic catharsis (Zillmann, 2000: 82). This theory in part reflects the Ludovico technique in Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* (1971). In line with Feshbach, Grixti (1989) puts forward the hypothesis of "the beast within". He claims that "human beings are rotten at the core" and that the horror genre is a kind of relief valve that allows the audience to release the bestiality within (Grixti, 1989: 86).

Over the years, the theories related to the therapeutic and cathartic properties of horror films have been widely criticized. Other studies (Zillmann & Vorderer, 2000), in fact, have demonstrated that the exposure to visual horror increases rather than decreases viewers' aggressive proclivities. It follows that this kind of exposure does not in some way "drain off" the aggressive tendencies and therefore "the symbolic catharsis hypothesis fails" (Zillmann & Vorderer, 2000: 82). Joanne Cantor (2004) supports this theory. She argues that the viewing of horror films can be unhealthy because of the negative traces the images can leave in the memory of the audience. Some horror-film memories, in fact, can be preserved in the amygdala, a region of the

brain that controls our responses to emotional events and can generate reactions and obsessive thoughts similar to those produced by real traumas. Some horror images, once incorporated within the Ego, can be difficult to erase (Cantor, 2004: 301). These observations provide interesting starting points in the understanding of the internalization and circulation of horror symbols in the human mind. In order to develop this argument, I will proceed with the analysis of the shot mentioned above, focusing on the gaze.

As Leon Hunt argues, *Opera* raises “provocative issues in horror spectatorship” (Hunt, 1992: 74). The gaze is an essential element of horror in this regard. Two main forms can be distinguished: the assaultive gaze and the reactive gaze. The former is usually male, cruel and aggressive, while the latter is female, passive and victimized. While the gender issue is a fundamental aspect of the gaze and worthy of deeper investigation, the following analysis will mainly focus on the effects the gaze provides in terms of shock and trauma. The audience’s reacting gaze, for instance, is traumatized by images which, in Clover’s terms, are considered as hurting (Clover, 1992: 203). The act of watching/seeing becomes, therefore, dangerous, causing fear and trauma. Horror directors, aware of the audience’s vulnerability, metaphorically assault the spectators’ eyes through cruel visual graphics. It follows that the reactive gaze, forced to see brutal scenes, is punished and eventually traumatized.

Throughout the film, Betty stands in for the audience members, but while the spectators can close their eyes during the most brutal scenes, Betty has no choice: either she watches or she goes blind. The psycho-killer not only forces her to watch, but also makes it impossible not to watch. “Take a good look!” says the killer with a distorted voice. “If you try to close your eyes you’ll tear them apart, so you’ll just have to watch everything.” These words seem directly addressed to the audience. Argento, in the same way as Santini, wants his spectators to watch and witness the violence and gore on the screen. The inspiration for the needles taped under Betty’s eyes came from Argento’s annoyance at the reaction of some spectators, who would cover their eyes during the gorier moments in his films. Reasonably, Argento films violent sequences because he wants the audience to see them and not “avoid the positive confrontation of their fears by looking away” (Jones, 2004: 158). Thus, the director’s response to the

aforementioned reaction was an extreme device that forced the individual to see: needles taped under the lower eyelids. As discussed in chapter 3, Vivian Sobchack (1992) interprets the relationship between spectator and film in terms of affect and body reflexivity. In other words, according to Sobchack:

We possess an embodied intelligence that opens our eyes far beyond their discrete capacity for vision, opens the film far beyond its visible containment by the screen, and opens language to a reflective knowledge of its carnal origins (Sobchack, 2004: 84).

This means that the viewers' corporeal carnal thoughts go beyond their capacity for vision. They perceive the filmic experience with their entire bodily being (Sobchack, 2007: 63). Moreover, they do not simply identify with the characters and the affect they display, but also draw on personal and cultural experiences as they respond to cinematic elements. This makes the visual experience even more effective.

The viewers are invited to enjoy the sadistic game from Betty's point of view. In other words, the assaulting gaze invites us to collude with the camera and to experience sadistic pleasure in Betty and Stefano's physical and emotional torment. This position is "contrasted with a reactive gazing that looks and empathizes with the pain of the on-screen victims or indeed sees itself as the target of cinematic terror" (Tatar, 1995: 37). From behind the needles, we see Stefano approaching the girl and then being stabbed to death. The extra-diegetic rock music on the soundtrack emphasizes this moment, while a close-up shows Betty's eyes dripping blood. Helplessly, the girl witnesses the murder, watching the violence as a spectator. Her "reactive gaze" (Clover, 1992: 175) is complicit in the act of killing. The repeated cuttings and SRS between Betty's eyes and Stefano's body being tortured allow the viewer to empathize with the victim/heroine. The blade penetrates Stefano's flesh and an extreme close-up shows the bloody tip emerging inside his mouth. After the murder, the killer cuts Betty loose and leaves the house.

After her lover's death, Betty runs out of the apartment and meets Marco, who gives her a lift to her house. Her mind is confused. She is totally incapable of

introjecting the shock. She cannot even recognize whether what she saw was real or not. "I can't decide whether it's just a dream, or the memory of something that's really happened," Betty confesses to Marco. Betty is disoriented. She feels a sense of guilt, believing that what happened was the result of her performance as Lady Macbeth and her consequent success. "Why did I sing the role?" she says. "I shouldn't have. It was my fault." Her thoughts reinforce the superstitious beliefs about *Macbeth*.

7.3.3 Performing memories as traumas of the past

Across the entire film, Argento employs point-of-view angles and inter-cut shots which are spatially and temporally disruptive to the narrative flow. Non-diegetic images and flashbacks follow in an irrational way. The viewer is therefore confused and suspended between dream and reality. Flashbacks are a technique that is often employed to explore traumas and shocks in the protagonists' lives. Acting as retardation devices, they create suspense, delaying the answer to the enigma in the end (Hayward, 2000: 136).

In a significant sequence (00:22:22 – 00:23:52), the killer recalls a past trauma. The scene opens with a series of long hallways, corridors and spiral staircases which lead to a secret room, where a woman sleeps on her bed. As discussed in chapter 4, the passage through narrow and impervious spaces often allegorizes the descent to the subconscious: a journey towards the most intimate spaces of the mind. As the psycho-killer walks down the staircase, the subjective camera facilitates the identification with his point of view.²⁴⁰ However, the ambiguity of the images does not allow the spectator to recognize whether what he sees is real or not. Is the killer actually walking there or is it a memory? Throughout the film, these actions/images will be revealed to be flashbacks to the past. They recall sadistic fantasies enacted years before with Betty's mother (Figure 80).

²⁴⁰ This sequence is accompanied by Bill Wyman and Terry Taylor's score *Black Notes* (1987).

The camera movements slowly follow the female body lying on the bed. The killer removes the sheet from the woman, almost inviting the viewer to participate in the perverse ritualistic game. A medium close-up shot shows female hands offering a dagger to the killer and then waiting to be tied up with a rope. The consignment of the weapon suggests a symbolical passage of power. It represents the possibility of Santini acquiring a dominant status and reconfirming his virility, re-establishing, therefore, the patriarchal order of roles. The dagger, symbolically associated with the phallus, suggests the act of penetration. It follows that the moment of stabbing can be interpreted as one of phallic aggression: rape and murder performed at the same time (Cooper, 2012: 36). The spectator follows the crime from the killer's point of view; however, before the murder is accomplished, the camera abruptly cuts to another scene. The straight cut replaces the murder sequence with a shot of the killer's house, while a record tape shows Betty in the opera house.



Figure 80 – Santini's perverse flashback – *Opera* (1987)

The fractured images of Santini's flashback (*permanent visitors*) seem apparently disconnected and unrelated to the previous actions.²⁴¹ They “proceed from one to another not by way of advancing the linear narrative, but by the sorts of associative connections” (Sevastakis, 2002: n.p.). In the end, the killer's memories and Betty's dreams find a connection, appearing interchangeable and leading the spectators to a solution.

²⁴¹ To read more about the concept of permanent and temporary visitors, see chapter 3 (3.4.1).

Betty is also subject to persistent flashbacks (*temporary visitors*). The girl remembers a woman tied up and a frightened young child staring at her. The images are blurred and difficult to grasp. However, throughout the film they will find a reason to exist. The child from her dreams is Betty herself and the blonde woman her mother. Witnessing some perverted moments of her mother's life, Betty as a child incorporated the visual trauma within her mind. To use Abraham and Torok's terms, she incorporated the object of trauma (psychic phantom) in a crypt of her Ego. Over the years, the psychic phantom found expression in the form of dreams and flashbacks, tormenting the girl from within. Reflecting traumas and psychoses of the past, these blurred memories show how excessive images and events are stored in the human mind. Santini had a perverse/sadistic relationship with Betty's mother: she forced him to torture and kill young women, before allowing him to have sex with her. "She taught me a cruel little game of killing and torturing. Only then could I be her slave," explains Santini to Betty. All of this happened while Betty's mother was tied up. The killer, seeing the young girl on stage as Lady Macbeth, thinks she is just like her mother. Thus, he enacts theatrical murders for the purpose of her pleasure.

The problematic of masochism in contradistinction to sadism, as developed in Deleuze's *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty* (1997), helps to delineate the role of victim and victimizer, and understand the relation between Betty and Santini better. Deleuze (1997) rejects Freud's combination of masochism and sadism in terms of sadomasochism. According to the French philosopher, masochism and sadism arise from such different impulses that the fusion of the two concepts in terms of sadomasochism is misleading. While the masochist derives pleasure from the Contract, defined as the process by which he can control another individual, the Sadist derives pleasure from the Law: the unavoidable power that subordinates one person below another. Santini, who apparently seems to be the victimizer, is actually a victim in search of a torturer. Convinced that he has found in Betty the ideal partner to realize the most dangerous of games, he tries to educate, persuade and conclude an alliance with her, by forcing the girl to watch atrocious murders (Deleuze, 1997: 20). Santini wishes to recreate the same masochistic alliance he had with Betty's mother. This relation, contrary to the sadist one, is not intended to hurt the girl. It is aimed, instead,

at entertaining and giving pleasure to Betty. Therefore, as Deleuze (1997) argues, the acts of violence are staged in order to manipulate the woman “into the ideal state for the *performance* of the role he has assigned to her” (Deleuze, 1997: 124). Santini assigns to Betty the role of passive torturer – a role that, apparently, was originally established in his previous relation with Betty’s mother, but which actually hides a prevalent role in his dominant partner. He needs his Lady Macbeth in order to recover his virility.

Conclusion

In the first part of this chapter, the application of Abraham and Torok’s theory of the psychic phantom to Mario Bava’s film *Operazione paura* (1966) has been useful in understanding the psycho-dynamics of the film and in exploring the concept of the double-phantom as a result of the unspoken and of trauma. In the second part, by recalling Gunning’s concept of the *cinema of attractions* I have developed the idea to propose the notion of the *horror of attractions*. This definition has allowed me to explore the *performative* qualities of the genre, with particular reference to Dario Argento’s *Opera* (1987). The analysis has demonstrated how *Opera*, as a performative form of art, is able to entertain and shock the audience at the same time. Its visual aestheticization of violence, in fact, acts as an element of the horror of attraction which, trapping the viewer’s gaze, causes a traumatic pleasure.

CONCLUSION

After framing the horror genre as a product designed to elicit fear, this work has focused on the interdisciplinary influences and intertextualities in Italian horror cinema. Despite the emergence of insightful theories related to horror cinema studies (psychoanalytical, feminist, sociological, etc.), the theoretical debate on the subject remains incomprehensive. The theories advanced, in fact, if taken singularly, are valuable but not totally explanatory of the genre's significance, reception and changes. To facilitate a more explicative knowledge it is necessary to widen the horizon of reading and interpreting the genre by incorporating more perspectives at a time. With this observation in mind, this study has aimed to address the gap in critical knowledge, reviewing the potentiality of Italian horror cinema through a multidisciplinary discourse. While outlining my theoretical scheme, I realized that the only way to provide a more exhaustive interpretation of the horror genre was to adopt an interactionist approach. Interactionism enables more perspectives to be considered at the same time. With regard to this, my project has mainly drawn on three hermeneutic traditions (psychoanalytical, pragmatist and sociological), advancing a dialogic investigation of the birth, evolution and decline of the Italian horror genre from its origins (1957) until the late 1960s.

The theoretical part of my dissertation has advanced the hypothesis of two distinct archives of horror, external and internal, suggesting an interpretation in terms of collective and individual memories. While the external archives include symbols established and recognized as horrific by the society, the internal ones engage with their assimilations in the human mind. The identification of collective archives has favoured the understanding of the national context in which horror archetypes have been generated. In line with this, chapter 1 has explored a wide range of common cultural elements, mainly identified in four sub-archives (Catholic religion, mythological traditions, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century gothic literature, and visual arts). These repositories, documented as the main generators of emblems of fear, provided fundamental sources of inspiration for Italian horror cinema.

As discussed throughout this thesis, the aim of the horror genre is universal; however, the means and resources used to elicit fear in audiences vary in national and international contexts. Horror symbols, in fact, are not the same across the globe. Their effectiveness changes from individual to individual, according to the singular set of beliefs established and permeated in the human mind. The success or failure of these symbols derives from the different outcomes of interaction ritual chains and the consequent level of emotional energy charged on them. If rituals are successful, symbols will be charged by special values which will last for a long time; conversely, if unsuccessful, symbols will lose their power, breaking the chain of circulation.

The analysis of diverse archives of horror has pointed out the dynamics of the genre as well as three distinct levels of circulation of symbols. The first level has been located in the context of the primordial phases of the growth of humankind, the second one in Italian horror cinema and the third in the private context of the inner conversation (in the human mind). The identification of these three phases of circulations has provided a broader understanding of how the genre constructs intertextual relationships. The interplay between cinema and archives of horror has documented a recurrent intertextuality which has often been at the base of the development of horror subgenres. With regard to this, chapter 2 has developed the argument with reference to a wide number of films where horror has been exploited under different forms.

Along with some moral implications, as well as censorship and spectatorship issues, production strategies and distribution models, my analysis has provided an overview of the conditions that favoured an intense proliferation of horror productions in the 1970s. In those years, the commercial success of British and American producers led Italian filmmakers to produce a massive amount of films, in order to challenge the hegemony of foreign distributions. Many of these films incorporated horror archetypes with elements of different natures, giving birth to hybrid cycles and new metaphors of fear. Horror directors drew symbols from a variety of discourses and, after a process of manipulation, imposed them on audiences. This phenomenon led to the reinforcement of old symbols and to the creation of new ones, which, circulating in further cinematic rituals, acquired new meaning and emotional energy. The innovative representations

that resulted emphasized the constant evolution of the genre in line with the tastes and conformation of modernity.

Exploiting themes which were at the core of the Italian society of those years, this new wave of films explored anxieties, perversity and moral taboos that were viewed as provocative and incompatible with civilized morality. Noticeably more violent compared to their foreign counterparts, the Italian productions staged an explicit sexualization of violence, engaging with themes related to gender, misogyny and sadism. These motifs, shocking and appealing at the same time, indulged the viewers' voyeuristic fantasies, becoming successful in both national and international markets. Another fundamental factor which affected the genre's development was the audience's expectations. With regard to this, chapter 2 has investigated the ways in which the horror genre attracts the viewer's attention, binding individuals around points of mutual interest. This analysis has heightened the fans' performativity and the importance of their agency in the dynamics of the distribution and reception of the horror genre. Fans, in fact, in both their privacy and their collectiveness, play a significant role in the ritualistic development and circulation of the genre.

As Siegfried Kracauer (1947) argues in *From Caligari to Hitler*, horror films offer an invaluable means of exploring and understanding the anxieties, fears and desires of a national body. In line with these considerations, one could say that the Italian horror genre provides a useful device to understand the tendencies and changes of the Italian society. The social reforms, the influence of the Catholic Church and the general changes which affected Italy from the late 1950s to the late 1980s provided pivotal points of analysis (Ginsborg, 1990; Di Scala, 1995; Forgacs, 2007). Not only the present but also the facts of the past are remarkable elements to be taken into consideration in the understanding of the origins and development of the genre. Developing in parallel with the spirit of its time, the horror genre reflects the changes in society. It is therefore reasonable to argue that, developing in this context of social, cultural and economic transformations, Freda, Bava and Argento shaped their vision of horror according to the changes of their era.

After exploring the importance of external archives of horror and the second-order circulation of symbols, chapter 3 has developed the concept of internal archives.

The investigation of these intimate repositories of fear has outlined a third-order circulation of symbols in the human psyche. To delve into this aspect, the attention has initially focused on the different ways of reading the Freudian concept of the *uncanny*. The identification of three groups of uncanniness and monstrosity – the return of the repressed, the reconfirmation of surmounted beliefs and the abject – has favoured a better understanding of the internalization and effects of the horrific in the human mind. However, the argument has required further analysis. Freudian theories (1919), in fact, although contributing to the viewers' response to horror films, do not provide a complete and exhaustive account of the genre. In order to fill this gap, Abraham and Torok's theories of psychic phantoms and trans-generational transmission have been adopted, providing new ways of reading and interpreting the process of internalization of horror symbols at an unconscious level. This discourse has been further extended through a pragmatist approach which has identified a third-order circulation of symbols, placed in a more private sphere. Individuals, in their solitude, re-elaborate thoughts and beliefs within their own mind through internal conversations. The combination of both approaches, psychoanalytical and pragmatist, has provided new perspectives on the process of internalization of horror films at conscious and unconscious levels, offering, furthermore, a new contribution to the neo-pragmatist ideas about inner speech.

The second part of my research has provided a theoretical development, illustrated through a series of case studies aimed at exploring the dynamics that affected the development, circulation and reception of Italian horror cinema from its origins until the 1980s. Taking a closer look at specific films from the work of individual directors such as Freda, Bava and Argento, my discussion has addressed the ways in which spaces, objects, identities and actions interact across the genre's narrative structures. The analysis, highlighting the directors' constant use of intertextual references to symbols already circulated at the first level, has shown that horror archetypes, motifs and themes intersect reciprocally, being framed by the socio-cultural conditions of the country at that time.

Discussing the genre through filmic and extra-filmic discourses (including editing and marketing processes, censorship and spectatorship issues, and intertextual

references to external and internal archives of horror), my thesis has suggested the need for a broad and dialogic interpretation. Only a dialogic interactionist perspective allows a more exhaustive reading of the Italian horror genre. As underlined throughout my work, the Italian horror genre refers to and draws on a multiplicity of discourses. It is therefore understandable that it can only be interpreted by a series of dialogic interactions incorporating a multitude of factors. The use of a singular approach, in fact, is incomprehensive in its aim of answering genre issues. Hence, whilst bearing this in mind, my project has attempted to analyse the horror genre by advancing more perspectives at the same time (mainly psychoanalytic, pragmatist and sociological).

Focusing on how different levels of analysis interact with one another, the combination of both parts of my research, theoretical and analytical, has proven that interactionism can extend the ways of reading and interpreting the Italian horror genre. Moreover, encompassing a variety of multidisciplinary discourses (Freud, 1919; Kristeva, 1982; Creed, 1993; Abraham and Torok, 1994; Wiley, 1994; Collins, 2004, etc.), the critical framework of my study has demonstrated that interactionist theories can be heuristically applied in the investigation of the genre. Interactionist approaches have received little attention from film criticism. This thesis offers one way of filling this gap, by developing a strand of microsociological theory that has not previously been applied to the genre. In this sense, my research suggests new reading strategies of the horror genre, offering, therefore, new perspectives on Italian cinema studies. By considering intertextuality as a common property in various arts, my research provides ideas that will inspire the following examinations of this or other bodies of work. This thesis, in fact, offers considerable potential for exploring other genres using similar methodological approaches.

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L'orribile segreto del dr. Hichcock aka "The Horrible dr Hichcock", Italy (1962), Italy
Freda, Riccardo (dir)

Lisa e il Diavolo aka "Lisa and the Devil", Italy (1972), Bava, Mario (dir)

Opera aka "Terror at the Opera", Italy (1987), Argento, Dario (dir)

Operazione paura aka "Kill, Baby, Kill!", Italy (1966), Bava, Mario (dir)

Profondo rosso aka "Deep Red", Italy (1975), Argento, Dario (dir)

Suspiria aka "Suspiria", Italy, Germany (1977), Argento, Dario (dir)

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La vergine dei veleni, Italy (1917), Vidali, Enrico (dir)

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Le ombre roventi aka "Shadows of Illusion", Italy (1979), Caiano, Mario (dir)

Le notti del terrore aka "Burial Ground", Italy (1980), Bianchi, Andrea (dir)

Le scomuniche di San Valentino aka "The Sinful Nuns of St. Valentine", Italy/Spain (1974), Grieco, Sergio (dir)

Lo spettro aka "The Ghost", Italy (1963), Freda, Riccardo (dir)

Lycanthropus aka "Werewolf in a Girls' Dormitory", Italy/Austria (1961), Heusch, Paolo (dir)

L'ultimo uomo della terra, 1964 Ragona, Ubaldo (dir).

Macabro aka "Macabre", Italy (1980), Bava, Lamberto (dir)

Macchie solari aka "The Magician", Italy (1975), Crispino, Armando (dir)

Mamma Roma aka "Mamma Roma", Italy (1962), Pasolini Pier Paolo (dir)

Mio caro assassino aka "My Dear Killer", Italy/Spain (1972), Valerii, Tonino (dir)

Mondo cane aka "Mondo Cane 1", Italy (1962), Cavara, Paolo (dir.)

Morte sospetta di una minorenne aka "The Suspicious Death of a Minor", Italy (1975), Martino, Sergio (dir)

Murder obsession – Follia omicida, Italy, France (1980), Freda, Riccardo (dir)

Non ho sonno aka "Sleepless", Italy (2000), Argento, Dario (dir)

Non si sevizia un paperino aka "Don't Torture a Duckling", Italy (1972), Fulci, Lucio (dir)

Nosferatu: eine Symphonie des Grauens aka "Nosferatu", Germany (1922), Murnau, F.W (dir)

Ossessione aka "Obsession", Italy (1943), Visconti, Luchino (dir)

Patrick vive ancora aka "Patrick is Still Alive", Italy (1980), Landi, Mario (dir)

Paura nella città dei morti viventi aka "City of the Living Dead", Italy (1980), Fulci, Lucio (dir)

Pensione paura aka "Hotel of Fear", Italy/Spain (1977), Barilli, Francesco (dir)

Perché quelle strane gocce di sangue sul corpo di Jennifer? aka "The Case of the Bloody Iris", Italy/Spain (1972), Carminio, Giuliano (dir)

Phenomena aka "Phenomena", Italy (1985), Argento, Dario (dir)

Il portiere di notte aka "The Night Porter", Italy (1974), Cavani, Liliana (dir)

Pitch Black, USA (2000), Twohy, David (dir.)

Porno Holocaust aka "Porno Holocaust", Italy (1981), Aristide Massaccesi as Joe D'Amato (dir)

Prometheus, USA (2012), Scott, Ridley (dir)

Qualcosa striscia nel buio aka "Something is Crawling in the Dark", Italy (1971), Colucci, Mario (dir)

Quante volte ... quella notte aka "Four Times that Night", Italy (1969), Bava, Mario (dir)

Quattro mosche di velluto grigio aka "Four Flies on Grey Velvet", Italy/France (1971), Argento, Dario (dir)

Quella villa accanto al cimitero aka "The House by Cemetery", Italy (1981), Fulci, Lucio (dir)

Quo Vadis? aka "Quo Vadis?", Italy (1913), Guazzoni, Enrico (dir)

Raisin Cain, USA (1992), De Palma, Brian (dir)

Rapsodia satanica aka "Satan's Rhapsody", Italy (1917) Oxilia, Nino (dir)

Rats - Notte di terrore aka "Rats - Night of Terror", Italy/France (1984), Mattei, Bruno (dir)

Riti, magie nere e segrete orge nel trecento aka "Black Magic Rites & the Secret Orgies of the 14th Century", Italy (1973), Polselli, Renato as Ralph Brown (dir)

Roma, Italy (1972), Fellini, Federico (dir)

Salò e le 120 giornate di Sodoma aka "Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom", Italy/France (1975), Pasolini, Pier Paolo (dir)

Satyricon aka "Satyricon" Italy (1969), Fellini, Federico (dir)

Saw, USA (2004), Wan James (dir)

Scorticateli vivi aka "Skin 'em Alive", Italy (1978), Siciliano Mario (dir)

Sei donne per l'assassino aka "Blood and Black Lace", Italy (1964), Bava, Mario (dir)

Sette note in nero aka "The Psychic", Italy (1977), Fulci, Lucio (dir)

Shivers, Canada (1975), Cronenberg, David (dir)

Shock (Al 33 di Via Orologio fa sempre freddo), aka "Beyond the Door II", Italy (1977), co-directed by Lamberto Bava, Bava, Mario (dir)

Simòn del desierto aka "Simòn del desierto", Mexico (1965), Bunuel, Luis (dir)

Suor Omicidi aka "Killer Nun", Italy (1979), Berruti, Giulio (dir)

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

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

The Last Temptation of Christ, USA (1988), Scorsese, Martin (dir)

The Man Who Knew Too Much, USA (1956), Hitchcock, Alfred (dir)

The Pit and the Pendulum, USA (1961), Corman Roger (dir)

Tenebre aka "Tenebre", Italy (1983), Argento, Dario (dir)

Terrore nello spazio aka "Planet of the Vampires", Italy (1965), Bava, Mario (dir)

Trauma aka "Trauma", Italy/Usa (1992), Argento, Dario (dir)

Tre passi nel delirio aka "Spirits of the Dead" Italy/France (1968), Fellini Federico, Malle, Louis; Vadim, Roger (dir)

Tutti i colori del buio aka "All the colors of the Dark", Italy/Spain (1972), Martino, Sergio (dir)

Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me, France/USA (1992), Lynch, David (dir)

Ultimo mondo cannibale aka "Last Cannibal World", Italy (1977), Deodato, Ruggero (dir)

Un angelo per Satana aka "An Angel for Satan", Italy (1966), Mastrocinque, Camillo (dir)

Un sussurro nel buio aka "Whisper in the Dark", Italy (1976), Aliprandi, Marcello (dir)

Una lucertola dalla pelle di donna aka "Lizard in a Woman's Skin", Italy (1971), Fulci, Lucio (dir)

Videodrome aka "Videodrome", Canada (1983), Cronenberg, David (dir)

Zombie 2 aka "Zombie Flesh Eaters", Italy (1979), Fulci, Lucio (dir)

VISUAL ARTS

Caravaggio, (c. 1597), *Medusa*, Florence: Uffizi, oil on canvas, 60 x 55 cm.

- (c.1598), *Judith Beheading Holofernes*, Rome: Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, oil on canvas, 145 x 195 cm.
- (1599), *David and Goliath*, Madrid: Prado, oil on canvas, 110 x 91 cm.
- (1602), *Sacrifice of Isaac*, Florence: Uffizi, oil on canvas, 104 x 135.
- (1607), *David with the Head of Goliath*, Vienna: Kunsthistorisches Museum, oil on wood, 90.5 x 116 cm.
- (1607), *Salome with the Head of John the Baptist*, London: National Gallery, oil on canvas, 90.5 x 167 cm.
- (1609), *Salome with the Head of John the Baptist*, Madrid: Royal Palace of Madrid, oil on canvas, 116 x 140 cm.
- (1610), *David with the Head of Goliath*, Rome: Borghese, oil on canvas, 125 x 101 cm.

Caspar David Friedrich (1801-1840), *The Abbey in the Oakwood*, Berlin: Alte Nationalgalerie, oil on canvas, 110 x 171 cm.

Escher, Maurits Cornelis (1898-1959), *Sky and Water I*, Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, woodcut, 43.5 x 43.9 cm.

Goya, Francisco (1746-1828), *Saturn Devouring His Son*, Madrid: Del Prado Museum, oil mural transferred on canvas, 143 x 81 cm.

- (1788-1828), *Two Old Men Eating Soup*, Madrid: Del Prado Museum, oil mural transferred on canvas, 49.3 x 83.4 cm.

Fuseli, Henry (1768-1825), *The Nightmare*, Detroit: Institute of Arts, oil on canvas, 101.6 x 127 cm.

Munch, Edvard (1863-1944), *The Scream*, Oslo: National Gallery Galleria Nazionale di Oslo, oil, tempera and pastel on cardboard, 91 x 74 cm.

FUMETTI NERI

Allain, Marcel; Souvestre, Pierre (2001) [1911], *Fantomas*, Giallo Mondadori

Barbieri, Renzo; Del Principe, Nicola (1977), *Sukia*, Milano: Edifumetto

- (1969), *Terror*, Milano: Ediperiodici
- (1969), *Terror Blue*, Milano: Ediperiodici
- (1972), *Il Vampiro*, Milano: Ediperiodici
- (1973), *Lo scheletro*, Milano: Ediperiodici

Bunker, Max, Magnus (1964), *Kriminal*, Milano:Editoriale Corno

- *Satanik* (1964), Editoriale Corno

Cannata, Nino (1965), *Sadik*, Ugo del Buono Editore

De Fiore, Gaspare & Rosi, Sergio; Cambiotti, Giorgio(1969), *Jacula*, ErreGi

Giussani, Angela; Giussani, Luciana (1962), *Diabolik*, Astorina

Leblanc, Maurice (1905), *Arsène Lupin*, Éditions Pierre Lafitte

Leonetti, Dino (1971), *Oltretomba*, Milano: Ediperiodici

Pederali, Giuseppe (1972), *Zora*, Ediperiodici

Sansoni, Gino; Giussani, Angela (1965), *Zakimort*, Editrice Cea

Sazie, Léon (1910), *Zigomar*, Ferenczi.