

Roma De Profundis:

Post-Economic Miracle Rome and the Films of Dario Argento (1970-1982)

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INTRODUCTION

Reading Argento Reading Rome

Reading Argento Reading Rome

This dissertation is about the confrontation between the film work of the Italian horror-thriller director Dario Argento and the city of Rome. It focuses on three key films within Argento's oeuvre, all of which are set in Rome – *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo* / *The Bird With the Crystal Plumage* (1970), *Profondo rosso* / *Deep Red* (1975), and *Tenebre* / *Unsane* (1982).¹ Each of my three body chapters is a close reading of one of these films. These chapters are ordered chronologically. I close this work with an epilogue in which I revisit the problematic developed in these films twenty-five years later with a brief reading of one of Argento's most recent Roman films, *La terza madre* / *The Mother of Tears* (2007).

The films that I analyze were made at an important historical conjuncture – namely, both on the heels of the intense period of economic modernization and socio-cultural transformation known as *il boom* or the “economic miracle” (which began in the mid-1950s and lasted until the early 1970s), and in the midst of the politically and socially turbulent period between 1968 and 1982 that has been widely seen as a response

¹ In addition to *Unsane*, *Tenebre*, which literally means “shadows” in English, was released in the Anglophone world as *Tenebrae* and *Under the Eyes of the Assassin*. As with the other films I analyze, throughout this work I will alternate between the original, Italian title, and the English title.

to the miracle, and that is known in Italy as the *Sessantotto*. Unlike some of his contemporaries in the Italian film industry (most famously Bernardo Bertolucci, Elio Petri, Francesco Rosi, Marco Bellocchio, Liliana Cavani, and Lina Wertmüller), Argento's films do not at any point engage directly with the political movements or ideologies of the *Sessantotto*. There is not a single shot of protest or activism; no depiction of workers striking or of students occupying buildings; no references to domestic terrorism; and none of the graphic images of police suppression that filled the screens of both militant cinemas and the nightly news across the nation during this period.

As we will see, Argento's films are a form of popular art, and their central imperatives were therefore ones of entertainment, not pedagogy. However, as I argue throughout this dissertation, Argento's work is neither apolitical nor ahistorical, as much as it may seem to be so on the surface. Part of my work, rather, is to unearth the political energies embedded within these three *Sessantotto*-era films, and thereby to return this work to this particular history. I will argue that although his camera may have resolutely avoided the images of protest and state authoritarianism that we are so used to seeing in what counts as "political cinema," Argento's work does raise a number of explicitly political questions precisely around the state of Italian life – especially Italian urban life – on the heels of the modernization processes of the "miracle."

Even if he rarely involved himself directly in the struggle, Argento has always identified as a leftist, and his body of work from the *Sessantotto* tacitly engages with some of the new political concepts and newly politicized categories that were "in the air" internationally at this moment. Indeed, many of the questions that Argento's films raise

circulate around critical categories that were developed or revitalized within 1968-era movements worldwide, sometimes as instruments for further protest, and sometimes as means of understanding the inadequacies of traditional, leftist notions of politics and political action in the face of contemporary modalities of capital and power.

Most important of these for my purposes was the socio-political and socio-economic critique emerging in European leftist thought at this moment around the category of space. Edward Soja, for example, isolates a number of what he calls “space invaders” in the 1960s and ‘70s, that is, geographers who began to subject their work to Marxist analysis and interpretation (David Harvey and Manuel Castells, for example, along with the contributors to the Anglo-American journal *Antipode*), or conversely, Marxists who began to “spatialize” the dialectic (such as Henri Lefebvre and the Situationists).² In addition, this was also a time of important transformations in the thinking of Michel Foucault, who began at this moment to examine the role of spatiality – the distribution and organization of bodies in space – in the formation of power-knowledge.³ As for Italy itself, although a truly Marxist geography would not develop in Italian *theory* until much later, as the historian Paul Ginsborg notes, some of the chief

² For an extended discussion of the history of the category of space within the Marxist tradition, see Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989).

³ Here I am specifically referring to the 1975 publication of *Discipline and Punish*, and to the transformation that it indicates in Foucault’s thinking around the category of space from earlier works like *Madness and Civilization* (1961) and *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963). In these earlier works, power functioned within institutional spaces of confinement and division. From *Discipline and Punish* on, however, Foucault would read such institutional settings merely as indicators of a more pervasive and ubiquitous form of power that could be defined as a delocalized, “political technology... detached from any specific use.” See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995) 205. See also *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), and *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Vintage Books, 1994)

fronts of protest for the Italian *Sessantotto* at the level of *practice* directly involved space – housing and town and city planning in particular.⁴

Circulating around the early years of the Italian *Sessantotto*, therefore, we can see a new form of analysis emerging practically worldwide that would focus on the particular role played by space itself in capitalist accumulation and ideology, and in strategies and tactics of power and resistance. The three films that I discuss, in a number of ways and on a number of levels, function together as an extensive exploration of the ways in which a continually unfolding history of power relations and strategies of capitalist accumulation can be detected within the structures, meanings, and social manifestations of urban and domestic space in post-miracle Rome in particular. Simply put, it is the goal of this dissertation to uncover and examine these structures and meanings, and to use them to articulate this history.

The key force shaping this history – and, indeed, these spaces – was, as we have seen time and again in historical and cultural studies of economic miracle Italy, the growth of neocapitalism. As Angelo Restivo has explored in a book-length study, this was true of the cinema of this period as well, which was, in his words,

profoundly connected, first, to the processes of political and economic reorganization that (re)constructed the nation into the Italy we know

⁴ See Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics, 1943-1988* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003) 298-309, 323-325. On the lack of a tradition of Marxist Geography in Italy, see Paul Claval's chapter on Italy in Ronald John Johnston and Claval, eds. *Geography Since the Second World War: An International Survey* (Sydney: Croom Helm Australia, 1984) 42-63. As Claval and others have noted, the work of Antonio Gramsci – particularly around the concept of “uneven development” – stands as a glaring exception in the Italian context. See especially Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, trans. Joseph A. Buttigieg (New York, Columbia U.P., 1991).

today; and second, to the larger and more “invisible” processes that have marked the transformation of global capitalism in the postwar period.⁵

Dominant among these processes, Restivo goes on to argue, were the increasing mobility, corporatization, and privatization commonly associated with what has come to be called, by Frederic Jameson and others, “late,” or “multinational” capitalism, along with the social, cultural, and geographic “postmodernity” that these new forms have effected.⁶ A number of art films from the 1950s and ‘60s grapple with and figure this emergence of “neocapitalism and the incipient postmodernity that accompanies it,” according to Restivo.⁷ Through symptomatic readings of these films (in particular their intense concentration on both issues of visuality and the image on the one hand, and the construction of narrative space on the other), Restivo argues, one can bring these emergent – and therefore, at their time, invisible – processes into visibility.

Among the goals of this dissertation is, like Restivo, to examine the relationship between neocapitalism and the category of space as it is mediated through cinematic representation, and like him, I take Italy as a kind of case study. However, I investigate this problematic in different cultural locations and at different geographic levels. To begin with, Restivo focuses on art cinema, which he claims, “differentiates itself from the ‘low art’ of the period insofar as it self-consciously addresses itself to a national

⁵ Angelo Restivo, *The Cinema of Economic Miracles: Visuality and Modernization in the Italian Art Film* (Durham, NC: Duke U.P., 2002) 3-4.

⁶ The most widely read analysis of cultural production under late capitalism is still Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism: Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke U.P., 1991). See also David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry Into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell Press, 1990). Jameson borrows the periodizing concept of “late capitalism” from Ernest Mandel. See Mandel, *Late Capitalism*, trans. Joris De Bres (New York: Verso, 1999).

⁷ Restivo 5.

cinematic tradition: the tradition of neorealism, so crucial to the process of national reconstruction.”⁸ Although they may incorporate certain art cinema tropes and techniques (as I argue *Deep Red* in particular does in my second chapter), Argento’s films, as anyone who has seen them can attest to, are decidedly not “art cinema.” In fact, Restivo even offers Argento as an example of the “low art” from which the national canon (the films of Antonioni, de Sica, Fellini, Pasolini, Rossellini, and so on) self-consciously differentiated itself throughout the 1960s and 70s.⁹ The film texts that I deal with do not come from the elite, intellectual, tradition of modernist art cinema, but rather from the sphere of postmodern mass media, and, within that sphere, from the immensely popular but critically debased genre of the *giallo*, itself a kind of hybrid of other popular generic forms (mainly horror, detective fiction, science fiction/fantasy, and the suspense thriller).¹⁰ Such “low” art, Restivo goes on to note, represented by genres like the *giallo* – along with comedies *all’italiana*, Spaghetti westerns, and *peplum* films – gave the Italian film industry as a whole a solid and secure economic base throughout the 1960s and ‘70s, and it was this very base that allowed for the experimentation and risk-taking (and the consequent low profit margin) of art films.¹¹

⁸ Restivo 9.

⁹ Restivo 9.

¹⁰ The most complete account of the genesis of the *giallo* on both the levels of aesthetics and industry is Mikel J. Koven, *La Dolce Morte: Vernacular Cinema and the Italian Giallo Film* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2006).

¹¹ Restivo 9.

Genres like the *giallo* therefore not only exist on the opposite end of the industrial spectrum from art films, but they imply an entirely different audience as well. As Mikel J. Koven argues in his book-length study of the genre,

approaching the *giallo* as one would other kinds of Italian cinema, such as that of Fellini or Antonioni, is not productive, as this genre was never intended for the art house, but for the grind house. These films were produced for marginalized movie theaters (and people), and for no other reason than immediate enjoyment.... We need to understand these films as vernacular, as a kind of cinema intended for consumption outside of mainstream, bourgeois cinema culture.¹²

This obviously has important repercussions for any potential critical approach to this cycle of films. Most studies of the *giallo* fail, Koven claims, by “desperately trying to make square pegs fit into round (modernist) holes.”¹³ Indeed, in its mass appeal, its heavy use of pastiche around genre and other aspects of cinematic coding, narrative structure, and marketing, and the often transnational scope of its stories, characters, lifestyles, and stylistic reference points, the *giallo* of the 1970s was an eminently postmodern genre. This was especially true for Argento, whose stylistic and film-historical reference points are truly global, whose protagonists are usually tourists and foreign ex-pats, and whose mise-en-scène is often filled with airports, mass produced commodities like automobiles, television sets and generic home décor items, historically decontextualized and unlocalizable urban spaces, and monolithic postmodern corporate and institutional buildings. The art cinema canon may be self-referential around issues epistemological

¹² Koven 19.

¹³ Koven 22.

and aesthetic, but Argento's films, as I will demonstrate throughout this work, are absolutely saturated with their own discursivity and intertextuality.¹⁴

As Pam Cook notes "trash" and "exploitation" genres like the *giallo* may have targeted a mass audience, but they found loyalty in certain markets in particular, mainly, she claims, "the youth/drive-in audience generally uninterested in critical reviews."¹⁵ The emergence of such a market in any culture implies a number of social and economic developments – motorization, for example, along with the kind of affluence that would make spending money and unsupervised leisure time possible for young adults. As I will explore at greater length later, in Italy these trends were tied very specifically to the transformations in global capitalism reflected in the economic miracle, transformations that also left traces on the media landscape of the country and in its urban and suburban spaces. The *giallo*'s very existence as a cultural phenomenon, in other words, is premised upon the changing socio-economic and socio-geographic structure of Italian life.

Similarly, much of the content of this group of films also emphasizes the changes wrought by the miracle's processes of modernization, especially as they affected urban space and experience. The three films I discuss pay particularly close attention to the effects of these changes on the urban space of Rome. Unlike Restivo, therefore, who

¹⁴ Indeed, the very transnational scope of Argento's intertextual references itself points to an increasingly global experience of media and culture. Not only do his films cite Italian art and popular, genre films (especially the work of Michelangelo Antonioni, Federico Fellini, Mario Bava, Sergio Corbucci, and Sergio Leone), but they also make reference or pay homage to, among others, filmmakers like Alfred Hitchcock, Fritz Lang, Jean-Luc Godard, Claude Chabrol, F.W. Murnau, Douglas Sirk, Nicholas Ray, Roger Corman, Stanley Kubrick, Arthur Penn, and Walt Disney (and, later in his career, George Romero, David Cronenberg, John Carpenter, and other more contemporary horror *auteurs*). Similarly, Argento's scripts often borrow from Anglo-American writers like Thomas De Quincey, Edgar Allen Poe, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Raymond Chandler, and Frederic Brown).

¹⁵ Pam Cook, "The Art of Exploitation or How to Get Into the Movies," *Monthly Film Bulletin* 52 (December 1985) 367.

concentrates mainly on the geographic scale of the nation (in particular, the post-war crisis of the nation-state and “national” subjectivity), I focus more on the urban and its sometimes subtle and intricate relationship with the global. Throughout this work I will be examining the confrontation between the urban space of Rome and the cinematic narrative space of Argento’s films with an eye towards those moments – both temporal and spatial – that reveal not only the emergence of new urban forms and geographies, but also, by extension, the parameters of a new, increasingly pervasive form of global space. Following Henri Lefebvre and Frederic Jameson, whose work I will discuss at length in the next section, I will be referring to this global form of space as “abstract” and “postmodern.” By the time of Argento’s films, the ultimate stage on which the social geography of global capitalism was playing out was no longer the nation, but rather the city, and this shift left some very visible traces on Rome’s urban landscape throughout the period of the miracle.

Indeed, while my method, like Restivo’s, is close textual reading, the three films that I choose are in themselves already textual readings of a certain sort. In these three films, I argue, Argento himself makes the processes of neocapitalism visible by performing a series of cinematic readings of the transforming urban fabric of Rome. My aim with this dissertation is to bring this cinematic reading of Rome to light in these three central films. I aim, in other words, to read Argento reading Rome.

This is not, therefore, a work on Argento per se. Enough has already been written in both English and Italian on the themes of his work, on the course of his career, and on his aesthetic consistencies and inconsistencies to secure Argento’s status as an *auteur*.¹⁶

¹⁶ The most important English language sources are Maitland McDonagh, *Broken Mirrors/Broken Minds: The Dark Dreams of Dario Argento* (New York: Citadel Press, 1994),

What I wish to accomplish here, rather, is to use the confrontation between these three films and their contemporary Rome in order to suggest a new way of looking at the relationship between cinematic form and style, urbanity, and history. Following some strong, recent moves in this direction – of which I’d like to mention in particular Edward Dimendberg’s masterful study of the urban landscape in *film noir*, and John David Rhodes’ brilliant work on Pasolini’s Rome – this dissertation demonstrates one way in which cinema can be seen as a form of urban historiography.¹⁷ Throughout this work, I lean on the urban as a socio-political, geographic, and representational category. In this way, I root my close textual readings of Argento’s films within the concrete flow of history.

In what remains of this introduction, I will situate the three readings in my chapters theoretically and historically – within the shifting terrains, that is, of Marxist socio-spatial theory on the one hand, and of late capitalist Rome and the Italian media landscape on the other.

Abstract Space, Globalization, and Spatial Representation

Alan Jones, *Profondo Argento: The Man, the Myths & the Magic* (Surrey, U.K.: FAB Press, 2004), Chris Gallant, ed., *Art of Darkness: The Cinema of Dario Argento* (Surrey, U.K., FAB Press, 2000), and a special issue of *Kinoeye* dedicated to Argento, “Assault on the Senses: The Horror Legacy of Dario Argento,” *Kinoeye* 2.11 (2002) <http://www.kinoeye.org/index_02_11.php>. Italian sources are more abundant and tend to take the films more seriously. The best work includes Roberto Pugliese, *Dario Argento* (Firenze: La nuova Italia, 1986), Luigi Cozzi et al., eds., *Profondo rosso: Tutto sul film capolavoro di Dario Argento* (Roma: Mondo ignoto, 2003), Fabio Maiello, *Dario Argento: Confessioni di un maestro dell'horror* (Milano: Alcrán Edizioni, 2007), and Vito Zagarrio, ed., *Argento vivo: Il cinema di Dario Argento tra genere e autorialità* (Venezia: Marsilio Editori, 2008). Translations of all subsequent Italian texts are my own.

¹⁷ See Edward Dimendberg, *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U.P., 2004) and John David Rhodes, *Stupendous, Miserable City: Pasolini’s Rome* (Minneapolis, MN: U. of Minnesota Press, 2007).

In the late 1960s and early '70s, a number of Marxists – among them David Harvey, Henri Lefebvre, and Edward Soja – began to incorporate spatial and geographic analysis into their historical materialist social critique. Summing up and clarifying the still relatively new approach in 1985, Harvey wrote, “Historical materialism has to be upgraded to historical-geographical materialism. The historical geography of capitalism must be the object of our theorizing.”¹⁸ In examining what he calls the “urbanization of capital” in this vein, Harvey notes a number of ways in which the morphology of cities reflects the very base structures of capitalism. The urban landscape under capitalism, its actual physical geometry and the distribution of land ownership, Harvey argues, *is* the concrete expression of various flows of capital (in the form of labor, commodities, materials, etc.): “The spatial organization of a city *is produced by* the intersection of capital flows into land development, on the one hand, and the requirements on the other of the reproduction of labor power (of different skills and qualities) and class relations.”¹⁹ This was most apparent in the Fordist industrial city, which involved the mass migration of bourgeoisie and proletariat alike to the metropolis as the central space of both production and consumption for the new economy. According to Soja, in its most structured moments and forms (such as, for example, nineteenth century cities defined purely by industry – most famously Pittsburgh and Manchester), cities directly recorded class conflict:

The new classes of urban-industrial capitalism entered the city in spatially segregated concentric zones: workers and the reserve army in the densest and most haphazardly jumbled inner zone, the new “middle-class” bourgeoisie settled in the more regularly gridded second ring, and the

¹⁸ David Harvey, *The Urban Experience* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins U.P., 1989) 6.

¹⁹ Harvey, *The Urban Experience* 12.

upper bourgeoisie in a suburban commuting zone of gardenized villas and countryside estates.²⁰

This “clearly defined” and “homogeneously composed” urban fabric was perfectly attuned to the interests of the dominant class and mode of production.²¹

However, as both Harvey and Soja note, even at this clear-cut level, there were various social and spatial contradictions intrinsic to the urbanization of capital. For one, such a structure – where those with the most money and power live in the periphery, not the center – inverted what Soja calls the “prestige gradient” of residential sites that existed under earlier forms of capitalism defined by mercantilism.²² Under this prior stage of capitalism, what Lefebvre has called the “market city” developed as a literal center to facilitate the meeting of goods and people in the act of exchange. The marketplace itself therefore replaced the agora or forum to become the center of city, and around it were constructed not only churches and town halls, but also the residences of clergy, nobles, and the merchant bourgeoisie. The market city that preceded the industrial city therefore presented an extremely centered spatiality.²³ As a side effect of

²⁰ Edward W. Soja, *Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000) 81.

²¹ Soja, *Postmetropolis* 81.

²² Soja, *Postmetropolis* 81.

²³ The intensely dialectical Lefebvre is careful to note throughout his work that such spatialities (along with the semiotic code of built space itself) must always been seen as developing within a dynamic relationship to class conflict. In *The Urban Revolution*, for example, he notes of the emergence of the “market city” that, “it is only in the European West, at the end of the Middle Ages, that merchandise, the market, and merchants were able to successfully penetrate the city. Prior to this, itinerant merchants – part warrior, part thief – deliberately chose to remain in the fortified remains of ancient (Roman) cities to facilitate their struggle against the territorial lords.... During this (class) struggle against the overlords, who were the owners and rulers of the territory... the marketplace became centralized. It replaced and supplanted the place of assembly (the agora, the forum). Around the market, which had now become an essential part of the city,

industrialization, however, a new form of outward movement that would push the boundaries of the city into the surrounding region would be overlaid upon the more inward dynamics of the concentrated city of mercantile capitalism. At the same time, however, the strategically planned geographic separation of factory (production) and residential (consumption/reproduction) sites created, for the first time in history, massive, daily intra-city commutes to work for labor and ownership classes alike.²⁴ Countervailing this first outward movement, which would itself define the next century or more of suburbanization, therefore, was another form of movement defined by internal urban circulation. The contradiction between what Henri Lefebvre would call “centrifugal” and “centripetal” mobile, urban spatialities, along with the tension between these and previously existing forms of urbanization, came to define the modern, industrial city.²⁵ While capitalism may indeed, as Harvey notes, produce the urban as a “‘rational landscape’ within which the accumulation of capital can proceed,” this landscape will always be produced in contradictory ways and, like capitalism itself as a system, subject to ongoing tension and crisis.²⁶

were grouped the church and town hall (occupied by a merchant oligarchy), with its belfry or campanile, the symbol of liberty. Architecture follows and translates the new conception of the city. Urban space becomes the meeting place for goods and people, for exchange. It bears the signs of this conquered liberty, which is perceived as Liberty – a grandiose but hopeless struggle.” Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, trans. Roberto Bononno (Minneapolis, MN: U. of Minnesota Press, 2003) 11.

²⁴ Harvey, *The Urban Experience* 20-21. See also Harvey, *The Urbanization of Capital: Studies in the History and Theory of Capitalist Urbanization* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins U.P., 1985).

²⁵ Lefebvre develops these concepts throughout *The Production of Space*. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson Smith (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1991).

²⁶ Harvey, *The Urban Experience* 22.

The urban built environment itself therefore records in its very morphology and geography what Soja calls a, “tense interplay between preservation and destruction.”²⁷ As can be seen in the case of this transition from mercantilism to industrialization, with each new phase of capitalism, there comes a spatial transformation that works to facilitate new relations of accumulation and exploitation. However, due to the very durability of built space in the forms of architecture, streets, infrastructure, and spaces of public gathering, prior spatialities are never completely destroyed or erased (except in the most extreme cases of war, natural disaster, or totalitarian state control). Rather, an always incomplete and unresolved attempt is made on the part of capital to incorporate and adapt these no longer productive spaces and sets of spatial relations into the new modes of accumulation. As with the inevitable crises of over-accumulation under capitalism, this often entails various forms of destruction.²⁸ As Harvey has put it,

Urbanization has always been about the mobilization, production, appropriation, and absorption of economic surpluses.... But urbanization is used under capitalism in very specific ways.... The class character of capitalism dictates a certain manner of appropriation and a split of the surplus into the antagonistic and sometimes mutually irreconcilable forms of capital and labor. When the antagonism cannot be accommodated, *capitalism has to add powers of devaluation and destruction of both capital and labor to its lexicon of possibilities*.... The meaning of urbanization is likewise radically redefined.... It is through urbanization

²⁷ Soja, *Postmodern Geographies* 58.

²⁸ Harvey summarizes capitalism’s innate tendency towards cyclical crises thus: “[Marx] showed, among other things, that capitalism had to be both expansionary and technologically dynamic; that profit depended on the exploitation of living labor power in production; and that this defined the central class relation and line of class struggle between buyers (capitalists) and sellers (workers) of labor power as a commodity. He also showed that the necessary expansion... often conflicted with the impulsion to revolutionize the productive forces under such a system of class relations. The system is therefore unstable, degenerating into periodic crises of overaccumulation, a condition in which surpluses of capital and labor power exist unused side by side. Overaccumulation leads to devaluation and destruction of both capital and labor power unless some way can be found profitably to absorb them.” Harvey, *The Urban Experience* 18.

that the surpluses are mobilized, produced, absorbed, and appropriated and... it is through urban decay and social degradation that the surpluses are devalued and destroyed.²⁹

It is in the cycle of growth, preservation, and destruction inherent to the capitalist urbanization process that Lefebvre saw the “strange and wonderful,” revolutionary potential to “renew dialectical thought.”³⁰ The urban – which, for Lefebvre, as we will see, never simply describes a concrete place, but also includes the realms of both consciousness and representation – piles contradiction upon contradiction. Taking advantage of the possibilities for revolution presented by the constant destruction-renewal of spatial relations associated with the urbanization of capital demands the creation of new forms of political practice and political instrumentalities that are urban and geographic in nature.³¹ This way of imagining revolutionary practice was influential on the Situationists and others, and it at least partially accounts for the explicitly urban character of 1968-era activism.³² While the particulars of these processes and events are beyond the scope of this dissertation, what all of this demonstrates is the way in which space in general – and the urban-geographic landscape in particular – is not merely the passive social product of a capitalist mode of production, but also itself plays an active role in constituting, enabling, and limiting the very processes of capitalist production, reproduction, and accumulation, as well as those of resistance and revolution. Social

²⁹ Harvey, *The Urban Experience* 53. Emphasis added.

³⁰ Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution* 13.

³¹ Harvey is explicit about this: “Any movement toward socialism that does not confront the urbanization of capital and its consequences is bound to fail.” Harvey, *The Urban Experience* 57-58.

³² For a book-length account of the Situationists’ approach to urban space, see Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT. Press, 1998).

space therefore disrupts any simple base-superstructure binary: in addition to being produced by a society's mode of production, as Harvey has it above, space also acts back upon the mode of production. Lefebvre himself sums this up by comparing space to other commodity-products of capitalism:

Space is never produced in the sense that a kilogram of sugar or a yard of cloth is produced. Nor is it an aggregate of the places or locations of such products as sugar, wheat or cloth.... It would be more accurate to say that it is at once a precondition and a result of social superstructures.... Though a *product* to be used, to be consumed, it is also a *means of production*; networks of exchange and flows of raw materials and energy fashion space and are determined by it.³³

What Soja has called, "the created spatiality of social life," must therefore be seen as "simultaneously contingent and conditioning, as *both* an outcome *and* a medium for the making of history."³⁴ Space is neither "a separate structure with its own autonomous laws of construction and transformation," nor, "simply an expression of the class structure emerging from social relations of production," but rather, "a dialectically defined component of the general relations of production, relations which are simultaneously social and spatial."³⁵ Up until the advent of a specifically Marxist geography, this "socio-spatial dialectic," as Soja has labeled it, was hidden from view by a history of thinking about the category of space that was influenced by the philosophical and scientific positivism of the Enlightenment – of Descartes, Newtown, and Kant in particular. Space, the thinking went, was an empty container for the historical unfolding of human events – an *a priori* and therefore "transcendental and essentially ungraspable"

³³ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* 85.

³⁴ Soja, *Postmodern Geographies* 58.

³⁵ Soja, *Postmodern Geographies* 78.

category.³⁶ It was, in Foucault's famous words, "the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile."³⁷ This view of space, according to Soja, "has tended to imbue all things spatial with a lingering sense of primordiality and physical composition, an aura of objectivity, inevitability, and reification."³⁸ As capitalism expanded into its corporate, multi-national stage beginning in the middle of the twentieth century, this "spatial veil" advanced, making it ever more difficult to construct an interpretation of human spatial organization as a social product, one that would frame space not as "a scientific object removed from ideology and politics" but as always in itself "political and strategic."³⁹

If what is needed, therefore, in order to advance dialectical thought is a "revolutionary spatial consciousness... a radical spatial praxis aimed at expropriating control over the production of space," then this project has become more challenging than ever under postmodernity for two central reasons.⁴⁰ The first of these, explored at length by Lefebvre, is the progressive rationalization, fragmentation, and instrumentalization of everyday life (and, by extension, as we will see, of space itself) taken up by state-managed, Keynesian capitalism after World War II. By the late 1960s, Lefebvre argued, consumption itself, and no longer just labor, had become a target of specifically capitalist forms of exploitation:

³⁶ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* 2.

³⁷ Michel Foucault, "Questions on Geography," in Colin Gordon, ed., *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980) 63-77.

³⁸ Soja, *Postmodern Geographies* 79.

³⁹ Soja, *Postmodern Geographies* 79.

⁴⁰ Soja, *Postmodern Geographies* 92.

In France and elsewhere neo-capitalist leaders had become aware of the fact that colonies were more trouble than they were worth and there was a change in strategy; new vistas opened out such as investments in national territories and the organization of home trade.... All areas outside the centers of political decision and economic concentration of capital were considered as semi-colonies and exploited as such.... In Europe after the war a few gifted and intelligent men... saw the possibility of exploiting consumption to organize everyday life. Everyday life was cut up and laid out on the site to be put together again like the pieces of a puzzle, each piece depending on a number of organizations and institutions, each one – working life, private life, leisure – rationally exploited.⁴¹

The explicitly spatial motifs used in this passage to describe the changes wrought on everyday life – decolonization, the fragmentation and recombination of social structures and activities, etc. – are hardly just metaphors, however. For as Lefebvre goes on to note immediately, this structuration of a “bureaucratic society of controlled consumption” was at its most pervasive in the new urban geographies of the post-war period: the state-planned “*new town* was the typical, significant phenomenon in which and on which this organization could be *read* because it was there that it was *written*.”⁴² What was literally inscribed within the very spatial structures of these new towns was “the negation of traditional towns,” “segregation and intense police supervision,” and “everyday life – organized, neatly subdivided and programmed to fit a controlled, exact time-table.” And the language in which it was inscribed was the explicitly spatial one of urban planning – these new towns were modeled after “colonial or semi-colonial towns, with their straight roads crisscrossing at right angles and their frequent police patrols.”⁴³

⁴¹ Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, trans. Sacha Rabinovitch (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2004) 58.

⁴² Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World* 59.

⁴³ Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World* 59.

What is important here is first, the way in which Lefebvre explicitly ties changes in the structure of power and capital to changes in the built environment, and second, the transformations that this implies in the very nature of spatial experience. For with the advent of the “new town” and the acceleration of corporate-influenced and state-controlled urban planning initiatives after the war came the onset of what Lefebvre would call “abstract space.” Drawing explicitly on Marx’s notion of “abstract labor” as the basis of exchange value under capitalism (contra concrete labor, with its intimate connection not only with the bodily experience of the worker, but also with the use value of the commodity produced), abstract space for Lefebvre is above all a homogenized and quantifiable form of space removed from any specific or “concrete” qualities.⁴⁴ As with Lefebvre’s description of everyday life above, in order for it to become an exchangeable commodity and be otherwise “rationally exploited,” space too would have to be submitted to a process of leveling and evening whereby equivalences could be drawn up: it would have to be “cut up and laid out on the site to be put together again like the pieces of a puzzle.” The new, recombined geography produced by this puzzle, according to Lefebvre, was literally cut to the measure of capitalism’s needs. Space would be:

...treated in such a way as to render it homogeneous, its parts comparable, therefore exchangeable... The subordination of space to money and capital implies a quantification which extends from the monetary evaluation to the commercialization of each plot of the entire space....

⁴⁴ Marx develops the similar concepts of “particular labor” and “general labor” in the *Grundrisse* manuscript before shifting his terminology to “concrete useful labor” and “abstract human labor” in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. See Karl Marx, *The Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (New York: Penguin Books, 1993) especially 171-172 and Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. S.W. Ryazanskaya (New York: International Publishers, 1970). The relationship between abstract and concrete labor, use value, and exchange value is theorized extensively in Volume 1, Part I, Chapter 1 (“Commodities”) of *Capital*. Marx, *Capital: Volume 1: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin Books, 1992) 125-177.

Space now becomes one of the new “scarcities,” together with its resources, water, air, and even light.⁴⁵

Not only would space itself be made “scarce” and therefore potentially profitable, but, in addition, this fragmentation of space would operate similarly to the capitalist division of labor. Space as a whole would, in Ed Dimendberg’s words, undergo an increasingly, “functionalized separation into spaces of production, dwelling, leisure, transportation, and infrastructure.”⁴⁶ These fragmented and functionalized spaces would, furthermore, come under the control of corporate and state bureaucracies with their increasing reliance on technology and surveillance.

The overall tendency of abstract space is, therefore, to remove the category of space from the realm of the contingent, corporeal, and concrete experiences of its everyday users, and place it instead within the realm of ideological representation.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Lefebvre, *Du rural à l’urbain* (Paris: Broché, 1970) 261-262. Quoted in Rob Shields, *Lefebvre, Love, and Struggle: Spatial Dialectics* (New York: Routledge, 1999) 180.

⁴⁶ Dimendberg 102.

⁴⁷ There are obvious parallels here – as Dimendberg points out – with the work of both Guy Debord and Roland Barthes (and structural Marxism as well, particularly that of Louis Althusser). See Dimendberg 113-114. At the same time, however, it must be noted that Lefebvre’s own theory of the relationship between space and representation is highly complex and specific. Space is a deeply dialectical category for Lefebvre, an eternal, contradictory becoming that involves representation in specific ways. To account for this relationship, Lefebvre developed the concepts of “spatial practice,” “representations of space,” and “spaces of representation,” three moments in the production of social space that inform one another, but remain irreducible to each other. “Spatial practice” (also called perceived space) refers to space as it is apprehended or instantiated in everyday life. “Representations of space” (conceived space) are the images or discursive instances (maps, master plans, social science texts, etc.) which delimit the possibilities of imagining or thinking space. “Spaces of representation” (lived space), finally, encompass the symbolic, mythological, ideological, or poetic dimension of spatial experience. In this sense, they resembles Roland Barthes’ notion of second order meaning in *Mythologies*. Space is never a thing in itself for Lefebvre, but is rather at all times a sensual experience, a thought, a concept, and a feeling (a “perceived-conceived-lived triad,” in Lefebvre’s own words) for an experiencing subject. It is, in addition, an active process – an intricate web of relations that is continuously produced and reproduced. See Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* especially 33-50. Among the prodigious amount of writing on Lefebvre’s spatial theories, some of the best is collected in Andrew Light and Jonathan M. Smith, eds., *Philosophy and Geography*

Greatly diminished in this process would be the more immediate and aesthetic phenomenological experience of space in all of its heterogeneity and contradictoriness that Lefebvre associates with prior – and, in his hopes, successive – historical phases.⁴⁸

What would be gained for an increasingly technocratic capitalism in this move would be

II: *The Production of Public Space* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998) and Kanishka Goodewardena et al., eds., *Space, Difference, Everyday Life: Reading Henri Lefebvre* (New York, Routledge, 2008).

⁴⁸ Lefebvre saw abstract space, which functions to impose homogeneity upon spatial experience and to eliminate difference and heterogeneity, as a historical step between what he calls “absolute space” and “differential space.” He describes the transition in space as one from intrinsic qualities to use value to exchange value to spontaneous, differential unities: “*Absolute space* was made up of fragments of nature located at sites which were chosen for their intrinsic qualities (cave, mountaintop, spring, river), but whose very consecration ended up by stripping them of their natural characteristics and uniqueness. Thus natural space was soon populated by political forces. Typically, architecture picked a site in nature and transferred it to the political realm by means of a symbolic mediation; one thinks, for example, of the statues of local gods or goddesses in Greek temples, or of the Shintoist’s sanctuary, empty or else containing nothing but a mirror.... The absolute space where rites and ceremonies were performed retained a number of aspects of nature, albeit in a form modified by ceremonial requirements.... / *Absolute space*, religious and political in character, was a product of the bonds of cosanguinity, soil and language, but out of it evolved a space which was relativized and *historical*.... Then the forces of history smashed naturalness forever and upon its ruins established the space of accumulation (the accumulation of all wealth and resources: knowledge, technology, money, precious objects, works of art and symbols).... It was during this time that productive activity (labour) became no longer one with the process of reproduction which perpetuated social life; but, in becoming independent of that process, labour fell prey to abstraction, whence abstract social labour – and *abstract space*.... / *Abstract space* functions ‘objectally,’ as a set of things/signs and their formal relationships: glass and stone, concrete and steel, angles and curves, full and empty. Formal and quantitative, it erases distinctions, as much those which derive from nature and (historical) time as those which originate in the body (age, sex, ethnicity).... / It can be shown that abstract space harbours specific contradictions. Such spatial contradictions derive in part from the old contradictions thrown up by historical time. These have undergone modifications, however: some are aggravated, others blunted. Amongst them, too, completely fresh contradictions have come into being which are liable eventually to precipitate the downfall of abstract space. The reproduction of the social relations of production within this space inevitably obeys two tendencies: the dissolution of old relations on the one hand and the generation of new relations on the other. Thus, despite – or rather because of – its negativity, abstract space carries within itself the seeds of a new kind of space. I shall call that new space ‘differential space,’ because inasmuch as abstract space tends towards homogeneity, towards the elimination of existing differences or peculiarities, a new space cannot be born (produced) unless it accentuates differences. It will also restore unity to what abstract space breaks up – to the functions, elements, and moments of social practice. It will put an end to those localizations which shatter the integrity of the individual body, the social body, the corpus of human needs, and the corpus of knowledge.” Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* 48-53.

a form of “spatial fetishism... reminiscent of the old fetishism of commodities,” that would function to conceal real social and political knowledge of the spatial environment. This reification of the category of space – symptoms of which would include the very durability of the spatial theories of Descartes, Newton, and Kant mentioned above – would pave the way for the increasingly hidden, pervasive, and embedded forms of spatial control discussed by Lefebvre and others (including, famously, Foucault). This, by extension, would allow for the continued strategic planning of everyday life on the part of corporate, multinational capital with the state as its administrative wing, hence ensuring the reproduction of capitalist social relations and the survival of capitalism itself.⁴⁹

Although the urban is a privileged category for Lefebvre, Neil Smith reminds us that this “spatial fetishism” works on other scales as well. The development of Lefebvre’s theory – and its more recent rediscovery – does happen to coincide historically with fundamental changes in the nature of space on a global scale, specifically “the dissolution of a comparatively stable political, cultural and economic geography of postwar expansion,” in which, “the solidity of the geography of twentieth century capitalism at various scales has melted.”⁵⁰ Citing decolonization, the growing porosity of national borders, and the fragmentation of the traditional divisions between the First and Third Worlds among other post-WWII geopolitical events, Smith argues that such massive transformations demanded the construction of a new “viable map of everything from bodily and local change to global identity.”⁵¹ Lefebvre’s attempt to theorize and produce

⁴⁹ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* 91.

⁵⁰ Neil Smith, “Antinomies of Space and Nature in Henri Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space*,” in Light and Smith 50.

⁵¹ Smith 51.

a new form of spatial practice must therefore be seen as itself a symptom of changes in the category of space that are not just urban and phenomenological, but geopolitical as well. Indeed, as Rob Shields notes, by positing the urban as a form of consciousness associated with the growth of capitalism that could not be tied to any specific place or set of places, Lefebvre's theory ties socially produced space to all levels of scale. Abstract space, for example, in addition to altering the experiential and political economic terms of space and spatiality – quality repressed in favor of quantification, exchange value substituting itself for use value, etc. – also introduces a contrast between “a global spatial practice and system under multinational capitalism” on the one hand, “and the ‘myth’ of the parcel, lot, and smallest unit of space, which is the lived reality for most,” on the other.⁵² This is what Lefebvre refers to as the contradiction between homogenization and fragmentation in late capitalist spatiality. As users of abstract space, we may believe ourselves to be experiencing in these spatial fragments something truly local, but in reality we are experiencing nothing more than repeated and standardized shards of a larger, “planetary” spatial reality. The Lefebvorean notion that “abstract space is both of these at once without any possibility of synthesis,” therefore implies that another way of understanding the category of abstract space is as a mystified and veiled imposition of *global* spatiality onto *local* spatial experience.⁵³ It is in this sense that Lefebvre

⁵² Shields 180.

⁵³ Shields 180.

considered the urban to function as the chief intermediary between global power and private, local, and individual practices.⁵⁴

The second, related reason that it has been so challenging to develop a truly “spatial consciousness” under late capitalism therefore has to do with the globalization of capital. In this line of thinking, much more commonly identified with the work of Frederic Jameson (who was, in fact, among those responsible for “discovering” Lefebvre for Anglophone critics), it is the very world system of multi-national capitalism itself that has become “unrepresentable as such.” Due to its vastness and complexity – “the enlargement of the social totality or operative context [of capital] out into the uniquely distended proportions of the new world system of late capitalism” – the older models by which the political could be represented and mapped have been surpassed.⁵⁵ It is this unrepresentability that, above all things, defines the advent of what Jameson calls “postmodern hyperspace,” which is functional, like Lefebvrian “abstract space,” at both local and global levels:

This latest mutation in space – postmodern hyperspace – has finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world.... [This situation] can itself stand as the symbol and analogon of that even sharper dilemma which is the incapacity of our minds, at least at present, to map

⁵⁴ Lefebvre develops the concept of the urban as “level M” (the mediator between the global and private) throughout *The Urban Revolution*. As Stefan Kipfer explicates succinctly, “As the middle level of analysis (level M) between the general level of the social order (level G) and the ‘private’ level of everyday life (level P), the urban mediates totality.” Stefan Kipfer, “How Lefebvre Urbanized Gramsci: Hegemony, Everyday Life, and Difference,” in Goonewardena et al. 200.

⁵⁵ Frederic Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana U.P., 1992) 48-49.

the great global multinational and decentered communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects.⁵⁶

This geopolitical situation – equally spatial and socio-political – is what led Jameson to develop his aesthetic theory of cognitive mapping. Attempting to read postmodern cultural production as a form of pedagogy (as Lukacs did for realism and Brecht for modernism), Jameson suggests that the primary mission of “political” art remains under late capitalism the representation of the social totality. However, this totality having attained a scope that exceeds representation, political culture must instead provide what Jameson calls “situational representations” or “cognitive maps” – that is figurations which may not be directly mimetic in nature, but which nonetheless articulate global social relationships on some level. In Jameson’s own words, having “come starkly up against those very difficulties in mapping which are posed in heightened or original ways by that very global space of the postmodernist or multinational moment,” cultural production must take on,

an aesthetic of cognitive mapping – a pedagogical political cultural which seeks to endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system – [and that] will necessarily have to respect this now enormously complex representational dialectic and invent radically new forms in order to do it justice.⁵⁷

In keeping with the “spatial turn” in critical theory of which he is an integral part, Jameson here suggests that political questions in postmodernity are of necessity *geopolitical* ones – and therefore *geographic* ones. Postmodern cultural production must necessarily attempt to provide what Soja calls, “an instrumental cartography of power

⁵⁶ Jameson, *Postmodernism* 44.

⁵⁷ Jameson, *Postmodernism* 50-54.

and social control; in other words, a more acute way of seeing how space hides consequences from us.”⁵⁸

In attempting to determine what these “radically new forms” might look like in practice, Jameson very tellingly consults urban theory, specifically the writings of Kevin Lynch. In *The Image of the City*, Lynch theorizes the specific means city inhabitants use to construct “mental images” of their cities. Each city “user,” he argues, possesses a subjective and constantly evolving “environmental image” of the city based on his or her understanding of the configuration of a series of urban-architectural elements (paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks).⁵⁹ The most successful cities, according to Lynch, are those which present a legible or, in his terminology, “imageable” composition of these elements. The most alienating and disorienting cities, on the other hand, are those that disregard these elements and construct themselves instead precisely out of what Lefebvre would consider “abstract space” – the rationalist, marketing efficacy of the speculative street grid, for example, or the segmentation of space by typology of use.⁶⁰

Jameson’s notion of the “cognitive map,” is an extrapolation – via the Althusserian conception of ideology as “the Imaginary representation of the subject’s relationship to his or her Real conditions of existence” – of Lynch’s “mental map” or “environmental image” of the city to the level of the global social totality.⁶¹ If, “disalienation in the traditional city... involves the practical reconquest of a sense of

⁵⁸ Soja, *Postmodern Geographies* 62-3.

⁵⁹ Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960) 46.

⁶⁰ See, for example, Lynch’s chapter on Jersey City, New Jersey.

⁶¹ Jameson, *Postmodernism* 415. See Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001) 85-126.

place and the construction... of an articulated ensemble which... the individual subject can map and remap along the moments of mobile, alternative trajectories,” then the chief political project for the contemporary left is to accomplish the same for global space.⁶² According to Jameson’s reading of Althusser, this is, in fact, the very purpose of ideology. Whatever its defects and problems, Jameson claims, it remains ideology’s role to invent a way of articulating a relationship between two otherwise irreconcilable epistemological realms – the directly lived, existential-individual on the one hand and the “unlived, abstract” and anonymous social totality on the other. Similarly, cognitive mapping must work to fill in the “gap between phenomenological perception and a reality that transcends all individual thinking or experience,” a rift which ideology itself “attempts to span or coordinate, to map, by means of conscious and unconscious representations.”⁶³ The failure of such a project would have important political repercussions: “the incapacity to map spatially is as crippling to political experience as the analogous incapacity to map spatially is for urban experience.”⁶⁴

Since it is indeed in the nature of this new abstract and multinational space to present difficulties in mapping (“mapping has ceased to be achievable by means of maps themselves”), then in order to cut through the thick webs of alienation and reification that define today’s socio-spatiality, the act of cognitive mapping itself will, paradoxically, have to take on non-cartographic forms.⁶⁵ It is for this very reason that Jameson turns

⁶² Jameson, *Postmodernism* 51.

⁶³ Jameson, *Postmodernism* 416.

⁶⁴ Jameson, *Postmodernism* 416.

⁶⁵ Jameson, *Postmodernism* 410.

towards cultural production more generally (especially literary, architectural, and filmic texts) and the question of form. Although these cultural texts cannot directly and mimetically map the world system in their narrative or representational “content,” they do, in Jameson’s terminology, provide a series of formal allegories or “figurations” of it. Following the Althusser of *Reading Capital* (and channeling Pierre Macherey as well) Jameson suggests that the new, fundamental but unrepresentable realities of global capitalism appear in these texts precisely as an “absent cause, one that can never emerge into the presence of perception.”⁶⁶ Summing up this play of presence and absence, Jameson continues:

Yet this absent cause can find figures through which to express itself in distorted and symbolic ways: indeed, one of our basic tasks as critics of literature [and cultural production in general, as any reader of Jameson would be quick to note] is to track down and make conceptually available the ultimate realities and experiences designated by those figures, which the reading mind inevitably tends to reify and to read as primary contents in their own right.⁶⁷

We can see now that the “radically new form” in which postmodern cultural production can do justice to the “complex representational dialectics” of late capitalism is precisely the “symptom,” the textual contradiction that, in its very unresolvability, indexes the presence in the text of a perceptually absent series of determinants. These symptoms, in fact, *are* the very cognitive maps that Jameson claims will unveil the workings and geography of the entire geopolitical system.

Given the geographical genesis, thematic, and terminology of his line of thinking, it is not surprising to find that many of the symptoms that Jameson tracks down and

⁶⁶ Jameson, *Postmodernism* 411.

⁶⁷ Jameson, *Postmodernism* 411.

interprets in cultural texts come up around issues of space. This is true, perhaps above all, of his interpretations of film texts. Jameson's reading of Sidney Lumet's 1975 film *Dog Day Afternoon*, for example, provides a compelling and useful model for linking cinema, urban history, and geopolitical critique. Jameson isolates in the film an unconscious figuration of both post-war American class relations and the simultaneous urbanization and globalization of capital. These issues, however, only become visible when we "relinquish those older narrative habits that program us to follow the individual experiences of a hero or an anti-hero, rather than the explosion of the text and the operation of meaning in other, random narrative fragments."⁶⁸ In the case of *Dog Day Afternoon*, this involves seeing Sonny's (Al Pacino) bank robbery story as nothing more than "a pretext for the revelation of that colonized space which is the branch bank, with its peripheralized or marginalized work force."⁶⁹ Such a move encourages us to focus instead on the struggle for precedence between the two figures of state authority presented in the film – the local police chief and the FBI agent. Jameson sees in this particular "narrative fragment" a binary relation between the "impotent rages and passionate incompetence" of the sweaty and highly characterized local cop on the one hand, and the "cool and technocratic expertise" of the affectless and detached FBI agent on the other.⁷⁰ What comes into relief in this encounter is the "starkly blank and emotionless, expressionless coolness of the FBI man himself... [whose] anonymous features mark a chilling and unexpected insertion of the real into the otherwise relatively

⁶⁸ Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible* (New York: Routledge, 1992) 48.

⁶⁹ Jameson, *Signatures* 48.

⁷⁰ Jameson, *Signatures* 48.

predictable framework of the fiction film.”⁷¹ The FBI agent is himself, therefore, the symptom, that which brings the “absent cause” or “real” to perceptual presence in a necessarily distorted language. The particular absent cause that this symptom cognitively maps for us, according to Jameson, is the “gradual but irreversible erosion of local and state-wide power structures and leadership or authority networks by national, and, in our own time, multinational ones.”⁷² The FBI agent, with his signification of technocracy, anonymity, and abstraction, “comes to occupy the place of that immense and decentralized power network which marks the present multinational stage of monopoly capitalism.”⁷³ What *Dog Day Afternoon* renders visible through levels of allegory that extend from the film’s narrative structure, to characterization, to the star system itself, therefore, is precisely an emergent geopolitical situation, namely – once again – the essentially unrepresentable social totality of global capitalism.

That these are explicitly socio-spatial and not just social questions, Jameson notes, is,

inscribed in the spatial trajectory of the film as it moves from the ghettoized squalor of the bank interior to that eerie and impersonal science fiction landscape of the airport finale: a corporate space without inhabitants, utterly technologized and functional, a place beyond city and country alike – collective, yet without people, automated and computerized, yet without any of that older utopian or dystopian clamor, without any of those still distinctive qualities that characterized the then still “modern” and streamlined futuristic vision of the corporate future in our own recent past.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Jameson, *Signatures* 49.

⁷² Jameson, *Signatures* 50.

⁷³ Jameson, *Signatures* 50.

⁷⁴ Jameson, *Signatures* 51.

The airport is not only directly linked to global space by the very nature of its function as a node of transport, but it is also the ultimate “abstract space” in the sense I outlined above (functionalized, fragmented, inhuman, etc.). However, as Jameson points out, the airport is not the only such space in the film. If the film represents the “liquidation” of older values and possibilities of experience by a globalizing “consumer society,” then its “authentic” Brooklyn locations are “the space which is the result of these historical changes, the ghettoized neighborhood with its decaying small businesses gradually being replaced by parking lots or chain stores.”⁷⁵ The film’s Brooklyn location and setting, which is meant to establish *Dog Day Afternoon*’s “realism,” can also be seen succumbing, literally in the film’s background, to a commodified and segmented modality of space – in other words, to abstract space. Through its explicitly spatialized narrative and its reliance on actual urban locations, *Dog Day Afternoon*, in other words, draws together a critique of abstract space with postmodern, global space.

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In this section, I have attempted to indicate the theoretical foundation on which I will erect the textual readings in my chapters. I have discussed the ways in which capitalism must be seen as an unfolding “socio-spatial” dialectic. I have considered the issue of “abstract space” and its particular relationship with postmodern, global or multinational space. And I have pointed towards a mode of reading cultural texts that allows us to penetrate the “spatial veils” that prevent us from developing a “spatial

⁷⁵ Jameson, *Signatures* 44, 46.

consciousness.” It is the central task of this dissertation to situate three of Argento’s Roman films – *The Bird With the Crystal Plumage*, *Deep Red*, and *Tenebre* – within both the unfolding history of Roman urban geography and the series of questions about space itself that emerged in the late 1960s. My task is, in other words, to uncover and read symptoms – the cognitive maps of global capitalism – in the encounter between the Roman films of Dario Argento and the Rome he inherited from the 1950s and ‘60s.

Indeed, as we will see in the next section, in the case of this particular Rome, these questions become far more than just theoretical abstractions – Lefebvrian pun intended. As John David Rhodes has noted in his own work on Rome,

Studies of the city “in film” that are not responsible to the historical and material specificities of actual cities may run the risk of treating the city as nothing more than an evocative visual commodity. In doing so, of course, such studies only recapitulate what Lefebvre laments: that the city is often, in fact, no more than a site of commodity consumption and itself a consumable commodity.⁷⁶

In order therefore to engage historically and materially with Argento, Rome, and issues of abstract space, in the section that follows I will discuss a series of specific historical instances in which abstract, global space began to take hold in this Rome, the Rome of the economic miracle.

The Abstract Spaces of Economic Miracle Rome

The popular, genre cinema of the 1970s – and Argento’s Roman films (*The Bird With the Crystal Plumage*, *Deep Red*, and *Tenebre*) in particular – suggests a highly privileged cultural location where certain socio-political, socio-economic, and, in

⁷⁶ Rhodes, *Stupendous, Miserable City* xvi.

particular, socio-spatial contradictions that had remained relatively well hidden behind the economic miracle's shiny veneer of commodification and consumer capitalist ideology would be rendered visible. The period preceding the 1970s – and the *Sessantotto* – saw a massive consolidation of capitalist accumulation in Italy as corporate, multinational capitalism made great inroads into Italian economics and everyday life. It is this trajectory and its recasting of Rome along the lines of abstract, global space throughout the 1950s and 1960s, that I will discuss in this section.

Indeed, as a number of scholars have argued recently, Rome makes for a perfect cinematic “case study” for an analysis of the shifting nature of spatiality at this particular moment.⁷⁷ The very layout and design of the so-called “Eternal City” has, throughout the city's very long history, been explicitly used by various regimes – ancient-imperial, papal, monarchist, fascist, neoliberal, etc. – for spiritual, religious, and propagandistic purposes as well as for social control. Rome's present form – indeed, its very existence – is predicated precisely on its having been the center of power for two of the most enduring regimes in Western history: first the Roman Empire, and later the Catholic Church. Questions of power are literally, therefore, inscribed within Rome's very structure, perhaps more blatantly than in any other city in the West. In addition, Rome's depictions in literature, cinema, television, advertising, and political discourse throughout

⁷⁷ There has been quite a proliferation of texts recently on post-war cinematic representations of Rome. Besides Rhodes' excellent book, other texts include Elisabetta Bruscolini, ed., *Rome in Cinema: Between Reality and Fiction* (Rome: Centro Sperimentale Cinematografico, 2000), Flaminio Di Biagi, *Il cinema a Roma: guida alla storia e ai luoghi del cinema nella capitale* (Roma: Palombi & Partner, 2007), Restivo, *The Cinema of Economic Miracles*, Mark Shiel, *Italian Neorealism: Rebuilding the Cinematic City* (London: Wallflower Press, 2006), Noa Steimatsky, *Italian Locations: Reinhabiting the Past in Postwar Cinema* (Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press, 2008), and Richard Wrigley, ed., *Cinematic Rome* (Leicester: Troubador Publishing, 2008).

the twentieth century are seemingly endless. Rome is the ultimate urban-historical, socio-spatial media text.

The spatial transformations that have defined Rome's history become more acute and rapid under post-war capitalism. The 1950s and 1960s witnessed a building boom unmatched at any point in Rome's prodigious urban history, one that, in tandem with the rapidly increasing economic, geographic, and cultural globalization of the moment, ushered in a completely new urban experience. The post-war surge of global capitalism in Italy had, by the 1970s, left obvious and concrete marks on Rome in the form of new buildings, new neighborhoods, new infrastructure, and new modes of transport. Furthermore, Rome's identity (and, indeed, its self-identification and aspirations) as a global, late capitalist city grew throughout the miracle and was almost fully consolidated by the 1970s.

The progressively vaster and deeper presence of global capitalist accumulation and consumption is therefore highly visible in the urban morphology of Rome as it shifts and develops leading up to and throughout this period. In this section, I will highlight what I believe to be the four key urbanistic events in the decades of the economic miracle that simultaneously indicated and helped facilitate this transition. Each of these four events, as we will see, can be seen as an instance of "abstract space" – that is, "an urban space designed with less regard for the corporeal and aesthetic experience of those who navigate it than for the realization of specific economic ends, social policies, or technological functions."⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Dimendberg 104.

1. *The Grande Raccordo Anulare (Gra)*

The first event was the planning and construction of a series of freeways that would encircle the city and connect all of the radial roads leading outward from the historic center. Construction on what came to be known as the Grande Raccordo Anulare or Gra (a clever acronymic pun on the name of the project's chief engineer, Giulio Gra) was begun in 1951. The highway system, which augured the mass private motorization that was not yet an economic possibility at the time (but would be by the 1970s), was finally completed at Via Flaminia in 1970. In addition to the well-documented social, economic, and phenomenological aspects of freeway culture that this introduced into Rome, this also meant yet another concentric border for the city to go along with the ancient walls, the ring of 20th century gridded neighborhoods just beyond them, and the circular rail network that had, to this point, been the outermost ring.⁷⁹ In this sense, the Gra was a victory for conservative and private forces whose planning platform was the *macchia d'olio* (oil stain) pattern of symmetrical, even, and dense circular expansion. It was also therefore a defeat for progressive government planners who desired a decentralized, polynuclear style of growth that favored separate, low-density neighborhoods with local identities and sub-economies.

More importantly, this was the first planning project in Rome's history that considered the flow of automotive traffic from an integrative, citywide perspective as opposed to viewing it as a series of localized, sectoral problems that could be solved with quick fixes. The Gra therefore stands as a powerful indicator of the centrality of motorization to the planning debates of this moment, and demonstrates one way in which

⁷⁹ Mario Sanfilippo, *La costruzione di una capitale: Roma, 1945-1991* (Milano: Amilcare Pizzi, 1994) 80-82. On highway culture and its particular impact on Rome, its periphery, and cinematic representation, see Restivo and Rhodes.

the imperative presented by traffic rendered a shift in the concept of the city. A city that had for centuries been structured around residential life and trade would now suddenly have to restructure itself around the flow of an ever-growing volume of car traffic.⁸⁰ Henceforth, Rome would need to be considered not just as a series of discrete parts, but as a kind of immanent network of interdependent, moving parts. As Roman planning historian Italo Insolera suggests, for the first time, “going places” would begin to surpass “being places” as the chief modality of Roman urban existence.⁸¹

2. *The 1960 Olympic Games and the Piano delle Olimpiadi*

On June 15, 1955 the International Olympic Committee’s (IOC) awarded Rome the Games of the XVII Olympiad, which were to be held in the summer of 1960. The Olympics appeared to the conservatives as an opportunity to signal the ultimate “success” of reconstruction and the economic miracle to the rest of the world, as a kind of welcome party onto the stage of global capitalism. More specifically for Rome, the Olympics meant a massive influx of money into city coffers from the IOC and the Italian state. Although these funds had the express purpose of preparing the city for just fifteen days in 1960, the city government of Rome and its parasitic armada of conservative, private

⁸⁰ Sanfilippo and Robert C. Fried both present staggering statistics on the growth of traffic and motorization at this time. According to Sanfilippo, in 1961 the ratio of automobiles to residents in Rome was 1:10. By 1991, that ratio had become almost 1:1. See Sanfilippo 71. Fried, for his part, notes, “Even in the late forties and early fifties, with only about 50,000 automobiles on the streets (or one per thirty people), traffic congestion was considered at the breaking point. Today [Fried completed his research in the mid- to late-1960s] there are some 800,000 vehicles using the same street system.” Robert C. Fried, *Planning the Eternal City: Roman Politics and Planning Since World War II* (New Haven, CT: Yale U.P., 1973) 41.

⁸¹ The new imperative, Insolera writes, was, “to allow an ever-growing volume of traffic to move through a city that was designed not for circulation, but to meet residential and commercial needs – a city where ‘being places’ is often more important than ‘going places.’” Italo Insolera, *Roma moderna: Un secolo di storia urbanistica, 1870-1970* (Torino: Einaudi, 1993) 232.

interests would, instead, use these exceptional funds for a series of enormous urban, architectural, and legal interventions that would, for all intents and purposes, determine the future course of the city. The political and socio-spatial transformation that resulted from this are the second event I wish to highlight.

Given the great need for infrastructure throughout the city (especially mass transit, public schools, green space, and, indeed, sports facilities), it came as a great surprise to professional planners when many of the urban interventions called for and implemented by the hastily approved *piano delle Olimpiadi* (Plan for the Olympics, 1958) were concentrated in one area in particular, the formerly fascist showpiece city of EUR (Esposizione Universale di Roma) southwest of central Rome. In part because of its association with Mussolini and his regime's desire to expand Rome southwestward towards the Mediterranean (the fascist *mare nostrum*) and in part because of the more industrial, working class identity of the eastern suburbs, EUR was the centerpiece of most conservative and private plans for the development of Rome. With state and international monies channeled directly into its public services under the banner of Olympics preparations, EUR would become a highly developed axis in an otherwise hastily expanding and crumbling city. After the Olympics, it would finally take its destined place as the upper-middle class residential suburb and global corporate administrative center that many post-war private developers (led by then building commissioner, Virgilio Testa) dreamed it would. Indeed, EUR would become one of the only areas of Rome equipped to handle the needs – office space, wide streets, ample parking, single-family

dwelling, and new schools, malls, supermarkets, multiplex cinemas, etc. – of a consolidating Italian economy and culture of post-industrial, consumer capitalism.⁸²

One of the ways in which the city government accomplished what Robert C. Fried called this, “total defeat for the professional planning movement,” was by commissioning some of Italy’s most renowned, *auteur* architects to build new sports centers, housing facilities, and urban infrastructure in areas that private real estate companies had marked for development. Among the great beneficiaries of this was the engineer-architect Pier Luigi Nervi. Nervi’s work between 1956 and 1960 on the design of the new Palazzo dello Sport (in EUR) and Palazzetto dello Sport (just north of the city center in Flaminio), his renovation of the Stadio Flaminio (also in Flaminio), and his construction of a huge viaduct for the new Corso di Francia (connecting Flaminio to the northern suburbs and the Gra) left indelible marks not only on the actual urban landscape of Rome but also on Roman architectural and urban design trends. His combination of shell construction, huge slabs of reinforced concrete, and narrow strips of pane glass came to define the aesthetics of this period as much as any other building style.⁸³ As we will see in my chapters, a number of new buildings influenced by Nervi appear in Argento’s Roman films.

⁸² It isn’t hard to understand why private developers had such an interest in EUR when real estate prices per acre are taken into account. According to Fried, in 1966, the areas around EUR were worth \$640 per acre as farmland. Once zoned for residential development, however, their value would immediately increase to between \$140,000 and \$200,000 per acre. See Fried 67.

⁸³ There were a number of concrete, steel, and glass buildings constructed in Rome between the late 1950s and mid-1960s. They include buildings such as Adalberto Libera, Leo Calini, and Eugenio Montuori’s 1958 office complex on Via Torino (the first building in Rome to use the curtain wall according to architecture historian Maria Paola Pagliari); the 1959 Sede Acea on Piazzale Ostiense, Carlo Chiarini’s 1960 commercial and residential complex on Via Merulana which featured enormous plate glass picture windows on each of its first two stories; Massimo Castellazzi, Tullio Dell’Anese, Annibale Vitellozzi’s Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Roma, begun in 1965 after significant public debate about the merits of its international style design (and not completed until 1975); Gaetano Rapisardi’s 1959 housing and commercial unit

The *piano delle Olimpiadi*'s hurried, poor implementation and lack of foresight represented a planning debacle for Rome. Its effects retrospectively reveal a certain tactical cleverness on the part of the conservative movement and the private developers of the late 1950s, however. These groups used the atmosphere of anxiety and haste surrounding the upcoming Olympics, the renown of certain Italian architects like Nervi, and the special government funds of the moment to commission new streets, buildings, and structures in such a manner as to effectively strong-arm all future planners and developers into following their preferred *macchia d'olio* pattern and southwest-ward, EUR-centered, corporate expansion. According to Insolera, this move would, "obligate every future city plan... to accept the abandonment of the city's tremendous architectural and topographical heritage as the central, guiding forces behind the city's expansion."⁸⁴ Instead of using the remarkable nature of the city's historic center as a kind of planning anchor – that is, as a cultural means to curb rampant building speculation and thereby regulate the market (a strategy favored by the left) – future planners would be forced to yield control of the city to the whims of a free market dominated by corporate real estate developers. These developers wisely seized a generational opportunity to lobby for the passage of a *piano delle Olimpiadi* that would effectively preclude any urban future but that of their own making.⁸⁵

adjacent to the church of San Giovanni Bosco in the Centocelle district; and perhaps most famously, the Monte Mario Hilton, constructed in 1963. See Gaia Remiddi et al., eds., *Il Moderno attraverso Roma: 200 architetture scelte* (Roma: Croma Quaderni, 2000).

⁸⁴ Insolera 244-245.

⁸⁵ Insolera 245.

3. *Società Generale Immobiliare (SGI), the Monte Mario Hilton, and Casal Palocco*

Among these developers was the private real estate conglomerate Società Generale Immobiliare (SGI). SGI was, according to Vittorio Vidotto, “the single leading protagonist in the transformation of Rome,” during this period.⁸⁶ The activities of SGI during this period – and what they indicate about the dense web of private and public, and transnational and national interests in the urban interventions of this moment – collectively form the third event I wish to highlight from the 1950s and ‘60s.

SGI’s history in Rome goes back to the days of Risorgimento when, seeing an enormous profit opportunity with the declaration of Rome as capital of Italy, the company relocated there from Turin in 1880 and began buying up surrounding farms and marshland. The land would soon become extremely valuable as the city’s new role as national capital precipitated a period of prodigious demographic growth and a boom in the building sector. SGI thereby became a permanent player in Rome’s urban development. Throughout the 20th century, it would also become synonymous with corruption and building speculation. The company drew a great deal of critical attention – especially from the left – for following the investment pattern they had first practiced in the 1870s and ‘80s: through carefully cultivated relationships with members of the government, SGI was able to precede almost every major urban planning decision with a purchase of cheap land that would be made subsequently valuable by the decision itself. To take just one example, when the *piano delle Olimpiadi* called for a Via Olimpica that would speed traffic between athletic venues in Flaminio and EUR, the new road would

⁸⁶ Vittorio Vidotto, *Roma contemporanea* (Bari: Laterza, 2006) 284.

take a circuitous route that just happened to pass through tracts of land recently purchased by SGI for development, thus immediately increasing the value of the land.⁸⁷

The history of SGI's ownership structure and commercial scope tells a significant story in its own right. Throughout the late 19th century, using a special fund provided by lay Roman supporters of the Catholic Church known as Peter's Pence, the Holy See itself began investing in SGI.⁸⁸ By the early 1960s, the Church owned an estimated 20% of the corporation, making it the largest single shareholder. During this time of peak Church investment (and under the leadership of the technocratic businessman Aldo Samaritani), SGI expanded its reach beyond Italy by building properties in Paris and Montreal, along with the Watergate Hotel in Washington, D.C. In 1970, Gulf-Western, a New York-based conglomerate with holdings in almost every financial sector (food, communications and entertainment, clothing, auto parts, metals and chemicals, and financial services) and a truly transnational reach (in Europe, North, South, and Central America), purchased the Vatican's 15 million shares. This financial transaction, which saw the ownership of arguably the most powerful private – or public – entity in Rome transition from national monopoly to transnational conglomerate, aptly reflects the changing structure of the Italian economy at this time.

SGI also became known throughout this period as the ultimate corporate slumlord. Their housing blocks were often shoddy and always ugly, and they were among the central participants in the *edilizia abusiva* (unregulated, illegal building) that dotted the periphery of Rome with repetitive, inhuman residential high-rises with poor services.

⁸⁷ For an American take on SGI's activities and involvement with the Vatican, see "Investment: Low Profile for the Vatican," *Time Magazine* 94.22 (28 November 1969).

⁸⁸ John Francis Pollard, *Money and the Rise of the Modern Papacy: Financing the Vatican, 1850-1950* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge U.P., 2005) 64.

By the time of Gulf-Western's purchase in 1970, Paul Ginsborg records, "one house in every six in Rome... had been built without any proper permit, and 400,000 people were living in habitations which officially did not exist."⁸⁹ SGI's aggressive business practices – including its ineradicable entanglement and collusion with the government – were among the main reasons for this situation.

In addition to owning residential and office buildings along with individual apartments and homes, SGI was also able to parlay their extensive land ownership into decision-making authority over larger scale urban projects. In this way, the company was able to alter and even construct entire neighborhood fabrics, and then, after the fact, to effectively force the city to provide these neighborhoods with services, roads, and upkeep. As with Watergate a decade later, SGI was responsible for the construction of a hotel complex in Rome that significantly altered the city fabric – namely the extremely controversial Cavalieri Hilton on Monte Mario. The result of an intricate bargaining process between Hilton, SGI, the Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA, the agency set up to administer Marshall Plan money), and the Italian and Roman governments, the Monte Mario Cavalieri Hilton was intended to serve not only tourists, but also foreign businessmen, military and government officials, and wealthy Romans who would be drawn to its American-style restaurants, bars, and nightclubs. The building contract originally stipulated that SGI and the city government would bear the cost of the land purchase and maintain the structure. In return, SGI was to receive two-thirds of the profits. The remainder of costs would be split evenly between Hilton and the ECA, and

⁸⁹ Ginsborg 247.

Hilton alone would reap the final one-third of profit.⁹⁰ Although the ECA eventually pulled out of the agreement, the presence of American governmental power in the project continued as the American ambassador to Italy, Clare Booth Luce, lobbied heavily in Hilton and SGI's favor.

The new Hilton on Monte Mario would be a clear architectural manifestation of transnational corporate power within the city of Rome, and its location on the highest hill in Rome's vicinity – not to mention the urban interventions that would be necessary to accommodate it – would make it impossible for Romans to miss. Ironically, it was this same position of geographic visibility (about thirty minutes by shuttle from the center and at the top of a hill) that made it “virtually invisible” to tourists and visitors, whose interest in more centrally located luxury hotels such as those on the Via Veneto contributed to the Hilton's lack of financial success.⁹¹ To compensate for this, in both its architecture and marketing, Hilton emphasized the new hotel's most striking aspect – its panoramic view of the ancient city. As Annabel Jane Wharton notes in a book on Hilton's European presence throughout the Cold War, the hotel implied a quite specific form of urban visuality:

Most obviously, the hotel was planned to offer its patrons a view of the city both from their own rooms and from the public spaces. The view presented was magnificent. From the Hilton's rooftop restaurant, the Pergola, the guest was in visual control of Rome. At the center of the perspective were the Pantheon, SS. Trinità dei Monti, and the monument of Victor Emmanuel II. Rome may be experienced without leaving the Hilton.... The Cavalieri Hilton offered the view as a commodity.⁹²

⁹⁰ Annabel Jane Wharton, *Building the Cold War: Hilton International Hotels and Modern Architecture* (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 2001) 143.

⁹¹ Wharton 141.

⁹² Wharton 139.

The new Hilton was therefore, to its foreign guests and even to some Romans, the very architectural and urbanistic embodiment not just of American-style luxury and transnational capital, but also of a commodifying, touristic gaze – precisely, in other words, the kind of consumptive, fetishistic gaze that Lefebvre associates with abstract space.

While it continues to occupy this position for wealthy tourists even today – the very first sentence on its website reads, “Overlooking the panorama that has inspired visitors for centuries is Rome’s most prestigious address,” – from the point of view of Romans, the Hilton has had an entirely different meaning.⁹³ As Mario Sanfilippo so succinctly puts it, the Cavalieri Hilton, besides representing just another typically Roman debacle caused by corrupt politicians handcuffed by corporate building speculators, was also, when completed, a “mammoth structure,” that, “irreparably destroyed the splendid landscape around the crest of Monte Mario.”⁹⁴ Despite SGI’s indications to Hilton during negotiations that they owned the land on which the American hotel was to be built, the top of Monte Mario had in fact never been rezoned after its designation as a public green space of low building density by the city’s Master Plan of 1931. The famous view on which Hilton staked the success of its new venture was even a part of this original plan: a *piazzale panoramico* (a large public space with a vista) would have given the people of Rome the visual access to their own city that could henceforth only be enjoyed by

⁹³ “Rome Cavalieri – Home.” Rome Cavalieri Hilton. 10 January 2010.
<<http://www.romecavalieri.com/>>

⁹⁴ Sanfilippo 37.

Hilton's extremely wealthy and predominately foreign clientele.⁹⁵ Hence, via the Cavalieri Hilton and thanks in large part to SGI, the opulent – and, to Italians almost completely inaccessible – American dream appeared like a mirage on a hill above Rome (and with a controlling view of the city, no less).

But SGI had plans to bring this consumerist, leisure-based lifestyle to wealthy and upper-middleclass Romans as well. As *Time* magazine noted in a 1963 exploration of the mysterious Italian company about to develop Watergate, “Immobiliare no longer likes to be a landlord. Instead, it builds and sells whole suburbs of apartments and homes, and throws in all the amenities from roads and utilities to churches and football [soccer] fields.”⁹⁶ This was, indeed, the exact idea behind SGI's construction in the 1950s and '60s of a series of large subdivisions throughout the city (including two – Belsito and Balduina – in the immediate vicinity of the Hilton that, again, called for a great deal of accommodation on the part of the city).

More importantly for my purposes, SGI was also active in the fraught new administrative center of EUR and around the new airport at Fiumicino (more on which below), where it did indeed build a series of “whole suburbs.” Sanfilippo, in referring to these SGI suburbs as “status symbols,” “pleasure islands,” and “Indian reservations for the upper class,” aptly captures the sense of historical vacuum and the isolated, bureaucratic identity of these new “communities” that began flooding the former marshland southwest of Rome.⁹⁷ In order to attract the *nouveau riche* army of white-

⁹⁵ Governatorato di Roma, *Piano regolatore di Roma, 1931, Anno IX* (Milano: Treves, Treccani, Tumminelli, 1931).

⁹⁶ “Italy: Roman Giant,” *Time Magazine* 81.4 (25 January 1963).

⁹⁷ Sanfilippo 109-112.

collar workers, airline employees, and wealthy entrepreneurs that would form their clientele, SGI prided itself, according to Vidotto, on, “providing their new owners with a product marked by a cheery adaptation of ‘American’ modernity.”⁹⁸ In addition to offering a certain level of luxury and the presence of various domestic accoutrements, SGI’s plans often emphasized what were considered at the time to be the typically “American” priorities of individualism, privacy, and a lifestyle centered around the nuclear family.

All of these new neighborhoods (Vigna Clara, l’Olgiata, Spinaceto, etc.) were – and, indeed, continue to be – defined by multiple levels of social and geographic segmentation. For example, among the most “American” and “modern” of these new subdivisions was Casal Palocco, a district built to the south of EUR that features prominently in Argento’s *Tenebre*. The social and cultural ideals of separation and privatization were built into the design of Casal Palocco on multiple levels. The community’s plan called for multi-bedroom, single-family homes grouped together within individual *isole* (blocks or “islands” of houses separated from other groups of houses by roads and/or often carefully manicured green space). These *isole* were, in turn, cordoned off as a group from the surrounding areas of the Roman suburbs by walls, gates, and security thresholds. Very much like today’s gated communities, from the time of their construction in the late 1950s, complexes like Casal Palocco were considered by many urban Romans – especially those on the left and in the arts – to represent everything that was wrong with contemporary Italian society. Developments like Casal Palocco were the very embodiment of the extreme social and cultural alienation of the new, post-economic miracle Italy, of, in Pasolini’s word, “the ongoing banality of the

⁹⁸ Vidotto 284.

fascism of consumer capitalism,” in which consumerism, individualism and the nuclear family were chiseling away at a centuries-old model of social integration built around active interest in politics and communal experience.⁹⁹ Paul Ginsborg makes this connection between social and geographic isolation explicit:

The new urban structures served to isolate families, which were decreasing in size, in small but comfortable living-quarters, and provided few spaces for collective gatherings or community life.... Cars and television further encouraged an essentially privatized and familial use of leisure time. Thus the “economic miracle,” by linking rising living standards with accentuated individualism, seemed to fulfill the American dream.¹⁰⁰

Nowhere is the “cosmopolitan” Roman cynicism around these new suburbs and their American dream trappings captured more succinctly than in the communist filmmaker Nanni Moretti’s 1993 film *Caro diario*. Moretti, driving through the new southwestern suburbs of Rome, sums up a generation of leftists’ puzzlement towards the seeming emptiness of suburban life thus: “Casal Palocco: Driving by these homes, I smell jogging suits, video tapes, watch dogs in the garden, and pizzas in cardboard boxes. Why did they come here thirty years ago?”

4. *L’Aeroporto Intercontinentale Leonardo da Vinci*

⁹⁹ Rhodes, *Stupendous, Miserable City* 13.

¹⁰⁰ While Ginsborg takes a critical position towards to these changes in Italian society, he – refreshingly – tempers this by noting some of the ways in which the miracle also benefited a number of Italians: “For millions of Italians the ‘miracle’ offered a material transformation which can only be called a profound liberation. For the first time the majority of the population had the possibility of living decently, of being warm and well clothed, of eating good food, and could bring up their children without fear of their being malformed or malnourished.... The wall which had separated town and countryside, South and North, mass deprivation and relative prosperity, had been breached – not in the way that the Communists or even the Catholics would have liked, but breached it had been.” Ginsborg 248-249.

What was emerging at this time in Rome was therefore a planning culture that heavily favored corporate real estate development over public regulation, and a parallel political economy ever more structured around transnational exchange, consumerism, and mobile privatization. One of the centerpieces of this emerging city would be the new international airport in the seaside town of Fiumicino to the southwest of Rome. Its construction is the fourth and final event I wish to discuss.

Although it is unlikely that intercontinental air travel was a part of his original fantasies, Mussolini's own personal version of manifest destiny – that of bringing Rome's historic center to *mare nostrum* via the axis of EUR – was effectively realized with the construction in the late 1950s of L'aeroporto intercontinentale Leonardo da Vinci (Leonardo da Vinci Rome-Fiumicino International Airport). The story behind the construction of the airport is yet another Roman tragicomedy of,

tens of millions of *lira*, of dozens of planning commissions, of collapsing runways, of fog, of petroleum monopolies, of flooded land, of mysterious and inexplicable building contract awards, and of all the usual ingredients of corruption and speculation around publicly funded works (only exaggerated, in this case, in proportion to the enormous sums of money involved).¹⁰¹

In all of this, what would be overlooked was just how the airport – and the immense amount of automobile traffic it would draw to Fiumicino from Rome – would fit into the now truly distended urban fabric of Rome. No provision whatsoever was made to connect Rome to its new airport, in fact, except a single small road that would force airport-bound traffic to join the large number of cars that, for work and holiday, commuted regularly on the Rome-Ostia *autostrada*. The airport would finally get its own dedicated highway

¹⁰¹ Insolera 244.

eight years later, but local rail service (not only a basic staple in European cities, but also the most logical, efficient, and cost-effective solution according to virtually everyone not involved in the planning process) would not be provided for another thirty years. In the interim, the chunk of space occupied by the airport would remain a fragmentary yet crucial urban appendage – an “irreconcilable node,” according to Insolera’s assessment in the March 1964 installment of the planning journal *Urbanistica*.¹⁰²

To complicate matters, this “irreconcilable node” also represented a whole new modality of space, time, and perception. Unlike previous elements of urban expansion, the addition of an international airport to the extended urban fabric of Rome meant not just a quantitatively new level of urban dispersal, but the grafting onto Rome of a qualitatively new spatiality altogether. In the sprawling reaches of an already unevenly developed city filled with centuries of conflicting temporalities and spatialities, Fiumicino Airport and its promises of rapid, intercontinental – i.e., *global* – transit represented a radically new sense of geographic and temporal experience.

However, this sense that Rome was now connected, via its airport, to an immanent geopolitical network was not just a theoretical abstraction. Indeed, it would be made tragically concrete throughout the 1970s and 80s when a series of terrorist attacks at Fiumicino placed the city of Rome on the front lines of a conflict taking place over a thousand miles away on the other side of the Mediterranean – that between Israel and Palestine.¹⁰³ In addition to the violence itself and the new approaches to airport – and

¹⁰² Italo Insolera e Manieri-Elia, “Tre anni di cronaca romana,” *Urbanistica* 40 (Torino: Istituto Nazionale di Urbanistica, Marzo 1964) 41.

¹⁰³ The first attack took place on July 23, 1968, when three members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine hijacked an El Al flight from Rome to Israel, subsequently diverting it to Algiers. The next significant attack was the December 17, 1973 bombing of the Pan

indeed, urban – security it would impel, the importance of these events for Rome also lies in the new global parameters of space that were emerging just on the edge of the city. Rome no longer just glanced the rural or maritime at its edges; it now also touched Israel, Palestine, Algiers, Athens, Kuwait, Vienna, and the rest of the globe.

In addition to opening the door to historical events like these, rapid transcontinental air transport would bring about and imply major social shifts as well. While Rome had been an important destination for pilgrims, foreign clergy, and wealthy northern Europeans for millennia, the eminently postmodern form of mass tourism that has come to define Rome in the last fifty years or so would only be able to take off after the construction of the new airport. With the airport would also come an increase in other transient populations such as international investors, expat residents, and foreign press agents.

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These four events – 1) the construction of the Gra, 2) the preparations for the 1960 Summer Olympics and the *piano delle Olimpiadi*, 3) the ever-increasing role in Rome's urban development of private real estate giant SGI and its transnational restructuring, and 4) the completion of Leonardo da Vinci Rome-Fiumicino International Airport – were themselves visible traces within the urban fabric of Rome of the advent of abstract, global space. Each of these examples represents a specific, historical incidence

Am office at Fiumicino. The bombing itself killed thirty-two people, and a hijacking ensued that saw an Athens-bound jet re-routed to Kuwait. Another was the coordinated attacks on the international terminals of both Rome's and Vienna's international airports on December 27, 1985 which killed nineteen and wounded ninety-seven others.

of, “not only the mobilization of space in the chain of production, distribution, and consumption, but a transformation of space itself into a commodity: produced, distributed, and consumed.”¹⁰⁴ In addition, each indicates the ways in which both specific institutions of global reach – the IOC, for example, along with Hilton and Gulf Western – and the global aspirations of Rome’s private and public planners were implicated in this process.

These spaces together – indeed, this specific kind of production of space, where the local/urban indicates the effects of the global – form a kind of urban pre-history of Argento’s Rome. Argento’s films go to great lengths to emphasize the emergence of this new city of abstract spaces by frequently concentrating on some of its very newest phenomena. His locations include some of the same urban forms that I’ve been discussing in this section – Fiumicino Airport, new corporate buildings in EUR, new American-style suburbs including Casal Palocco itself, etc. The same can be said for his English and American protagonists and their frequently corporate entourages. Argento’s Roman films relegate older, residual forms of Roman urbanism to the background in favor of these emergent ones. The postmodern Rome which these new urban settings and populations indexed and helped produce would become, as I will demonstrate in the body of my dissertation, the very diegetic substance of *The Bird With the Crystal Plumage* and *Tenebre*, as well as the object of *Deep Red*’s critical displacements. The Rome of the 1960s featured new and transforming modalities of sprawl and fragmentation along with new efforts to contain it (and consequent new forms of uneven urban development); new imperatives for security and surveillance; new populations of tourists and ex-pat foreign

¹⁰⁴ Lukasz Stanek, “Space as Concrete Abstraction: Hegel, Marx, and Modern Urbanism in Henri Lefebvre,” in Goonewardena et al. 70.

residents; and new economies and subjectivities structured around corporate power, privatization, consumerism, and ever-smaller familial contexts. This post-economic miracle Rome – abstract and directly linked to global space – is the city that Argento inherited, chronicled, and critiqued.

The Transforming Italian Media Landscape and the Emergence of New Audiences

These massive urban transformations took place against the background of equally significant – and strikingly parallel – shifts and transitions in the structure of Italian media that span the first decade and a half of Argento's career (from 1969-1984). These transformations warrant a brief discussion since they established a new role for mass communications in Italian everyday life and, along with the social and geographic changes that I've been highlighting, also produced new patterns of media consumption that contributed to the formation of Argento's audience.

At the center of these transformations was the emergence of television and its unseating of cinema as the mass medium of choice among Italians. As elsewhere in the developed world, television's growth was immediate and prodigious in Italy, and its early history was an unmistakable indicator of the increasing atomization of Italian social life. When it was first introduced in 1954 with a limited broadcast coverage area and just one network, there were only 88,000 television sets nationwide. But television's growth would follow, capitalize upon, and, indeed, help produce Italy's new social patterns. For the first few years of its existence, television adapted itself to the semi-public consumption patterns formed by cinema. Generally, it was viewed outside of the home

and in large groups (mainly in cafes and bars). By 1965, just over a decade after the first transmissions, 49% of Italian families owned a television set in their homes.

But the most significant changes took place during the 1970s and early 1980s, a time period that encompass all of the films I will discuss in my chapters. By 1975 – the year that Argento released *Deep Red* – the percentage of Italian families owning a television jumped to 89%.¹⁰⁵ At the same time, cinema ticket sales declined rapidly from their peak at 7.9 million in 1956 to 4.5 million in 1976. One of the reasons for this was that films began to be viewed more frequently at home, on television. In 1978, for the very first time in Italy's history, the home-based medium of television took in more revenue than the cinema. In addition to the global economic crisis, the reconfiguration of Hollywood distribution practices, and – Argento's own preferred explanation – the social unrest and public violence of the *Sessantotto*, Ginsborg suggests that these shifts were also related to the socio-spatial transformations of Italy's growing cities, where by the middle of the 1970s, in the seemingly endless urban peripheries, “each family watched television in its own flat.”¹⁰⁶

Yet another factor in television's new dominance within Italian everyday life was the deregulation of television broadcasting. At its beginnings in the early 1950s, television was a state monopoly controlled by the government's executive branch, that is, the ruling political party. In 1951, RAI (Radio Audizioni Italiana), a post-war continuation of the fascist-era EIAR (Ente Italiano per le Audizioni Radiofoniche) would be granted complete and total rights over all radio and television broadcasting throughout Italy until an arbitrarily set expiry date of December 15, 1972. State ownership of

¹⁰⁵ See Ginsborg 240, 432.

¹⁰⁶ Ginsborg 242.

television broadcasting would theoretically meet the entertainment and information needs of the various sectors of the Italian population as it would be ostensibly owned by these very consumers. In practice, however, the church-influenced Christian Democrat (DC) government of the 1950s would impose a heavily censored “educative” model on the new medium that would stress, among other things, its chief ideological values – the linguistic uniformity that it saw as necessary to modernization and the growth of a truly contemporary “free” capitalist market, anti-communist politics, and, of course, the importance of the nuclear family and of religion.¹⁰⁷ This was apparent above all in the realm of advertising, where commercial spots were not broadcast during breaks within a show or between shows, but rather in their own highly regulated half-hour time slots. These transmissions, called *Carosello*, featured 110-second ads that were prohibited by law from mentioning the product or service advertised outside of the first and last five seconds of the spot.¹⁰⁸ The other one hundred or so seconds of each *Carosello* were filled in with narrative vignettes, cartoons, and fairy tales. *Carosello* therefore became wildly popular throughout the 1960s, especially with children, who, according to Ginsborg, “were introduced in this familial, homely and seemingly innocuous way to the delights of consumerism.”¹⁰⁹

When December 15, 1972 arrived and the state’s TV monopoly expired, a series of debates ensued about the future of television. These polemics – like the Roman planning debates I highlighted above – pitted those on the left against private

¹⁰⁷ The phrase “educative model” is from Elena Dagrada, “Television and its Critics: A Parallel History,” *Italian Cultural Studies: An Introduction*, David Forgacs and Robert Lumley, eds. (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1996) 233-247.

¹⁰⁸ Ginsborg 240-241.

¹⁰⁹ Ginsborg 241.

entrepreneurs. The former saw an opportunity for reform and new modes of regulation that would dislodge ruling party control (still the DC) of the media. The latter, on the other hand, argued for a free media market, in which deregulation and *laissez-faire* economics would encourage private ownership of media outlets and hence competition. These long-winded polemics themselves caused a brief period of almost total deregulation until a new media law was finally passed on April 14, 1975. The new law represented a compromise between the two sides: RAI would retain its monopoly, but it would no longer exist under the heading of the executive branch. Henceforth, control would not be in the hands of the single ruling party, but would instead be split amongst the various parties represented in parliament based on the number of seats held by each. This law laid the groundwork for the founding of two new RAI networks: by the end of the 1970s, in what came to be known as *lottizzazione*, or parceling, RAI would own three channels with three different political platforms: the conservative, Christian Democrat RAI 1, the Socialist RAI 2, and the Communist RAI 3.¹¹⁰

But, in the meantime, in a fashion strikingly similar to Rome's urban expansion as I outline it above, during the two-and-a-half years with no regulatory framework (from late 1972 through mid-1975), the Italian media landscape would be irreversibly changed by a series of private entrepreneurs. Seeing an opportunity for profit in the moment of non-regulation, these entrepreneurs opened local TV stations throughout the country. By the time the 1975 law was passed and new regulations kicked in, these stations were already well established, and a *de facto* victory had been won by the private sector over against the state monopoly. One by one, the government would attempt to shut these new broadcasters down via a series of drawn out and very costly individual lawsuits claiming

¹¹⁰ Dagrada 241.

violation of the state's ownership rights over local markets. This mostly unsuccessful and entirely unsustainable litigation practice was itself shut down by a 1976 Constitutional Court ruling that declared the state's practice of prosecuting private broadcasters for violating a state monopoly unconstitutional. The ruling effectively awarded RAI a legal monopoly over all *national* broadcasts, but no control whatsoever over *local* broadcasts.¹¹¹ Once again, sluggish and dysfunctional government allowed private, corporate interests to determine another future landscape of Italy. Although private ownership of television stations was never made legal by any actual legislation (a process which would theoretically reflect the will of the people in a representational democracy such as Italy's), private stations began broadcasting in every town, city, and region throughout the peninsula – and usually without any oversight whatsoever. The state-owned RAI would not only have its own viewership split across three channels, but it would also have to compete for viewers with small, local broadcasters who were often much more highly educated in business and marketing than RAI's executives.

The most famous beneficiary of the 1976 Constitutional Court decision was Silvio Berlusconi. Originally a real estate developer (a fact which demonstrates how linked these two cultural and economic sectors were in the 1970s), Berlusconi was among those who capitalized on the 1972-1975 period of deregulation by creating his first television station, Telemilano, in Milan in 1974. In addition, Berlusconi also saw a loophole in the 1976 ruling that, in tandem with Italy's small size and high population density, would allow him to construct his own media empire. Since the 1976 law never stipulated how many local stations each individual owner or ownership group could control, Berlusconi

¹¹¹ Christopher Wagstaff, "The Media," *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Italian Culture*, Zygmunt G. Baranski and Rebecca J. West, eds. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge U.P., 2001) 294.

would develop his own national audience by opening dozens of local stations throughout the country. Using trucking lines he already owned, he would then deliver videocassettes with prepackaged content – consisting mostly of American shows with Italian advertisements – to all of his stations. The tapes would then be broadcast simultaneously. In this way, throughout the mid- to late-1970s, Berlusconi was able to unify and consolidate a national audience.¹¹² His coup would be complete in the early 1980s when his ally, Socialist prime minister Bettino Craxi, was able to push a series of decrees through parliament that made private ownership of *national* television broadcasting legal for the first time in Italy. Among these was the appropriately named “Berlusconi Decree” of 1984. Henceforth, Italy would have what would be called a “mixed system” of ownership: the state would retain ownership of the RAI networks, but anyone with enough capital (and the right connections) could apply for and obtain a national broadcast license. As for Berlusconi, as we know all too well, these developments along with his wise and vicious subsequent investment practices and politics allowed him to become the wealthiest and most powerful person in Italy.

RAI, originally established simply to serve the public, now found itself locked in competition with the commercial sector (not to mention with itself, via its multi-channel structure) not just for viewers but, more importantly, for national advertising revenue. Television was by this point, in the words of Elena Dagrada, “no longer...an educative instrument but... an integral part of the culture industry, which could be run as a competitive business, thus leading, amongst other things, to market segmentation.”¹¹³ And of course, RAI, managed as it was by state bureaucrats less aware of contemporary

¹¹² Wagstaff, “The Media” 293-299.

¹¹³ Dagrada 244.

marketing techniques, was no competition for the shrewd businessman Berlusconi. Berlusconi foresaw – and, indeed, very much in tandem with the other urban, social, and economic developments I’ve been discussing in this section, helped produce – an emerging set of audience tastes, desires, and ideologies. His stations scheduled and aired their content according to careful demographic research and the type of audience targeting that would become ubiquitous in the 1980s.¹¹⁴

Argento’s Audience

Among other things, these changes in the social and media landscape of Italy helped to form the very audience of Dario Argento’s films and of the *giallo* in general. From its inception with the films of Mario Bava (and going back even further to the yellow-covered pulp novels first released in the 1920s), the *giallo* has been an explicitly commercial and popular genre. Its cinematic, generic incarnation has been quintessentially postmodern as well. As I will explore at length in chapter two, the *giallo*, like its contemporary genre, the Spaghetti Western, is not only a hybrid genre, but it is also one that self-consciously foregrounds and deconstructs generic codes and conventions as well as processes of translation and transcultural indigenization. The new levels of media saturation in Italian society brought about by the changes I discuss above created a more media savvy – or, at the very least, a more media “knowledgeable” – group of spectators who would be more able than prior audiences to understand and relate to the irony, self-referentiality, and intertextuality that formed central aspects of the *giallo*’s – and particularly Argento’s *gialli*’s – postmodernist aesthetics.

¹¹⁴ Wagstaff, “The Media” 296.

But the *giallo*, unlike the vast majority of other market segments within the film industry, benefitted from the expansion of television at the economic level as well. *Gialli* have generally been produced quickly and on low budgets. In the early 1970s, therefore, as Christopher Wagstaff notes, they were customarily screened not in *prima* or even *seconda visione* (first or second run) cinemas where Hollywood and Italian “art cinema” products were shown, but in the more suburban and rural – and much cheaper – *terza visione* (third run) theaters where demand was higher and turnover faster.¹¹⁵ The film-going culture at these theaters was therefore quite different from that of the more sophisticated and urban *prima* and *seconda visione* theaters. As Wagstaff notes, the *terza visione* audience was “more like the television audience than like a *prima visione* cinema audience.” Not only did the *terza visione/giallo* spectator often see films at “the cinema nearest his house... after dinner, at around ten o’clock in the evening,” but the mode of spectatorship within the cinema itself was also more “televisual”:

The viewer (generally he)... would not bother to find out what was showing, nor would he make any particular effort to arrive at the beginning of the film. He would talk to his friends during the showing whenever he felt like it, except during the bits of the film that grabbed his (or his friends’) attention (the film would stop anyway at an arbitrary point for an intermission). People would be coming and going and changing seats throughout the performance.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ For a more extensive account of this tiered distribution system, see David Forgacs and Stephen Gundle eds., *Mass Culture and Italian Society from Fascism to the Cold War* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana U.P., 2007), Elena Gremigni, *Pubblico e popolarità: Il ruolo del cinema nella società italiana (1956-1967)* (Firenze: Le Lettere, 2009), Koven, *La Dolce Morte*, and Wagstaff, “A Forkful of Westerns: Industry, Audiences and the Italian Western,” *Popular European Cinema*, eds. Richard Dyer and Ginette Vincendeau (London: Routledge, 1992) 245-261.

¹¹⁶ Wagstaff, “A Forkful of Westerns” 253.

Gialli were, in this sense, effectively aimed at an audience that was emergent at this moment, namely that of television with its distracted, home-based consumption patterns.¹¹⁷ This, as Mikel Koven argues, is apparent in the *giallo*'s mode of address as well, which prioritizes filmic spectacle over narrative. The *giallo*, he notes, "is designed to give the audience a set of 'thrills,' and the 'plot' is merely a pretext on which to hang those 'thrills.'"¹¹⁸ Since its patterns of reception and mode of address were already practically that of television, when the Italian film industry entered its period of decline throughout the 1970s and these *terza visione* theaters began to shut down, the *giallo* remained safe. As Wagstaff notes, "with the *de facto* deregulation of television in 1976 there sprang up a massive broadcasting of... third-run films on commercial television channels which continues to this day."¹¹⁹ The *giallo* and other third-run genre films ("mondo" documentaries, Nazi exploitation films, and urban cop thrillers known as *poliziotteschi*) would thrive on television through the early 1980s.¹²⁰

The *giallo* would, in turn, provide television networks with a proven, lucrative product. RAI, in fact, attempted in the early 1970s to capitalize on Argento's early career

¹¹⁷ Here I am referring especially to the work of John Ellis on the televisual glance as counterposed to the cinematic gaze. Ellis writes, "TV's regime of vision is less intense than cinema's: it is a regime of the glance rather than the gaze. The gaze implies a concentration of the spectator's activity into that of looking, the glance implies that no extraordinary effort is being invested in the activity of looking.... The cinema-looker is a spectator: caught by the projection yet separate from its illusion. The TV-looker is a viewer, casting a lazy eye over proceedings, keeping an eye on events." John Ellis, *Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, Video* (London: Routledge, 1982) 137.

¹¹⁸ Koven 32.

¹¹⁹ Wagstaff, "Cinema," in Forgacs and Lumley 218.

¹²⁰ Argento himself noted these transformations in his audience in a 1985 interview with film critic Roberto Pugliese: "It was the arrival of private television and city life becoming terribly aggressive. These two factors kept large groups of the elderly and middle-aged bourgeois from going to the cinema, and encouraged instead these masses of teenagers to take possession of the theaters." Pugliese 13.

success by backing a new mini-series of made-for-TV *gialli* shorts called *La porta sul buio* (*Door Into Darkness*, 1973). Much in the manner of the Hitchcock of *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* or the Rod Serling of *The Twilight Zone*, Argento hosted the series by introducing its episodes in direct address. His introduction of the series' very first episode uses this prototypically televisual mode of address to suggest a certain conjunction between this emergent audience and the themes of fear and isolation:

What you are about to see is the first of four films that I've created for television. This is also the very first encounter I have had with you, since up to this point I have worked exclusively in cinema. Four films directed by four different directors with four stories very different from one another – but that nevertheless share a common atmosphere: that of anxiety, fear, unease, and suspense. They are *gialli*, but they are a different category of *giallo*. As for the title of the series, “Door Into Darkness,” you may be wondering what it might mean. Well, it means a number of things: opening a door into the unknown, into that with which we find unfamiliar and therefore unnerving and frightening. But for me it also means something else. It can happen – indeed, it has happened to everyone at least once – that we close a door behind us and find ourselves in a completely dark room. We frantically search for the light switch, but don't find it. We try to open the door, but we can't. And we have to stay there, in the dark, all alone – forever. The protagonists of these stories have all pulled this fatal door shut.¹²¹

¹²¹ The translation is my own. The original address is: “Questo che state per vedere è il primo dei quattro film che ho realizzato per la televisione. Ed è anche il primo incontro tra me e voi, perché fino ad oggi la mia attività si era rivolta esclusivamente al cinema. Quattro film, dunque. Quattro storie molto diverse le une dalle altre, dirette da quattro differenti registi ma tutte percorse da un filo, un'atmosfera comune... e cioè l'angoscia, la paura, l'inquietudine e la divina suspense. Sono dei gialli, ma dei gialli alla maniera nuova: dei gialli diversi. Quanto a 'La porta sul buio', che intitola la serie, vi chiederete cosa vuol significare. Ebbene, vuol dire molte cose: aprire una porta sull'ignoto, su ciò che non conosciamo e che perciò ci inquieta, ci fa paura. Ma per me vuol dire anche altre cose. Può capitare, ed è capitato una volta, anche una sola volta nella vita di una persona, di chiudersi una porta alle spalle e trovarsi in una stanza buia... cercare l'interruttore della luce e non trovarlo... provare ad aprire la porta e non poterlo fare. E dover restare lì, al buio... soli... per sempre. Ebbene, alcuni dei protagonisti delle nostre storie si sono chiusi questa fatale porta alle spalle.”

This was an important moment not only for Argento, but for RAI as well. For the latter, this program was an attempt to wrangle the new, more youthful audience that Argento's first film *gialli* were instrumental in consolidating. This would, it was thought, give RAI a competitive advantage in the years of deregulation (1972-1975) over the growing private sector of local television broadcasters. Argento, for his part, would use this introduction to lay down a number of themes that he would explore throughout his career. For one, he posits a connection between architectural segmentation and social isolation: when the interpellative "we" of the address opens the door into the private space in which "we" find ourselves all alone, the experience is one of overwhelming terror and helplessness. In addition, since this emotional experience is triggered not by the unknown and new so much as a familiar experience rendered unfamiliar – that is, the self in a now spatialized experience of isolation and solitude – this mini-narrative touches upon the Freudian concept of the uncanny, which, as we will see in my chapters, is a vital social, spatial, and psychological trope within Argento's oeuvre.

In addressing these themes of isolation and the terrifying familiar not to a cinematic audience consuming his film in public space, but rather to what was, by this point, an entirely home-based television audience, Argento's critique extends to private, domestic space itself. The suggestion here is that the new socio-cultural emphasis on the home as a space of consumption and identity formation during this period lends itself to new experiences of the uncanny – of a kind of fear of entrapment and isolation within the domestic. Argento, in other words, ties together the experience of isolation with new experiences of both home life and media, as well as with the new, more privatized urban and architectural forms of the moment.

The episode of the show directed by Argento, *Il tram (The Tram)*, further elaborates on these themes. It does so, however, not in the mode of domestic horror as one might expect, but rather in the form of an investigative narrative that takes place in public space. The crime under investigation is the murder of a young woman on a crowded tram – that, inexplicably, occurs without a single witness. The head investigator, Inspector Giordani, interviews each of the dozens of potential eyewitnesses that filled the tram, but not one of them can remember seeing or hearing anything out of the ordinary. *Il tram*, according to Barbara Maio, thus raises a series of philosophical issues around, “the fallibility of vision.”¹²²

But as Maio goes on to argue, it also raises specific social and historical questions around the experience of both urban space and mass media. The setting of this “narrative of solitude and alienation” – that is, the tram itself – is a public space *par excellence*. One could hardly choose a space so closely associated with the banality of everyday urban life, one, as Maio says, so “absolutely immersed in normality.”¹²³ The episode’s faded cinematography and attenuated camera and editing style (especially by Argento’s often exaggerated standards) function to underline this banality. The story itself, however, imbues this everyday, public space not with any kind of narrative dynamism or gravity (as in the approach to such everyday spaces in, say, the city symphony film or even neorealism), but rather with an extraordinarily high level of social fragmentation. Despite being in a group by definition – simply by being spatially delimited by the vehicle they share – the individual passengers on the tram are decidedly not a collective: they are able to muster neither an explanation of the mysterious crime nor any emotional or ethical

¹²² Barbara Maio, “Piccoli orrori quotidiani: La televisione,” in Zagarrio 232.

¹²³ Maio 232.

concern for the victim. Argento's precise blocking and camera placements emphasize this lack of social cohesion: the urban crowd in the tram is covered mostly in long shot from a position in the front of the vehicle facing backwards, and the actors position their gazes either off-frame or downward, thus resisting engagement with one another. As such, the continuous public space of the tram is figuratively broken down into discrete, private spaces of separate, individual experience – the dominant characteristic of which is apathy. The entire episode in this way allegorizes and exaggerates urban alienation and contemporary moral indifference. Adding to this effect is the fact that, in Giordani's interviews, each passenger is comically – and intentionally – over-characterized, their individual “quirks” exaggerated to the point of making it almost impossible to imagine that they form aspects of a single social whole. This is very much the alienated and fragmented urban crowd of the modern metropolis discussed by the Frankfurt School and others.¹²⁴

But *Il tram* is not just an incisive commentary on the quintessentially modern, urban experience of indifference and alienation; it is also a critique of postmodern media spectatorship. As Maio notes, “in a wink towards the show's audience, the unknowing witnesses of the murder on the tram are depicted as morons: despite traveling literally directly alongside the victim, not one of them sees or hears a single thing of any use to the investigation.”¹²⁵ This group of people is not only apathetic, amoral, and fragmented,

¹²⁴ The urban crowd is analyzed extensively throughout the work of Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer, and Georg Simmel. See Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, Harvard U.P., 1999), Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, trans. and ed. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U.P., 1995), and Georg Simmel, *Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings*, ed. David Frisby (London: Sage Publications, 1997).

¹²⁵ Maio 232.

but it also seems to have significant cognitive problems around perception and attention. It is, in a word, distracted. The group of characters on the tram, I am suggesting along with Maio, allegorizes the emergence of a new group of media spectators in Italy, one whose patterns of visual consumption can be more closely linked to television than to cinema. Like the television spectator who, in the words of John Ellis, “glances rather than gazes at the screen” and whose “attention is sporadic rather than sustained,” this “audience” too is isolated and distracted.¹²⁶

In addition to raising these issues, *Il tram* also contains many of the elements that we see throughout Argento’s *oeuvre*. Besides the motifs of psychological and social alienation and isolation, *Il tram* also explores the themes of violence, perception, logical impossibility, and, of course, sexuality. Like many of Argento’s other films, it also conveys a keen awareness around mass media and representation, not only in the ways I discuss above, but also at the textual level in the form of self-reflexivity around filmmaking codes and conventions. Finally, like the films I will analyze in my chapters they foreground issues that are specifically urban, architectural, and geographic.

Chapter Summaries

Each of my three chapters is a close reading of a single Argento film shot and/or set in Rome, beginning with his directorial debut, 1970’s *L’uccello dalle piume di cristallo* / *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, and moving on through 1975’s *Profondo rosso* / *Deep Red*, and 1982’s *Tenebre* / *Unsane*. Each chapter traces how a given film’s imbrication in the specific urban histories, practices, and networks that comprise Rome opens onto a necessarily theoretical engagement with geopolitics conceived more

¹²⁶ Ellis 24.

generally. Using the theoretical platform I outline above, each chapter incorporates a materialist and concrete engagement with cinematic mise-en-scène, Roman urban space, and location filmmaking along with larger theoretical questions around representation, subjectivity, and the socio-spatial. Each, however, remains within the rubric of history in the end by suggesting some of the ways in which these stylistic and theoretical matrices themselves figure a certain historiography of their contemporary Rome. In this way, not only do my formal and stylistic readings of the individual films advance into a theoretical register, but a reading of urban history itself becomes the very end result of this process. The urban, in other words, is the category that allows me to unite close textual reading with historical analysis.

In chapter one, “Transparency, Opacity, Segmentation: *The Bird With the Crystal Plumage*,” I examine the narrative, location choices, and mise-en-scène of Argento’s first feature film as a commentary on the modern urban planning history of Rome. Shot on location in the streets of Rome, this film functions as an extensive examination, in particular, of the sometimes contradictory ways in which this history has been implicated in questions of power. The film’s central locations are the early 20th century extra-mural neighborhoods of Flaminio and Salaria. The gridded street patterns of such neighborhoods were a conscious attempt on the part of city planners to manage and contain what might otherwise have become, given the shifting modalities of consumption and habitation induced by the rapid socio-political and economic change of the twentieth century (the emergence of abstract, global space), incessant, illegible, and unmanageable urban sprawl. The construction of new grids as a mode of urbanism was dominant in Rome for almost a century, from the breach in 1870 until the late 1950s. But by the time

of the *Sessantotto* (and hence of *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*) this mode was finally being eclipsed by the new cultural and economic imperatives that I've been discussing in this introduction (mobility, privatization, consumption, globalization, etc.).

These new imperatives, of course, required and helped to produce a new spatiality which would overlay the old with, among other things, new forms of transport (the automobile and international air travel in particular), and a new style of corporate architecture which indicated the presence in Rome of multinational capitalism. The Rome of *The Bird With the Crystal Plumage* is the still new Rome of the Gra, of post-Olympic sprawl, of Fiumicino airport, and of the new, massive, and privately-owned housing complexes and blocks of corporate office buildings inspired by brutalism and the style of Nervi. As I describe above, this new phase of capitalism undermined any stabilizing hold that the modernist transparency of the grid may have had on Roman urban space by provoking whole new modalities of sprawl and fragmentation. By offsetting the clarity and organization of Rome's modernist gridded neighborhoods with other, more opaque and illegible moments of the city both in the far reaches of the suburbs of Rome, and also, in a different way, within the walls in the palimpsestic historic center, *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* calls attention not only to the highly unresolved and uneven nature of Roman space, but more specifically to the ways in which governmental attempts at controlling urban space – and by extension, urban populations – would be forced to undergo shifts in response to the violent protests of the 1960s and 70s.

Due to the changes wrought on the category of space by new transport and telecommunications technologies, the state would no longer be able to regulate the city at the level of the neighborhood as a manageable administrative-geographic unit. Instead, as

elsewhere in the developed world, the forms of power developing at this time would have to be isomorphic to this new proto-network spatiality of movement and flow. The film's investigation narrative therefore hinges on new, technological forms of detection and suspect management including a police computer that is not only able to aggregate microscopic, individual traits of known criminals into a larger archive, but can also use this archive to conjure up an idealized physiognomic and characterological, "criminal type." In its use of rationalist segmentation and recombination as an investigative technique, this archive recalls the panoptic, disciplinary societies of Foucault.

The film's *mise-en-scène* reflects these issues in a number of ways, most apparently through the recurring visual motif of the glass box. This is introduced in an opening scene at the Fondazione Wilkinson, an ornithology center whose very *mise-en-scène* – rows upon rows of labeled and catalogued taxidermied bird samples in glass boxes – is that of power-knowledge. Quite crucially, the crime that initiates the narrative also mobilizes glass in extremely conspicuous ways, as the eyewitness, the American expat writer Sam Dalmas, is helplessly trapped between two massive plate glass windows in the entryway of an art gallery inside of which a woman is seemingly attacked. As a material that embodies both spatial segmentation and visual clarity, glass is used here as an architectural manifestation of the new forms of observation and surveillance emerging at this moment in Italy. Hence, the film suggests a certain equivocation between the architectural transparency offered by glass and the supposed epistemological transparency of power-knowledge and the gaze of surveillance. However, Argento goes beyond this Foucauldian critique not only by using what would become an authorial signature to undermine this equivocation – namely, the unreliability of perception itself –

but by suggesting the various ways in which the postmodern space of Rome exceeds this type of disciplinary control. The unfolding drama around glass, in other words, parallels and allegorizes the unresolved attempts at urbanistic transparency suggested by the film's location choices. Within the highly symptomatic visual language of late-1960s popular cinema, in other words, Argento's first film raises a wide variety of questions about postmodernity, capitalism, power, and urban and architectural geography.

In chapter two, "Profonda Roma: *Deep Red*'s Domestic and Urban Uncanny," I examine what is widely considered Argento's first true masterpiece, *Profondo rosso* / *Deep Red* (1975), as a hybrid film whose multiplicity of generic references encourages an equally heterogeneous method of analysis, especially around issues of space, place, and dwelling. I trace the ways in which, at the level of *mise-en-scène* and narrative, *Deep Red* incorporates aspects of both horror and detective fiction and the at times contradictory modes of spatiality traditionally associated with each – respectively, multi-leveled depth and the division of contiguous space. In elaborating both of these modalities alongside one another, this film calls upon at least two theoretical modes and signifying practices – the depth hermeneutic of psychoanalysis and a surface model of surveillance – to produce its complex and intertwined set of meanings around public and private urban space.

This complexity is visible in the film in a few key areas. The first that I examine is the heavy emphasis that the film places on the borders between interior and exterior space via camera movements and placement, editing, and the use of point-of-view. *Deep Red* consistently represents this threshold area as a zone of trouble, danger, and death, thus figuring the demarcation of interior from exterior space as itself a form of violence. In addition, as a narrative that draws its symbolic and thematic energy from the Freudian

concept of the uncanny, it posits an explicit relationship between interior space, depth, and repression, and through framing choices, narrative structure, and mise-en-scène, explores the concepts of repression and the return of the repressed as spatial terms.

My reading begins to take on political and historical valence when I examine *Deep Red*'s location choices and general depiction of urban space and suggest that the uncanny is at play at the metropolitan level as well. This film goes to great lengths literally to dis-locate itself. Its use of what is commonly known as “creative geography,” in which a diegesis is constructed out of geographically inconsistent or impossible combinations of various real spaces, bears a strong historical and political meaning in itself. Although it places a great deal of emphasis on being set in Rome, the vast majority of the film was shot in the northern Italian city of Turin, the birthplace of the nineteenth century unification movement known in Italy as Risorgimento. Turin's more “modern” and “European” identity throughout the nineteenth century – industrialized, anti-clerical, and politically progressive – was manifest in a highly organized, gridded city plan that sharply distinguished it from Rome. By obviously grafting Turin onto Rome, however, *Deep Red* merely states an urban-historical fact about Rome's modern development: the modernist grids that were meant to tame Rome's historically chaotic urban growth and regulate its future course (and that I discuss in chapter one in relation to *The Bird With the Crystal Plumage*) were meant to do so precisely by emulating Turin's urban clarity. Indeed, the very practice of constructing residential grids on the fringes of Rome (like Flaminio and Salaria, and many others) became known in planning circles as “Turinization.” In this sense, *Deep Red* takes the critique that began in *The Bird With the Crystal Plumage*'s “little Turins” of Flaminio and Salaria to its logical conclusions by

using the geographic displacements available to cinema to map Turin itself onto Rome, and literally forcing the former to signify the latter. All of this is done in the service of a multi-faceted critique of Italian urban and domestic life that, as I demonstrate, is historically rooted in the protests of the *Sessantotto*.

In my third and final body chapter, “*Tenebre*, EUR, and the Postmetropolis,” I turn to Argento’s *Tenebre / Unsane* (1982). This film symptomatically tackles the changing roles of both the city and the mass media in daily life. It simultaneously takes on both the increasing importance in Rome of the American style suburb (and the absolute centrality of the automobile and the nuclear family) and the effects of private television broadcasting, a model that – as I note above – was in the process of displacing state ownership at this time. The dispersed and sprawling acceleration of media saturation and consumerism that these changes brought throughout Italy – and Rome in particular – are figured in the film in a number of ways. The narrative of *Tenebre* is, for example, not structured solely around sexual repression and individual trauma as it is in the previous films. In addition to the personal, the film examines another layer and another register of violence that is more depersonalized and de-psychologized. Unlike *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* and *Deep Red*, *Tenebre* does not center its narrative around uncovering the motives of a single psychopathic murderer. Here, rather, there are two killers, whose professions – a writer and a reader who is also his chief supporter/critic – explicitly form positions on the intersubjective textual network of mass media. The narrative suggests a form of violence and a desire to kill that is not rooted in the experience of a single individual, but rather within the virtual, textual network itself.

This play on the “transference of guilt” motif usually associated with the work of Alfred Hitchcock is operative in *Tenebre*’s own textuality and spectator positioning as well. The chief way in which this is accomplished is in the film’s rather thorough problematization of traditional cinematic point of view, especially in its murder sequences. While murder sequences in horror films often employ optical point of view shots, moving camera, and voyeuristic looking to situate the viewer in the perverse position of the killer, here this technique is exaggerated, displaced or otherwise evacuated. The suggestion is therefore that while violence exists in the film – in the extreme, in fact, since this was certainly Argento’s most gory film to date – it is not attached to any specific subject position. The film offers instead a free-floating and quite dispersed signification of subjectivity, and almost no explanation of its rather intense form of violence.

Upon closer examination, however, the film does seem to offer a peculiar directionality, one that, I argue, is historical in nature. Via its double-murderer structure – the first killer seems to be constructed out of the clichés of existentialist modernism, while the second, in his every word and gesture, embodies a kind of postmodern, corporatized identity of superficial charisma and emptiness – *Tenebre* stands as a rather cynical examination of the emergent social subjectivities of the early 1980s. In tandem with the film’s *mise-en-scène* and location choices, I argue, this characterological progression suggests a certain historical periodicity around Rome’s urban development. The presentation in *Tenebre* of Rome as a confused, splintered, dilated, horizontal, and remarkably repetitive agglomeration of sites instead of a centered, consolidated metropolis alludes to concrete changes to the city of Rome that took place throughout the

1960s and 70s. Much of this urban change was visible in suburban Rome, particularly the former Fascist showpiece city of EUR which, throughout these years, transformed into Rome's most Americanized, corporate residential-business area, complete with its own suburbs. Among these was Casal Palocco, a conscious attempt on the part of private developers to provide EUR's army of new white collar workers with a "Californian" experience of home and neighborhood. Not coincidentally, *Tenebre*, ultimately a story of displacement and depersonalization, is shot almost exclusively in the postmodernist suburbs of EUR and Casal Palocco. I draw on Edward Soja's term "postmetropolis" (a combination of the cultural and geographic terms postmodern and metropolis) to unravel these conjunctions.

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Throughout this dissertation, then, I wish to demonstrate cinema's unique capacity to represent – to think – the urban as a category. My consideration of Dario Argento's Roman films is meant not just to contribute to the scarce literature on Argento himself or the *giallo*, but more generally to suggest a new way of looking at the relationship between postmodern mass media, cinematic form and style, urbanity, and history. Mobilizing the theoretical platform I've outlined above, my chapters read Argento's films in order to write the history of 1970s and '80s, postmetropolitan Rome.

CHAPTER ONE

Transparency, Opacity, Segmentation: *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*

Faces in the Window

Early in his debut film, *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo* (*The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, 1970), Dario Argento presents the following scene: Sam Dalmas (Tony Musante), an American writer living in Rome, while out for an uneventful nighttime walk on an empty street in the modern Flaminio district, witnesses a struggle between a man and a woman through the double glass doors of a brightly lit contemporary art gallery. Sam's concern builds over the course of a series of intercut point-of-view and reaction shots, and as soon as he sees a knife, he begins to walk across the street, heroically, if mindlessly, drawn towards the luminous space. After a passing car brushes him and knocks him over in his rapt distraction, Sam continues toward the box of light, eventually rushing through the front door into a glass bubble that forms the gallery's vestibule. Once here, he finds the inner door locked. A low angle reverse shot from inside the gallery that almost perfectly aligns the camera's frame with the iron frame surrounding the huge panes of sliding plate glass then reveals that Sam is trapped: vertically and horizontally by the double framing of the vestibule and camera, and in depth by two large glass walls. A cutaway shows a pair of hands in black leather gloves pressing a button, suddenly the front door through which Sam had entered slides closed, and his imprisonment is

complete: he is enclosed in the diffuse light-space of the vestibule, able neither to enter the gallery to stop the crime nor to flee the scene, and thereby forced to observe a horrific murder unfold from a transparent jail cell. As he gestures wildly in fear, terror, and sympathy for the suffering victim, as he silently screams for the attention of passers-by and pleads for the writhing, bleeding woman to persist, Argento forces us to watch Sam watch the terrifying scene unfold through multiple layers of crystal clear glass.

The most striking visual element of this scene is without question the double, transparent walls of glass that trap Sam in the gallery's entryway.¹²⁷ Argento goes to great lengths to foreground them and to exploit the wide spectrum of possibilities inherent in the architectural material of glass here. This scene emphasizes the transparency of glass, its subtle reflectivity, and its visual property of collapsing multiple planes of depth onto one surface. At the same time, however, Argento's camera also highlights the materiality of glass, that is, its ability to demarcate and segment space by obstructing the passage of sound and bodies. The gallery sequence calls attention to the ways in which glass as a building material paradoxically allows for both the distinct, physical separation and the optical interpenetration of space. In this scene glass delineates the spaces of the street, the vestibule, and the gallery interior as architectonically separate as an opaque wall would. At the same time, however, it links these spaces visually. In doing so, it produces a transparent cell that immobilizes Sam as an observed, observing subject.

¹²⁷ It is almost impossible to find a review of the film that does not mention the gallery's doors. This is true of both the (quite scarce) scholarly work on the film and popular reviews. For example, even in a narrative-based capsule review of the film in the July 23, 1970 issue of the *New York Times*, Roger Greenspun manages to sneak a reference in to "the gallery's heavily locked glass doors." Roger Greenspun, "Argento's 'Bird With the Crystal Plumage.'" *New York Times* 23 Jul 1970.

In one of the few book-length studies of Argento available in English, Maitland McDonagh analyzes the gallery scene in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* as one of Argento's many self-reflexive references to cinematic spectatorship:

Like the movie viewer who sits in a darkened theatre and watches glowing two-dimensional images flicker before his eyes, Sam Dalmas walks along a nighttime street, enveloped in his own cloak of darkness. His attention is engaged first by the light, the light emanating from the art gallery whose glass-paned façade allows it to spill onto the street. Through the glass, framed by the metal strips that define the doors, Dalmas can see figures, flattened and remote.... Dalmas passes through the first set of glass doors and is trapped: he has been made doubly a spectator. The inner doors keep him separated from the woman bleeding within the gallery while the outer doors set him apart from the action on the street.¹²⁸

This reading of Sam as a stand-in for the cinematic spectator is validated by similar references to looking and spectacle throughout Argento's career.¹²⁹ As McDonagh is careful to point out, however, the comparison between Sam and the cinematic spectator – especially, it is implied, the immobilized, fixed, disembodied, voyeuristic, and “all-seeing” one posited by apparatus theory – can only be taken so far.¹³⁰ The version of

¹²⁸ McDonagh 53-54.

¹²⁹ Argento began his career as a critic for the Marxist daily newspaper *Paese Sera* and was a lifelong, self-proclaimed cinéphile. For these reasons – as I will explore at greater length in the next chapter – his work conveys the same, high level of awareness around the history of cinematic coding and narrativity that can be seen in the work of other critics-turned-filmmakers throughout Europe at this time, especially in France, England, and Germany.

¹³⁰ “Apparatus theory” loosely refers to a current in 1970s film theory that deployed semiotics, structuralist Marxism, and Lacanian psychoanalysis to posit a form of cinematic spectatorial identification that was textual and technological in nature. It tended to argue that the goal of classical cinema was interpellative: narrative films generally suppressed the source of their cinematic enunciation and, in turn, forced the viewer to unconsciously identify as this source. It further claimed that classical films structured spectatorship around a unidirectional system of voyeuristic pleasure in which the viewing subject could experience a combination of disembodiment and psychic regression, and an illusion of all-seeing, all-knowing transcendence. Founding texts include Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*,

spectatorship that this scene articulates is rendered more complex by two factors. First, even if he is trapped within a relatively circumscribed space and is unable to interact with the spectacle of Monica's suffering, Sam is anything but disembodied here. On the contrary, his body – his wild gesticulations and nervous shuffling – forms a spectacle in its own right. Second, the fact that Sam's act of looking is itself spectacularized means that the terms of vision are not unidirectional. Sam is not the "pure, all-seeing, and invisible subject," of apparatus theory.¹³¹ On the contrary, not only does the violence "come out to get" Sam, as McDonagh puts it, thus breaking the presumed fourth wall of apparatus theory, but also every bit as much as Sam is the observer here, he is also the observed – first by Monica, later by the passer-by, eventually by Inspector Morrosini, and always by the camera and the spectator. This is underscored by the sequence's great number of reverse shots taken from inside the gallery, shots which frame Sam within the rectangle of the gallery's doors and thereby put him on display, as it were, on a kind of glass "screen." It cannot fail to escape our attention here that the dimensions of the rectangle in which he is trapped match Argento's 2.35:1, Cromoscope aspect ratio almost exactly. Clearly, Sam is caught up in a different scopic regime than that of the keyhole, one that is defined more by a dialectic of transparency, opacity, segmentation, and entrapment than by the perverse, individual pleasures of the voyeuristic.

The scopic regime in which Sam finds himself is, rather, that of the bureaucratic-corporate metropolis of "abstract" and "global" space that I discussed in my introductory

trans. Celia Britton et al. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana U.P., 1982), Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," and "The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in Cinema," in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia U.P., 1986), and Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in Rosen.

¹³¹ Metz 97.

chapter – that is, the city of postmodernity as theorized by Henri Lefebvre, Frederic Jameson, and others. But this film is not about postmodern metropolitan specularité per se. Rather, it is rooted in the specificities of one particular city at one particular moment – namely, the Rome of the waning days of the economic miracle. There is no doubt that *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, like many other Argento films, persistently foregrounds space, architecture, and location, sometimes at the expense of classic cinematic spatio-temporal organizational devices like narrative causality, diegetic integrity, and character. What must be accounted for, however, is the great extent to which the film engages, both spatially and narratively, with the particularly *Roman* social and architectural context that forms its diegesis. The figure of Sam is not, therefore, a stand-in for a transhistorical spectating subject. Rather, his various modalities of looking throughout the film – ranging from the curious to the investigative to the self-protective – motivate an urban exploration of Rome that is quite historically concrete. *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* uses the structure of detective fiction (with the foreigner Sam as a literal witness) to conduct a thorough interrogation not of any individual suspect (fittingly, the identity of the killer turns out to be almost irrelevant in the end), but rather of the city of Rome itself on the heels of the economic miracle.

This is revealed, on the one hand, in the catalogue of elements of Rome's urban space that the film provides via location shooting. For example, there is a clear emphasis placed on the city's doors, windows, thresholds, and the borders between spaces throughout the film. Such elements are frequently used as two-dimensional, geometric framing devices that call attention to the flat, compositional qualities of the image. Argento, for example, employs the same technique for nearly all of *The Bird with the*

Crystal Plumage's establishing shots – a simultaneous tilt up and zoom in from a camera positioned at street level to a second or third floor window (beyond which the subsequent scene ostensibly takes place). If the traditional role of an establishing shot is simply to help make diegetic space legible by, on the one hand, rooting a scene to a particular place within the film's imaginary geography and, on the other, laying out the spatial dynamics of a setting in preparation for the use of closer shots in analytical editing, then these shots fail doubly. First, due to the employment of obvious visual rhymes and repetitions, these shots take on a discursively auto-referential quality that disrupts their function as simple markers of place. Second, these "establishing" shots fail to provide an anchor for the film's geography. Rather, restricted as they are to representing minor, tangential features of the banal, modern Roman apartment buildings that serve as the locations of scenes that happen in interior spaces, they begin instead to call attention to certain repeated features in the actual built environment of the city. More than simply allowing diegetic space to take hold by indicating the parameters and properties of the film's narrative space, these shots actually do more to call attention to the parameters and properties of Rome's urban space. Filmic spatial orientation, in other words, is evacuated from these establishing shots in favor of an analysis of urban and architectural phenomena.

In addition, given the modern urban planning history of Rome, Argento's particular location choices for *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*'s are highly complex and problematic. Among these are the late 19th and early 20th century gridded neighborhoods of Flaminio and Salaria, the fascist era EUR district (*Esposizione Universale di Roma*) and Via Leonida Bissolati (formerly Via XXIII Marzo), and the newly constructed Fiumicino Airport. Each of these locations represents an attempt on

the part of the city and/or national government to control or direct the course of Rome's immense and disorderly 20th century growth in one way or another, an effort that only accelerated in the 1960s as Rome's growth continued to respond to changes in the Italian (and global) economy. As we will see, in both its elaboration of its own narrative space and its location choices, *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* represents a highly symptomatic attempt – that is, one filled with unresolved assertions and tensions, rather than a single, clearly articulated argument – to grapple with Rome's recent and continuing socio-spatial transformations. It is through the film's construction of cinematic space, its location choices, and its amateur investigation and police procedural narrative that *The Bird With the Crystal Plumage* confronts the abstract, global spatiality of its contemporary Rome.

Argento's Third Rome

Roman urban historians commonly distinguish three phases in the city's planning history, all of which coexist and overlap in today's city: the First, the Second, and the Third Romes. The concepts of the First and Second Romes refer to the ancient and papal city, respectively. The Third Rome is the modern capital city ushered in by the process of Italian unification (known as Risorgimento) that culminated in the breach of papal Rome's fortified walls at the Porta Pia in 1870.¹³² The period of the Third Rome (1870 through the present) has witnessed the most intense social, political, cultural, economic, and spatial upheaval in the shortest amount of time, mainly due to the unification

¹³² The historical information on Roman urban planning in this piece comes from a number of sources. In addition to those already cited (Fried, Insolera, and Sanfilippo), this section also refers to Spiro Kostof, *The Third Rome, 1870-1950: Traffic and Glory* (Berkeley: University Art Museum, 1973) and Borden W. Painter, Jr., *Mussolini's Rome: Rebuilding the Eternal City* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005).

government's decision to build the Third Rome inside the old city's walls instead of constructing a new modern city outside of the old city's walls. As Spiro Kostof has put it, for Rome, the unification and the decision to construct the modern city within the boundaries of old,

meant the rude awakening of a picturesque, backward, but immensely prestigious town of some 230,000 people, through the influx of a massive government apparatus, a new middle class of bureaucrats, bankers, and speculators; and working class people drawn to the capital of the young Kingdom by the promise of special opportunity. It meant housing facilities for tens of thousands, accommodation for government offices, new roads, and public services. It meant, beyond all this, the fashioning of a national image – the iconography of unity.¹³³

The urban planning of Rome would have to respond first and foremost to these imperatives. Rome was meant to become the physical manifestation of the superior ideals of the new liberal democracy over the old clerical aristocracy. The result was an historic center peppered with monumental civic buildings, crisscrossed by large avenues, and surrounded by new, gridded residential districts. Not surprisingly given the new nation's lack of financial, material, and technological resources, urban reform was piecemeal, incomplete, and poorly regulated, and could therefore only take place, as Robert C. Fried has noted, "through ad hoc conventions between the city and private developers and through ad hoc measures of public improvement, without benefit of, or hindrance from, an overall design."¹³⁴

Urban historian Mario Sanfilippo has argued that one can distinguish separate

¹³³ Kostof 10.

¹³⁴ Fried 23.

periods within the planning history of the Third Rome.¹³⁵ The first, lasting from 1870 until 1945, was the most “centralized, bureaucratic” period of planning. Four of the five locations chosen for *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* – Flaminio, Salaria, EUR, and Via Bissolati – were the results of this early, highly disruptive moment in the planning of the Third Rome. This was a period of relatively controlled if alarmingly massive expansion that saw the city’s population increase from roughly 230,000 in 1870 to 1.6 million in 1944.¹³⁶ The development of the city both within and immediately outside the city walls was to be, relatively speaking, “homogeneous and compact,” and the period culminated in the “consolidated” and “hierarchical” city of the fascist *ventennio* delineated by the regime’s 1931 Master Plan.¹³⁷ Among the stated goals of this extremely controversial period of planning was to fill any urban voids left within the city center by centuries of chaotic, “organic” growth, to urbanize the rural areas within the walls, and to quickly build new neighborhoods immediately outside the walls and deeper into the periphery to accommodate the influx of new residents and manage the future growth of the city. This moment therefore saw the construction of new axial boulevards, the widening of existing streets into thoroughfares, the erection of dozens of new governmental buildings and monuments, and the development of highly organized pockets of predominately residential urban space on the edges of the historic center. Because the material imperatives were hastiness and convenience and the ideological imperatives were rationality and equality (political – and spatial – ideals meant to contradict centuries of Catholic domination), the city’s planners opted to import the grid

¹³⁵ Sanfilippo 10.

¹³⁶ Fried 21.

¹³⁷ Insolera 63.

model provided by the *piemontese* city of Turin, the birthplace of the Risorgimento movement and Italy's first capital. Many of the city's new neighborhoods (including those featured in *The Bird With the Crystal Plumage* – Flaminio and Salaria) sprang up around ancient Roman consular roads (such as the Via Flaminia and Via Salaria) in what had previously been farm- and marshland.

The effects on the city were palpable and sudden. As Insolera has put it, “the city being born at this time seemed to want to be *piemontese* and Haussmannian.” Its new clusters of crisply visible and legible urban space in the form of grids and axial boulevards were directly opposed to the “dark and unhygienic alleys” and general “opacity” of old Rome.¹³⁸ Indeed, the use of the grid as a structuring pattern of streets and buildings was meant not only to “sanitize” the city, but also to dictate its future by preventing sprawl and rampant speculation. Ironically, however, because of a series of victories won by private builders and the poor enforcement of building codes on the part of city government (both of which, as we have seen, would continue to define Rome's expansion into the 1950s and '60s), these were to become the very defining features of the landscape of twentieth century Rome.

What becomes visible retrospectively within this early phase of the Third Rome is therefore a slowly unfolding and ever incomplete attempt to rationalize Roman urban space, to bring it in its entirety into a present-tense state of modern clarity and transparency. The regime's Master Plan of 1931 was the most blatant instance of this form of socio-spatial management, a quite conscious attempt on the part of a totalitarian regime to strategically plan urban experience and everyday life. For the regime, the Master Plan would be a means of instituting in the traditionally “opaque” urban

¹³⁸ Insolera 36.

environment of historic Rome – that in which writers as diverse as Henry James, Sigmund Freud, and Henri Lefebvre have seen a palimpsestic and oneiric spatial logic – the “modernist transparency” that Anthony Vidler has isolated in the spatial thought of Jeremy Bentham, Michel Foucault, and Le Corbusier.¹³⁹ In typically bombastic language, during the ceremony introducing the 1931 Master Plan, Mussolini himself extolled the virtues of wide, Haussmannian boulevards:

You will continue to liberate the trunk of the great oak of the Eternal City from all that encumbers it.... In five years, Rome must appear wondrous to all the peoples of the world; vast, ordered, and powerful like it was in the time of the first empire.... You will cut the streets of Rome out from the foolish contamination [of medieval and Renaissance Rome], but you will also give the most modern means of circulation to the new towns that will spring up in a ring around the ancient city. You will construct an axis that will be the widest in the world and that will bring the fury of the sea all the way from a resurrected Ostia directly to the heart of the city where it will master [*vegliare*] the unknown.¹⁴⁰

In addition to attempting to achieve Mussolini’s goal of *grandezza* (grandeur) and neo-classical aesthetic cleanliness, one of the important concepts behind the 1931 Master Plan was the attempted codification and re-sectioning of Rome’s urban space in such a way as to, “regulate [*disciplinare*] the future growth of the city.” Indicative of this Lefebvrian “representation of space,” the Plan’s map consisted of a neatly color-coded classification and segmentation of the city not only by neighborhood use and building typology, but also by demographics and class. In practice, however, the massive demolitions called for

¹³⁹ Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays on the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992). See, for example, Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton, 1961), Henry James, *Italian Hours*, ed. John Auchard (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), and Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* 254.

¹⁴⁰ Governatorato di Roma, *Piano regolatore di Roma, 1931, Anno IX*. I have translated the Italian word *vegliare* here as “master” to call attention to the issue of power and domination in this phrase. *Veglia* is the root of the Italian word for surveillance (*sorveglianza*).

by the 1931 Master Plan created its own series of “voids” and “urban deserts” in the historic center, and its only hint of “success” was in displacing working class and therefore potentially revolutionary populations from the city center into the sprawling peripheries of the city.¹⁴¹

As Sanfilippo’s second phase demonstrates (1945-1970, and therefore encompassing the years of postwar reconstruction funded largely by American Marshall Plan money, the subsequent economic miracle, and the beginnings of the *Sessantotto*), Roman urban history would bear out a different reality than that which Mussolini attempted to forge. As I detail in my introduction, in fact, after World War II, with the encroachment of multinational capital on the city throughout the economic miracle, the city took on forms of abstract, global space that cannot easily be associated with or reduced to the spatiality of the “disciplinary societies.” As many scholars of Roman urban space have noted, the deeper peripheries of the city would see the most significant change during this period. This period saw the rapid increase of *edilizia abusiva*, the illegal form of building outside of the city walls and immediate periphery and beyond the control of the still effective 1931 Master Plan that produced, among other atrocities, the infamous *borgate*.¹⁴² During this period, residents began to spread rapidly into the newly

¹⁴¹ Insolera 135-136.

¹⁴² *Borgate* is an Italian term for which there is no adequate English translation. It refers to the series of mass housing projects built on the periphery of Rome throughout the 20th century to house new immigrants and those displaced by the *sventramenti* (or gutting) of the city center. It is also used interchangeably with the clusters of makeshift huts and sheds built by immigrants to Rome in the outskirts of the city. Historically, the *borgate* were almost always underdeveloped and poorly served by city utilities like running water, electricity, and public transit. They are therefore strongly identified with the Roman subproletariat. As John David Rhodes explains, “The term borgata does not have an exact equivalent in English.... The term, pejoratively derived from the word *borgo*, which simply means ‘district’ or ‘neighborhood,’ was coined as an official term by the fascists. As Italo Insolera has written, ‘Borgata is... a piece of the city in the middle of the country, that is not really one or the other....’ One may occasionally hear or read the terms

constructed periphery, and the basis of Rome's economy transformed from artisanal production and familial exchange into more anonymous service sector activities (especially those involving tourism and foreign investment). The EUR district, for example, the location of the dramatic first shots of *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, was transformed around this time from a crumbling fascist showpiece into veritable ghost town, and subsequently into the trendy residential district and center of international finance capital that I describe in the introduction. New apartment buildings, banks, shopping centers, corporate headquarters, heavy urban infrastructure, and highways sprang up with shocking suddenness throughout the city during this time.

In an attempt to modernize the city's infrastructure and "discipline" this prodigious, haphazard, and almost completely unregulated post-war growth, on September 5, 1958, the city government requested a new, regional Master Plan that would finally replace the still effective fascist Master Plan of 1931. The new plan would encompass many towns and villages that had previously been beyond the purview of Roman planning. Among these was the seaside town of Fiumicino, the site of the new international airport that I discuss at length in my introduction, and that features prominently, as we will see, in the closing sequence of *The Bird With the Crystal Plumage*). After a whole decade of comically intricate debates between left and right and public and private interests, the Master Plan was finally implemented in 1967. Between this plan, the continuing, unregulated mode of *edilizia abusiva*, and the urbanistic events that I detail in my introductory chapter, the 1950s and '60s would mark the end of a century of hegemony in Roman planning of gridded residential pockets, axial boulevards,

borgate and *periphery* (in Italian, *periferia*) used almost interchangeably." Rhodes, *Stupendous, Miserable City* 2.

and demographic segmentation as means of geographic “discipline,” and its replacement with a new spatiality of dispersal, transport, and individual motorization.¹⁴³ The concept of “bureaucratic, consolidated” city space that had itself been so ambivalently received at its advent precisely because of the ways in which it displaced the Renaissance and medieval spatiality that had defined Rome for centuries before Risorgimento was, by the 1960s, being eclipsed in turn by an increasingly abstract, centrifugal concept of city space, one that conceived of the city as a mobile, concentric network to be monitored and managed rather than a series of discrete and concrete *topoi*. As Insolera has observed,

In the twenty years between 1951 and 1971... almost four-fifths of the historic center’s previous residents moved into the city’s periphery. After 1970, this same phenomenon extended to the circular “oil stain” of neighborhoods beyond the city walls: just as these neighborhoods were formed between 1870 and 1960 to house the population of the growing city, now they were being transformed into offices whose patterns of dispersal formed yet another “oil stain.”¹⁴⁴

Many post-Risorgimento residential neighborhoods whose grids and demographic organization by class were thought of only a generation earlier as destroying the “organic” social and urban fabric of old Rome were themselves slated for major changes, many transforming from predominately residential zones into commercial or finance districts. Some, like Flaminio and Salaria, were to become conduits of automobile transit and trucking leading into the city center from the new circular “belt” of freeways around Rome (the *Gra*, or *Grande Raccordo Annulare*, begun in 1951 and finally completed at Via Flaminia in 1970). *The Bird With the Crystal Plumage*, shot in 1969 and released in 1970, sits on the cusp of Sanfilippo’s third phase (1971 through the present), during

¹⁴³ See, for example, the debates preceding the institution of the 1967 master plan in “Roma: verso le ultime fase del piano,” *Urbanistica* 40 11-92.

¹⁴⁴ Insolera 319.

which the city would fragment and disperse even further, American-style consumerism would begin to truly take hold, and the city became increasingly identified as a center of consumption and part of a global, urban network. Today the city has annexed dozens of neighboring towns, and the familiar and much maligned “oil stain” has expanded even further.

The story of the Third Rome is therefore one of unchecked sprawl and dissolution, countered at various points by improvisatory measures to contain and “discipline” this growth through the typically modernist urban structures such as axial boulevards and street grids represented by zones like Flaminio and Salaria. The opaque “organic unity” of the ancient and papal center was replaced by a loosely functional, hierarchical city, forced to cater to the needs of a flailing monarchic republic and then to those of an imperfect totalitarianism. This city was in turn replaced by a polycentric urban agglomeration that developed at the whim of a fickle and highly exploitative free market. It is also, therefore, a story of deregulation. The unlawful and dangerous mode of *edilizia abusiva*, the result of countless decisions to yield to the free market, became increasingly dominant with time. If by 1870 Rome was already arguably Europe’s most historically and urbanistically complex capital city, by 1970 it had become an indecipherable urban palimpsest.

The Shifting Terrain of Italian State Power

In its narrative, mise-en-scène, and location choices, *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* represents an attempt to grapple with this complex urban history via the cinematic and architectural tropes of transparency, opacity, and segmentation. The film

uses these tropes to confront the highly complex and ever changing relationship between urban space and governmental and institutional authority. These were particularly pressing questions in the Roman context. For at the same time that Rome's urban fabric expanded into ever new, unmanageable, and unrepresentable forms, just as rapidly and haphazardly the Italian state was developing new modes of social control that harkened back to the "disciplinary society" that was fascism.

In addition to being a period of intensive urban expansion, the 1960s and 1970s were also a moment of extreme political activism and violence in Italian society from both left- and right-wing "terrorist" groups. The most dramatic response on the part of the government was the advent of several new *leggi speciali* passed in a state of "emergency" that vastly expanded state authority, allowing for the application of both brute force and surveillance to its citizens in ways unseen since fascism. These laws drastically limited civil liberties for Italians in three chief ways: by lengthening pre-charge detention for suspects of terrorism to up to an astonishing eight years, by extending the legality of the use of lethal force on the part of the police and immunity rights for those who did use it, and, most importantly for my purposes, by drastically reducing constitutional limits on search and seizure, surveillance, and eavesdropping, and allowing telephone lines, mail, public spaces to be monitored extensively.

This kind of re-emergence of fascist governing tendencies would appear in other institutional sectors as well. This moment also saw the restructuring of Mussolini's infamous SIM (*Servizio Informazioni Militare* – the Italian secret service). During the time of the regime, SIM, effectively Mussolini's Gestapo, was mobilized to squash partisan resistance and to enforce the new race laws of 1938. After the war, instead of

purging and disbanding SIM, the Allied occupation used its abundant archives and the extensive reach of its intelligence organs to prevent the rise of communism. Although the organization's emphasis would become foreign intelligence for several years (as SIFAR – *Servizio Informazioni Forze Armate* – from 1949 on), the organization resumed the domestic, urban surveillance and police intervention duties with which it had been charged under fascism in 1965 as SID (*Servizio Informazioni Difesa*). By the time of the *leggi speciali* of the 1970s, SID had already contributed to a culture of fear, distrust, and paranoia vis-à-vis the Italian state, not least of all because, despite this history of shifting emphases and monikers, SID effectively represented the continued and renewed institutional presence of fascism in Italian society.

SID would also become a central part of the disturbing collusion of this period between governmental institutions and neo-fascist groups known as the *strategia della tensione* (strategy of tension). Beginning with the December 12, 1969 bombing of Milan's Banca Nazionale dell'Agricoltura that killed sixteen people, a series of terrorist acts committed by right-wing groups and secretly endorsed by high-ranking government officials would be falsely attributed to leftist anarchists by law enforcement agencies including SID. The idea behind the *strategia* was simple: a widespread social desire for a new authoritarian dictatorship would emerge from the confusion, fear, and panic created by supposedly leftist acts of domestic terrorism. The *strategia della tensione* did effectively urge the Italian state towards the right: the neo-fascist Movimento Sociale Italiano-Destra Nazionale (MSI-DN) doubled their percentages in the 1972 parliamentary elections. It was this right-heavy parliament that was responsible, beginning in November of 1974, for passing the *leggi speciali* that so significantly increased the presence of state

power in everyday life.¹⁴⁵

Although many of these legal changes took place further into the 1970s, the changing nature of power in Italian society is apparent in 1970's *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*. These issues are, in fact, put front and center in the narrative by a series of investigative techniques used by the police. In the film, Sam Dalmas, an American writer living in Rome with his girlfriend Julia, witnesses an attempted murder at an art gallery which seems to be the most recent in a string of attacks on young women. This particular victim, Monica Ranieri, the wife of the gallery's owner, Alberto, is the first survivor. With his passport confiscated by the police, Sam, who has a creeping suspicion that he saw something important to the investigation that he cannot remember, decides to investigate the attacks on his own. During his search, Sam and Julia receive threatening calls from the killer, and clues lead them to suspect Alberto. When Sam and the police corner Alberto, he falls from a window, and confesses to the crimes before dying. Feeling lingering doubts about his memory of the assault, however, and worried by the sudden disappearance of Julia and his friend Carlo, Sam continues to investigate, eventually learning that the killer is Monica. Once Sam discovers that Monica has murdered Carlo and kidnapped Julia, his memory of the attack is restored, including the detail that Monica held the knife, not her supposed attacker (who, it turns out, was Alberto). Sam is rescued by the police just seconds before Monica kills him, and he and Julia return to the United States.

In a way that one cannot help but see as highly symptomatic of these particular historical issues around surveillance and the expanding power of the state (à la the early work of Fritz Lang), the film's investigation narrative hinges on a series of

¹⁴⁵ Historical information in this section drawn from Ginsborg 348-405.

telecommunications technologies. Sam and the police are led to suspect Alberto in the first place, for example, only after expert analysis of the tape of his threatening phone call reveals the sound of a rare bird in the background (that of the film's title). Once research reveals that the single Roman-area bird of this species resides at the zoo – which happens to be located directly across the street from the Ranieri's Salaria district home – Sam and the police rush to arrest Alberto. In addition, the medium of television is twice commandeered by the police and used as a tool for law enforcement. The first occurrence of this is Inspector Morrosini's televised update on the status of the murder investigation. It becomes clear from the way this address is presented by Argento's camera that its purpose is not simply to provide the public with information, but to make the literal face of the law – Morrosini's talking head close-up – visible in public space for the killer to see. Although television was, by this moment in Italy, a domestic audio-visual medium *par excellence*, here Argento places it in one of the quintessential, public spaces of the contemporary city – the shop window. Furthermore, the camera's thirty-five second track, pan, and zoom behind and around the window's onlookers simultaneously unifies and fragments them – very much like the passengers in *Il tram* that I discuss in my introduction – as an anonymous, public urban crowd. The great effectiveness of Morrosini's televisual simulation of the long arm of the law is proven immediately after the address when the killer, still within the same pan that ends the long take, steps into a phone booth to call the inspector, thus leading to a break in the investigation. The second use of television comes at the end of the film after the crime has been solved, when Morrosini and Professor Renaldi, an expert psychologist, once again address the Roman public, this time to explain the nature of the crime. Reminiscent of Hitchcock's ending to

Psycho, the Professor's explanation is radically inadequate to what we have seen occur throughout the film. From the point of view of social control, however, television is here mobilized as a palliative device, one that can supposedly narratively resolve even Monica's heinous crimes.

But the film's most outlandish and nightmarish depiction of this convergence of technology, surveillance, and social control is provided by a primitive, digital archive used by the police to produce a short list of any crime's possible suspects. Resembling what Allan Sekula has called the various "positivist attempts to define and regulate social deviance," this forensics computer receives evidence from a crime scene (here cigar ashes, a glove, and microscopic fibers of fabric) and spits out a suspect typology along with a list of Roman residents who may fit the bill.¹⁴⁶ Something like an electronic incarnation of the criminological work of Alphonse Bertillon and Francis Galton, this computer is not only able to aggregate microscopic traits of known criminals into a larger archive, but it is also, through this archive, able to conjure up an idealized physiognomic and characterological "criminal type" – complete with a rather kitschy dot matrix image of that "type" wearing a trench coat and bearing a knife.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," *October* 39 (Winter 1986) 19.

¹⁴⁷ As Sekula puts summarizes, Bertillon, "sought to individuate," while Galton, "sought to visualize the generic evidence of hereditary laws." Elaborating, he writes, "The Paris police official Alphonse Bertillon invented the first effective modern system of *criminal identification*. His was a bipartite system, positioning a 'microscopic' individual record within a 'macroscopic' aggregate. First, he combined photographic portraiture, anthropometric description, and highly standardized and abbreviated written notes on a single fiche, or card. Second, he organized these cards within a comprehensive, statistically based filing system. / The English statistician and founder of eugenics, Francis Galton, invented a method of composite portraiture.... His interest in heredity and racial 'betterment' led him to join in the search for a biologically determined 'criminal type.' Through one of his several applications of composite portraiture, Galton attempted to construct a *purely optical* apparition of the criminal type. This photographic impression of an abstract, statistically defined, and empirically nonexistent criminal

The production of police knowledge, then, comes about through a circuit of computers, filing cabinets, archives, data, and media technology. As it turns out, of course, the male suspects produced by this process are all wrong since Monica, a woman, is the actual murderer. Although this at one and the same time brings the inferiorities of this investigative model compared to a good, old-fashioned eyewitness into deep relief and raises issues of gender, these facts are downplayed by the film's narrative. Instead, *The Bird With the Crystal Plumage* provides example upon example of technological and archival processes standing in for knowledge, immediate experience, and personal memory. Even the murderer's own mode of killing is wrapped up in a kind of fetishistic act of archiving. As we see in the very opening scene of the film, the killer keeps files on her victims and potential victims – complete, like those of the police, with photographs, manila folders, standardized forms, and handwritten notes.

Furthermore, this mediatized, technological organization of knowledge infiltrates Sam's mind: throughout the film, Sam's memory flashbacks are shot through with freeze-frames, optical zooms, and abstract montage. They therefore seem to depict not the inner perspective of a human brain perusing its own memories, but of some kind of post-production machine examining a series of images recorded by a photographic, cinematographic apparatus and attempting to reorganize and interpret them. In this sense, the restoration of Sam's memory involves finding not a decaying and morphing, neurological trace of an event, but the right *photographic* image – and, furthermore, re-filing this image in its proper place. In a kind of narrative organization that Argento would repeat five years later in *Profondo rosso / Deep Red* (1975), it is the very absence

face was both the most bizarre and the most sophisticated of many concurrent attempts to marshal photographic evidence in the search for the essence of crime.” Sekula 18-19.

of a memory *image* that allows the film's hermeneutic – and hence its story – to exist.

This film challenges, therefore, the traditional relationship between knowledge and the concept of transparency. Knowledge here is not a matter of clear perception, without obstruction. It is, rather, a matter of discursive organization and abstract statistical models, of archives and recording devices come to take the place of human perception and memory, and of the meticulous combination and recombination of individual, segmented parts. It is a matter, according to Sekula, of

a truth-apparatus that cannot be adequately reduced to the optical model provided by the camera. The camera is integrated into a larger ensemble: a bureaucratic-clerical-statistical system of “intelligence.” This system can be described as a sophisticated form of the archive. The central artifact of this system is not the camera but the filing cabinet.¹⁴⁸

Rome, (Il)legible City

This critique around knowledge, discursive organization, and the trope of transparency plays out at the level of architectural and urban space throughout the film as well. The police's mode of investigation via segmentation, classification, typology, and biometrics is, to begin with just one brief example, implicitly connected to questions of urban surveillance by the cut from the close-up of the printout that ends the computer scene to Morrosini's office, the dominant feature of which is by far the obligatory police map of Rome. As with the modern history of Roman planning as I outline it above, then, *The Bird With the Crystal Plumage* introduces a series of forms of urban and epistemological transparency only to undermine them in various ways, and to thereby reveal their more opaque foundations and directions. On one level, the film produces a paranoid and dystopian fantasy of a highly structured and surveilled Rome in response to

¹⁴⁸ Sekula 16.

real changes in the structure of Italian state power. It, in other words, constructs a carceral and panoptic cinematic city – a painstakingly delineated, highly legible city transparent to the gaze of power, in which new structures of control have become dominant. On another level, however, as we will see later, *The Bird With the Crystal Plumage* also points to what seems on the surface to be highly transparent and visible but is, in actuality, opaque – that is, the new “abstract” and “global” spaces of late capitalism. The film, in other words, pits the forces of modernist transparency and surveillance against those of late capitalist opacity, and demonstrates the ways in which this drama unfolds at the level of urban space itself.

According to Edward Dimendberg, for a film to construct a “panoptic” cinematic city, there would have to be, “an emphasis upon ordering the city and endowing it with a visual unity.”¹⁴⁹ Dimendberg points, for example, to, the “synoptic visual images of skylines, panoramas, and aerial views,” in American film noir that, “exemplify the spatial concentration and enclosure of the ‘disciplinary societies.’”¹⁵⁰ Throughout the early part of his career, with one key exception in *The Bird With the Crystal Plumage* that I will discuss shortly, Argento vehemently avoided such urban overviews.¹⁵¹ However, even in

¹⁴⁹ Dimendberg 83.

¹⁵⁰ Dimendberg 83.

¹⁵¹ It is interesting to note in this regard that Argento’s most recent film as of the completion of this dissertation, *La terza madre / The Mother of Tears* (2007), is filled to the brim with such shots. It also features images of the very postcard-friendly monuments that Argento so consistently avoids throughout his filmmaking (St. Peter’s, the Pantheon, the Colosseum, etc.). This, I would argue, is best examined in the light of the film’s interest in the challenge presented by simulation, tourism, and the digital to traditional forms of vision. Although *La terza madre*’s narrative frames these questions as ones of science vs. the occult, it is clear from the film’s most central and recurring phrase – “we’re *supposed* to believe in what we see, what we touch” – that vision and visual representation in themselves are very much at issue. The emphasis on images of Rome associated so closely with visual consumption, specifically with a touristic regime of question, ties these questions back to the city itself and its history.

their absence, Argento's debut film still manages to endow Rome with a kind of fictional, visual unity. This visual unity, however, operates not at the "macro" scale of the urban overview shot, but at the more embedded and local, "micro" scale of repeated, similar location and mise-en-scène choices.

With a few key exceptions that I will get to later, Argento chose to shoot much *The Bird With the Crystal Plumage* in locations whose architectural style and street layout closely associate them with specific regimes – for example, the grids of the modernist-monarchic Flaminio and Salario, the fascist-era axial intervention of Via Bissolati, and the late capitalist corporate center of EUR where the film opens. These particular locations are all examples of the exact kind of "modernist transparency" that I outline above. To take just one of these examples, for the location of both Sam and Julia's home and the art gallery Argento chose the highly historically complex *quartiere* Flaminio. Built in the 1910s and 1920s, Flaminio is one of the city's quintessential, gridded, *piemontese* neighborhoods. Because of the topographical position of Flaminio – it is hemmed in by the hills of the Parioli and the Villa Borghese to the east and northeast, the curving Tiber to the west and northwest, and the Porta del Popolo and historic center to the south – few if any concrete changes would be made to its gridded streets during postwar planning. The grid and scheme of visibility (organized vistas, uniform buildings, etc.) represented by Flaminio were, in fact, to become the dominant features of Rome's "oil stain" of an urban landscape by the end of WWII. A number of similar pockets of space (Insolera's "little Turin's") popped up in the areas just outside Rome's ancient walls. However, having been constructed only a few decades earlier in the 1910s, Flaminio and its organized pattern would throughout the middle of the twentieth century

still have represented a relatively new (by Roman standards) and radically disruptive style of urbanity vis-à-vis the city's traditionally premodern, "organic" palimpsest of windy streets, medieval churches inside the walls in the historic center. Indeed, in a matter of feet, just beyond the city walls from Flaminio where Via Flaminia becomes Via del Corso, Rome takes on a completely different spatiality.¹⁵² Mid-century Flaminio would therefore have been remarkably stamped with its own historicity: it would have had the very unusual identity of being a *new* norm.

But if by the end of WWII neighborhoods like Flaminio would have represent an urban norm for Rome – a relatively new norm, but a norm nonetheless – by the time of *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* in 1970, this style of urbanism was already itself being eclipsed by a style more appropriate to the emergent motorization, dispersal, and sprawl of the 1950s and 1960s – the mode of “going places rather than being places” that Insolera isolates.¹⁵³ The areas of the periphery beyond Flaminio would be comprised of freeways, airports, and radically new, American-style building projects – in short, the kind of abstract, global, postmodern spatiality that, according to Lefebvre, Jameson, and others, renders spatial representation almost impossible. Flaminio itself, therefore, is a kind of segment of urban *legibility* and transparency sandwiched between two radically different forms of urban *illegibility* – the ancient and organic within the walls, and the postmodern and centrifugal further into the periphery.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² This is complicated by the fact that just south of the city walls from the Flaminio is the most organized section of the ancient city, that planned by the interventions of Pope Pius IV and structured around the Via del Corso, of which Via Flaminia is an extra-mural continuation. I thank John David Rhodes for this observation.

¹⁵³ Insolera 232.

¹⁵⁴ Salario, the location chosen for the Ranieri's apartment was part of the same

Where Argento moves beyond simply *recording* urban space and into *reading* it is in his mise-en-scène choices. The glass box of the gallery sequence is, for example, a remarkably apt, critical figuration of Flaminio as an urban-geographic site. Like Sam in the gallery's entryway, Flaminio is enclosed and trapped by the various urban forms around it. Sam's presence in the glass vestibule also raises issues of legibility and illegibility. Throughout *The Bird With the Crystal Plumage*, in fact, Argento activates and plays upon the residues of history entombed within various Roman locations not only by staging within them the media- and technology-driven murder mystery narrative that I discuss above, but also by continually emphasizing a dialectic of segmentation, transparency, and opacity in his mise-en-scène.

As they are in the gallery sequence, throughout the film, these issues are quite literally crystallized in the material of glass. The limpidity of glass certainly stands out in a city that is, in reality (as Argento emphasizes in a chase sequence in the historic center that I will discuss momentarily), dominated by heavier materials such as stone, brick, and concrete. Glass is deployed throughout the film, as it is in the gallery sequence, as the only material that segments and separates individual spaces from one another, binds these separate spaces optically, and places subjects and their immobilized bodies on display as if they were specimens or objects of research. Indeed, it is the repetition of the glass box as a mise-en-scène element that endows this film's Rome with a supposed spatio-visual unity. Although other, countervailing spatial tendencies arise in the film at other times, as I will discuss later, a large portion of the Rome of *The Bird With the Crystal Plumage* is, in this way, made to appear as a citywide, serial form of enclosed, transparent spatiality –

building movement of the early 20th century and is also structured around an ancient consular road. It therefore has a strikingly similar urban-historical identity.

something like a repetitive agglomeration of clear cells.

This *mise-en-scène* of clear cells is nowhere clearer than in an early scene in the fictional ornithology center called the Fondazione Wilkinson. Shot in the bird section of the Giardino Zoologico di Roma (the very place where, according to the fiction, the eponymous bird resides), the Fondazione is a riot of individual, four-sided glass compartments containing endless varieties of neatly classified, stuffed bird specimens, all in a room ringed by enormous picture windows. Again, this particular *mise-en-scène* is emphasized by the work of the camera itself. The Fondazione scene is comprised of six shots – four dramatic and dynamic camera movements, and two still close-up inserts. The first shot begins as a close-up of one of the museum's glass-encased bird specimens before racking focus to capture Sam and Carlo entering the frame in the background. As they briskly walk right to left across the frame, the camera tracks slightly to the right as it pans left, thus ensuring that the two men remain in the center not only of the camera's frame, but also of that of the glass display case. The second shot is a rapid right-to-left tracking shot that follows Sam and Carlo as they pass through a narrow corridor between two rows of towering glass. Once again, the camera is positioned so that the glass curios remain in the foreground with the men in the background. The third shot dollies backwards as they walk towards the camera with a line of glass cabinets on the left edge of the frame, and the fourth – sandwiched between two close-up inserts of a living cat inside one of the display cases reserved for bird specimens – rhymes the second by tracking right to left as Sam and Carlo walk amongst more glass compartments. With all this emphasis on the transparency and segmentation provided by glass, the Fondazione's *mise-en-scène* suggests collection, observation, display, and the meticulous management

of space, vision, and knowledge. Indeed, in tandem with the types of suspect management technologies I've been discussing that pervade the film, the scene's camera placements and movements subtly suggest that not only the bird specimens, but also Sam and Carlo as human specimens are within the dominion of a classificatory gaze of power-knowledge.¹⁵⁵

The ways in which the transparency-segmentation dialectic of glass become bound up with knowledge, classification, and social control – and, indeed, the shortcomings of this “truth-apparatus” – are comically underscored in a police line-up scene slightly later in the film. When Sam visits the police precinct the day following the attack, Morrosini presents him with a group of suspects. Like countless line-up scenes in movies and television, six men appear one by one in the brilliantly lit, glass-encased space in front of Sam. This particular glass case recalls not only those of the Fondazione Wilkinson, but also that in which Sam found himself trapped on the night of the attack at the gallery (and therefore, once again, the film screen as well). What is striking about this

¹⁵⁵ Famously, and in a way that has been contested recently, Foucault has associated the emergence of power-knowledge with particular trends not just in visibility, but also in architecture. His well-known reading of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon is highly architectural and, in fact, centers on the presence of windows (and, by extension in the modern age, glass). As I am arguing *The Bird With the Crystal Plumage* does with Rome in its combination of mise-en-scène and location choices, Foucault presents the Panopticon as an agglomeration of transparent cells. His description bears an uncanny resemblance to the terms of vision posited by *The Bird With the Crystal Plumage*'s gallery sequence and much of the rest of the film: “The seeing machine was once a sort of dark room into which individuals spied; it has become a transparent building in which the exercise of power may be supervised by society as a whole.... We know the principle on which it was based: at the periphery, an annular building; at the centre, a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring; the peripheric building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building; they have two windows, one on the inside, corresponding to the windows of the tower; the other, on the outside, allows the light to cross the cell from one end to the other. All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower.... By the effect of backlighting, one can observe from the tower, standing precisely against the light, the small captive shadows in the cells of the periphery. They are like so many cages, so many small theaters, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible.” Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 200-216.

scene, though, is the way in which sexuality becomes directly imbricated in these processes of classification and social control. The scene, in fact, begins with a highly disruptive flat cut away from Sam's intensely sexualized dream image of Monica futilely reaching out to him for help from the other side of the glass, and the sudden appearance of Morrosini at the line-up shouting, "Bring in the perverts!" As the fifth of Morrosini's six "perverts" enter the luminous space in front of Sam, the exasperated inspector notices something amiss: "How many times do I have to tell you?" he proclaims, "Ursula Andres belongs with the transvestites, not with the perverts." The joke here, within the tasteless terms of trash cinema, is, of course, that it is a hair's line between perversion and transvestitism, and, furthermore, that the police's system of classification is so rigorous that it is an error of colossal proportions to confuse what we well know to be nothing more than various shades of pervert. Despite its socially reactionary nature, however, this joke provides yet another readable symptom of an emergent form of power. Besides just poking fun at the foolish rigidity of categories within these models of investigation and social control, this joke also suggests the inevitable limitations of any such form of classification. Most interestingly, and similarly to the blind spot that the female killer, Monica, represents to the police's investigative apparatus, these limitations come up around the issue of sex and gender.¹⁵⁶

It is as if there exists some abstract, penetrating force that functions to disrupt all

¹⁵⁶ This blind spot is as much a question of the violation of or play on genre norms as it is of social norms. Carol Clover has noted that the killer of the slasher genre is "typically figured as a mama's boy, a transvestite, or genitally defective." Argento often uses these "feminized" males (Alberto in *The Bird With the Crystal Plumage*, Carlo in *Deep Red*, and Christiano Berti in *Tenebre*, for example) as foils, while the actual killers often occupy more normative gender positions (Monica, Marta, and Peter Neal, respectively – although, as we will see in chapter three, *Tenebre* troubles this structure of displacement by using two murderers). See Carol J. Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton U.P., 1992).

of this attempted organization, a force that involves sexuality and gender identity in this particular instance, but that is also, more simply and playfully, embodied as a cat in a cabinet full of birds in the scene at the Fondazione. These “exceptional” cases may themselves be read as symptoms. For just as the spatial forms produced by the Rome of late capitalism would sprawl beyond the containment of the pre-war urban grids, so too would multinational capitalism itself produce spatial and epistemological forms that would that would outrun any fixed representation. The organization of knowledge in the film, I am arguing, can be read as an allegory of the new and ever-changing parameters of Roman urban space.

The one shot in this film that resembles anything like the kind synoptic overview of Roman space that Dimendberg would consider requisite for a legibly panoptic urban representation is instructive in this regard. Far from endowing the city with a visual unity as in Dimendberg’s film noir shots, this urban overview shot actually functions to depict a complex dialectic of illegibility/opacity and legibility/transparency on an urban scale. After Alberto’s death, Sam begins his search for Carlo, Julia, and Monica at the top of a wide pedestrian stairwell in the northern part of Flaminio. A panorama ensues of the entire district that begins as an extreme high angle shot of Sam, then floats upward and southward to reveal a sweeping view of the Tiber, the axial spine of Via Flaminia, and the parallel Lungotevere Flaminio as they head directly into the historic center. The uniformly spaced buildings of the foreground, all in a tightly organized chute between the Tiber and the western edge of the Villa Borghese, emphasize the urbanistic clarity that the modernist Flaminio maintained even after the war.

This neat organization contrasts sharply with the disorderly array of churches and

monuments in the shot's background just beyond the Porta del Popolo and in the city center. The only time the medieval city center appears in the film is when it forms the setting of a chase scene. When he feels Sam and Julia are becoming too nosy, Alberto hires a hit man who finds them out for a stroll in the tight, windy streets of the historic center. When Sam hears the car approaching, he and Julia take solace in an even tighter alleyway where the hit man's car cannot fit. Clearly, we are no longer in the wide, automobile-friendly streets of Flaminio anymore. A foot chase ensues, during which Argento emphasizes the heavy building materials of the historic center: Sam hides Julia first in an arched, brick alleyway, and then behind a metal door under the arch. He runs past fences and gates made of wood and corrugated metal and through a bus depot, and climbs aged, crumbling walls made of concrete and stone. Close-ups and Foley sound of both Sam's and the hit-man's feet on cobblestones and gravel, and of the hit-man's stray bullets on dense, solid brick suggest just how materially different this place is from Flaminio and the many other locations in the film where the emphasis is squarely on transparency and legibility. Jump cuts and violations of the axis of action combine with Ennio Morricone's free jazz score and low-key lighting to provide a further sense of confusion and spatial indecipherability to the scene.

As if to further emphasize the differences in visuality between the ancient city and modern planning interventions, when Sam finally emerges onto a busy street to take safety in the urban crowd whose very publicness will enable him to, in fact, turn the tables and begin tailing the hit-man, he suddenly finds himself on the modern Via Leonida Bissolati. This wide axis proposed by the 1931 Master Plan as Via XXIII Marzo (to commemorate the anniversary of fascism) was originally intended to facilitate the

circulation of automobile traffic around Piazza della Repubblica, Piazza Barberini, and the new, gridded streets of the Ludovisi neighborhood. Once demolitions were complete and the street was built, it was lined with the massive brick and concrete office and apartment buildings in front of which Sam and the hit-man walk (and all of which, in typical 1930s fascist style, featured large, first floor windows). Via Bissolati's modernist buildings were, during the economic boom, converted into the car dealerships, home appliance stores, and travel agencies that form the background of this slow chase. Like many of the other locations in the film, then, Via Bissolati itself records a powerful set of historical transitions – from fascism through the economic miracle and into multinational, consumer capitalism. In addition to choosing such an historically loaded street, Argento also chooses a striking camera movement for this sequence – a straight left-to-right track that intercuts between the hit-man and, behind him, Sam. This double tracking shot once again highlights the jolting difference in spatio-visibility between opaque, pre-modern Rome where the chase begins and this modernist, transparent street. The camera's track does not just show but dynamically *articulates* in its very movement the shape, rare for Rome and practically non-existent before Risorgimento, of the fascist era street – that is, a completely continuous straight line. The camera's path is, in other words, a cinematic-spatial elaboration of urban clarity and legibility, one that only a certain strand of fascist thinking on Roman urban modernity made possible.

The editing here suggests, in addition, another set of social issues around urban legibility and illegibility. The film cuts back and forth between visually rhyming moments of the two tracking shots of Sam and the hit-man – that is, with each cut, first the hit-man and then Sam appear in the same exact place on the frame and in front of the

same storefront as each other. These are temporal points where the shots of the two men are, in other words, exactly the same except for the fact that the hit-man has been replaced by Sam. The kind of interchangeability and uniformity of human subjects that this editing choice suggests is driven home quite powerfully when the hit-man, wearing a bright yellow jacket, ducks into a large convention of ex-prizefighters – all of whom are wearing the exact same jacket – and vanishes in the crowd. This editing pattern and the hit-man’s merging with the crowd suggests a dramatic sense of urban anonymity and recalls the kind of “isolated sameness” and “seriality” that Jean-Paul Sartre has theorized in relation to modern, urban experience.¹⁵⁷ According to Sartre, this kind of seriality is not premised upon the potentially liberating experience of becoming an invisible “nobody” in the urban crowd, but rather that of being a highly visible and repeatable “just anyone” – an average person among average people, both individuated and standardized all at once. It parallels, in other words, precisely the kind of organization of knowledge, space, and visuality that I’ve been discussing throughout this chapter.

In all of its technical and stylistic aspects, this scene in the historic center articulates, once again, a dialectic of transparency, segmentation, and opacity. Returning now to the synoptic shot of the Flaminio and the ways in which it demonstrates Rome’s legibility and illegibility, it is important to notice – especially in a film that is so much about what is seen – not only what this shot shows, but also what it hides. For behind the camera, in the northern parts of Flaminio and across the bend in the Tiber, a brand new city had recently emerged around the new stadiums, housing facilities, and public infrastructure hastily built in preparation for the 1960 Summer Olympics. This new city bore the marks, above all, of the engineer-architect Pier Luigi Nervi. Nervi worked

¹⁵⁷ See Dimendberg 62.

prodigiously in Flaminio between 1956 and 1960, most notably on the design of the Palazzetto dello Sport in northern Flaminio, on the renovation of the Stadio Flaminio, and on the construction of the huge Corso di Francia viaduct connecting Flaminio to the northern suburbs. Nervi's work left indelible marks throughout Rome that exemplify a form of architecture emerging at this time, much of which featured the kind of reinforced concrete and narrow pane glass of the film's opening scene in EUR (which I will get to shortly). Further into the distance, Via Flaminia and Corso di Francia both lead directly to the Gra, Rome's then brand new, high-speed automotive beltway. By situating this emergent Rome in off-screen space, the very placement of the camera is symptomatic of another kind of illegibility – not that of the visible as in the gallery sequence or of the opaque as in the ancient city center, but rather that of the unrepresentable.

Immediately following the opening credits of *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, there is a rapid, right to left tracking shot of a young woman (who turns out to be the first victim, Sandra Roversi) briskly walking on Piazzale dell'Industria in EUR towards a bus stop, directly in front of an office building designed by Luigi Moretti and V. Balio Morpugo and built in 1965.¹⁵⁸ The loosely brutalist building with narrow slivers of plate glass sandwiched between concrete and steel epitomizes the exact, Nervi-inspired architecture so forcefully and symptomatically elided by the overview shot of Flaminio. Its serial repetition of heavy materials starkly contrasts with the limpidity of both the glass cases of the Fondazione Wilkinson and the art gallery's glass entryway which appear in the next two scenes and identify the building with a number of stylistically similar new constructions (including, for example, the infamous Monte Mario Hilton).

¹⁵⁸ Today the building houses the international headquarters of the Credito Italiano bank.

The incongruity of this location with the other two along with the images of quotidian life on Piazzale dell'Industria endow this building with a similar urban-historical temporality to the Flaminio: it is made to appear at one and the same time, paradoxically, as an emblem of a radically new strand of post-war architecture and one that has already become so pervasive as to have established itself as the newly unnoticeable backdrop of everyday Roman life.¹⁵⁹ Clearly, we are neither among the familiar landmarks, monuments, and tortuous romance of the picture postcard First and Second Romes, nor are we in the tightly organized and transparent gridded neighborhoods of the modernist Third Rome. Rather, we are without question in another Rome, one in which anonymous buildings outfitted with generic signifiers of institutional and global economic and cultural authority dominate. We are in a Rome in which urban dwellers wander from non-site to non-site, a city that had yet, in the early days of the *Sessantotto*'s social and cultural upheaval, to establish a stable self-image.

Conclusion

In this sense, while *The Bird With the Crystal Plumage* introduces a decidedly urban-cinematic critique of Rome, it also points to the emergent and as yet unrepresentable urban forms encroaching upon the city throughout the 1960s. Fredric Jameson has famously drawn upon urban theory (specifically the work of the planner Kevin Lynch) to argue that the socio-economic relations of late capitalism are, like a poorly designed city, not directly mappable and representable, and that such an incapacity is, "as crippling to political experience as the analogous incapacity to map spatially is for

¹⁵⁹ See Remiddi et al., 2, 113, 115, 130.

urban experience.”¹⁶⁰ The peripheral Rome chosen for the opening of *The Bird With the Crystal Plumage* and hidden from the film’s single urban-synoptic image is a perfect embodiment of such, “an alienated city... a space in which people are unable to map (in their minds) either their own positions or the urban totality in which they find themselves.”¹⁶¹ To the extent, therefore, that these new buildings speak at all, they speak in the empty spatial language of 1960s and 1970s Rome. They speak, in other words, of motorization, dispersal, and the increasing presence of global capital. They stand in not only for such markers of post-modernity as the highway, the airport, the suburban shopping center, and the office park, but also for what Dimendberg has called, “the geographic ubiquity and impersonality of the large corporation and the more opaque social and economic relations developing in its wake.”¹⁶²

The film’s final scene is as striking as its first, and together, I’d like to argue, these bookends suggest a form of illegibility that does not just attempt to figure Rome’s urban space, but also effects a meta-theoretical engagement with global space, technology, and mass media more generally. For in these sequences, the film touches upon the same form of illegibility that the overview shot of Flaminio does – that is, they raise questions not just around urban morphology and history, but around representation itself. The opening scene, as we have seen, does so at the level of architecture and location. The closing scene, however, makes this critique at the level of filmic discourse.

Once the case is finally closed, as I have already mentioned, Professor Renaldi gives a publicly palliative but inadequate explication of the murders in a television

¹⁶⁰ Jameson, *Postmodernism* 416.

¹⁶¹ Jameson, *Postmodernism* 51.

¹⁶² Dimendberg 4.

address. While he continues as a voice-off, Argento closes his film with an almost incoherent series of jump cuts depicting jetliners of various companies taxiing on the runways at the newly constructed international airport at Fiumicino. In the midst of these jump cuts is a shot of Julia in the first class cabin of an airplane and then, a few shots later, Sam greeting her. With its protagonists finally reunited and en route to their home country, the film cuts to its final shot: a TWA jet taking off behind rolling credits with the sound of Sam repeating one of his very first lines in the film, “I can hear him saying it now: Go to Italy. It’s a peaceful country. Nothing ever happens there.”

That no single shot stays on the screen for more than a few frames gives the overall impression of a kind of dissolution of the filmic text.¹⁶³ In addition, the relation between the doctor’s poor representation of the case, the sudden irruption into the film of the medium of television, Sam’s repeated voice-over, and the images and sounds of 747’s is never made clear. There is nothing in the film to motivate this scene’s schizophrenic disarray of signifiers. It is as though the long-haul jetliners and the almost instantaneous capacity to connect the local to the global both economically and geographically that they signify exceed the spatio-temporal capacities of cinema.

But despite this assault on representation, it is important to note that this moment, like so many others in the film, retains a powerfully historical subtext. At the time that Argento shot *The Bird With the Crystal Plumage*, the location of this sequence, Rome’s new international airport in the town of Fiumicino, was still quite new. Originally constructed to facilitate the influx of athletes, press, fans, and delegates for the Olympics in 1960, the Rome-Fiumicino International Airport opened to the public on January 15,

¹⁶³ There are thirty-one shots in just below two minutes of screen time. Removing the fifty-seven seconds of the final, credits shot, this makes for a rapid fire pace of just less than one shot per second for about a minute.

1961. Just as the Olympics themselves functioned as a kind of coming out party for Italy into the sphere of global capitalism (and therefore as an affirmation of the ultimate “success” of reconstruction and the economic miracle), the addition of an international airport to the extended urban fabric of Rome represented not just a quantitatively new level of urban dispersal, but a qualitatively new modality of space and time altogether – that of globalized simultaneity. The airport in which this film so confoundingly closes was, in other words, the very centerpiece of an emergent, post-Olympiad – indeed, postmodern – Rome.

Paul Virilio has argued that what defines a city precisely as contemporary in postmodernity is the diminished importance of physical boundaries. Such boundaries have been eroded by the new experiences of time and space produced by ever advancing technologies of transport and telecommunications:

If the metropolis is still a place, a geographic site, it no longer has anything to do with the classical oppositions of city/country nor center/periphery.... [T]he intramural-extramural opposition collapsed with the transport revolutions and the development of communication and telecommunication technologies.... In effect, we are witnessing a paradoxical moment in which the opacity of building materials is reduced to zero.... Deprived of objective boundaries, the architectonic element begins to drift and float in an electronic ether, devoid of spatial dimensions, but inscribed in the singular temporality of an instantaneous diffusion.¹⁶⁴

This suggests that it is not just the limits – internal and external – of Rome, but also those of urban representation themselves that are glimpsed by the film. The ending of the film suggests that the means of representation for contemporary cities can no longer be those of a modernity predicated on capturing the fleeting moment (such as photography) or the

¹⁶⁴ Paul Virilio, *The Lost Dimension*, trans. Daniel Moshenberg (New York: Semiotext(e), 1991) 12.

continuous unfolding of time (such as cinema). Rather, Rome, synchronized as it was becoming into a globalized economic system and shared time and space through means such as the airplane, would begin at this time to imply new technologies of representation whose currency would need to be immediate dissemination and “real time.”

It is the combination of this new form of transparency – paradoxically, a fully mediatized model of immediacy – along with the opaque social and economic relations of late capitalism that Argento’s film ultimately installs and traces in the Roman landscape. *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* traverses various locations and modalities of space in its examination of the changing roles of institutional authority and state power in Italian society. It figures these as spatial questions by presenting a fantasy of a policed and urbanistically regulated Rome. And it posits various ways in which these kinds of regulations fail in the face of multinational capitalism. It ends, however, with a series of images that point directly to their own limits.

At its very end, therefore, *The Bird With the Crystal Plumage* pries open – and leaves open – a series of questions about the future of the city in the face of the new spatialities, temporalities, and power structures of a post-modernity that was just beginning to take root in Rome. But it also, in the end, hints at the emergence of a new form of media that has, indeed, since become a dominant means of urban representation – namely, television. As Virilio suggests, precisely because of its innate displacements, television may be adequate as a figuration of this new urban non-place. “The cathode-ray window,” Virilio writes, “brings each viewer the light of another day and the presence of the antipodal place. If space is that which keeps everything from occupying the same place, this abrupt confinement brings absolutely everything precisely to that ‘place,’ that

location that has no location.”¹⁶⁵ Indeed, it is television – the medium *par excellence* of Virilio’s “instantaneous diffusion” – whose literal voice gives the otherwise bewildering closing scene of the film at Rome-Fiumicino Airport its only, very tenuous semblance of unification. Not only Rome, therefore, but also urban cinema itself appears at the end of the film to be, in the face of new urban, geopolitical, and media forms, precisely a location that has no location.

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In this chapter, I have discussed the ways in which *The Bird With the Crystal Plumage* confronts the modern history of Roman planning and expansion. The early part of the twentieth century saw various attempts on the part of the government of Rome to contain sprawl and building speculation. These efforts were heightened under fascism, and were closely associated with a discourse of social control. The economic miracle, through the social and spatial forms that it introduced, brought with it new kinds of challenges to these modes of socio-spatial management. This, along with the violence and protests of the *Sessantotto*, necessitated new modalities of state power; an institutional restructuring that involved, among other things, increased surveillance. This is figured in the film’s police investigation, which relies heavily on mass media, archival processes, and technology. This form of power would be confounded in Rome’s history once again by the increasingly global reach of the city’s economy and identity. These questions are posed and re-posed throughout the film in a number of ways – some narrative, some via location choices, and some at the stylistic and technical levels of editing, mise-en-scène, camerawork, and sound use. Taken together, these elements and this film represent, to

¹⁶⁵ Virilio 17-18.

return to Jameson and Lynch, a kind of symptomatic, “situational representation” of the city of Rome as it undergoes the social, political, economic, and geographic transformation from the 1960s into the 1970s.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶ Jameson, *Postmodernism* 51.

CHAPTER TWO

Profonda Roma: *Deep Red*'s Domestic and Urban Uncanny

“All these and security were within. Without was the ‘Red Death.’”

-Edgar Allen Poe, “The Masque of the Red Death.”¹⁶⁷

Locating Deep Red

In 1975 Dario Argento would direct his fifth feature film, *Profondo rosso/Deep Red*. In many ways *Deep Red* marked both a return to form and a new beginning. In the early 1970s, Argento would capitalize on the success of his debut film *L’Uccello dalle piume di cristallo/The Bird With the Crystal Plumage* (1970) by making two more popular *gialli* within a year: *Il Gatto a nove code/The Cat O’ Nine Tails* (1970), and *Quattro mosche di velluto grigio/Four Flies on Grey Velvet* (1971). After this run and his successful RAI crime thriller mini-series, *La porta sul buio/Door Into Darkness* (released in 1973), Argento decided to experiment with his artistic range by directing a historical film, *Le Cinque giornate/The Five Days of Milan* (1973).

The Five Days of Milan is an unusual film even by Argento’s standards. Its comic and bloody treatment of what, even within the Italian context, would seem like historically esoteric material (the uprising of the city of Milan against the Austrian Empire during the First Italian War of Independence) virtually assured that it would be an international flop. And although it achieved a mild level of success with a domestic audience, this apocalyptic, slapstick, historical costume comedy that seemed to suggest

¹⁶⁷ Edgar Allen Poe, “The Masque of the Red Death,” *The Portable Edgar Allen Poe*, ed. Philip Van Doren Stern (New York: Penguin Books, 1977) 281.

shades of Godard was panned by critics in both Italy and abroad. One could argue, in fact, that the sole historical importance of *The Five Days of Milan* lies in having convinced Argento that his strengths as a filmmaker and writer were suited less to idiosyncratic combinations of material than to the conventions of popular, genre filmmaking. Argento, it seemed, had a particular affinity for the *giallo* – the composite and eminently postmodern Italian genre that he helped create with his first three films – and he would return to it with a vengeance, so to speak, in *Deep Red*.

Long before Argento and other filmmakers (most notably Mario Bava and Lucio Fulci) popularized the film *giallo* throughout the 1960s and '70s, the term *giallo* had referred to a series of literary texts. In the late 1920s, the Italian publishing house Mondadori began to translate and release a series of American pulp mystery novels with yellow covers, hence the nomination *giallo* (Italian for yellow). After the success of the first wave of literary *gialli*, these highly visible and unmistakable yellow covers became associated not only with mysteries, but also with a variety of other genres, including modernist detective fiction, gothic horror, fantasy, and even erotica. Over time, the stories of all of these generic modes began to be combined and then adapted for the screen, at which point the category *giallo* began to take on a kind of generic status in its own right – ironically, as an impure composite of elements from all of these other genres.¹⁶⁸ According to Mikel J. Koven, for example, the first screen *giallo* was Luchino

¹⁶⁸ As Mikel J. Koven points out, Italian critics and filmgoers would be much more likely to use the term *filone* (strand or vein) than *genere* (genre) to describe the various vicissitudes and instantiations of the *giallo*. “If we think of a larger generic pattern as a river, in this context the *giallo* as genre, several smaller ‘streamlets’ branch off from that genre-river, occasionally reconnecting to the main flow farther ‘downstream.’ Perhaps, in some cases, what we think of as a film genre, like the *giallo*, may be a cluster of concurrent streamlets, veins, or traditions – *filone* [sic].... On the one hand... we can see the *giallo* as less a distinct genre of film than as a *filone* of the larger horror or crime genres.... On the other hand... if we see the *giallo* as

Visconti's 1943 *Ossessione*, an eroticized and tawdry adaptation of James M. Cain's hard-boiled novel *The Postman Always Rings Twice*.¹⁶⁹ Indeed, given that its name derives from a marketing strategy that proved successful over time (i.e., the yellow cover) rather than from any narrative, stylistic, or diegetic description (such as, say, horror, melodrama, or the western), it is perhaps no surprise that *giallo* has never been a fixed and definable category. Rather, in Gary Needham's words, it has always been "a conceptual category with highly moveable and permeable boundaries that shift around from year to year."¹⁷⁰

In addition to this high level of generic multiplicity, the *giallo* also derives from a hybrid national identity. Many of the first *gialli* were, in fact, translations from English texts. The books, for example, of S.S. Van Dine, Edgar Wallace, Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett, George Simenon, Agatha Christie, Erle Stanley Gardner, and Argento's idol, Edgar Allen Poe, all appeared with yellow covers. Italian writers began to capitalize on the early success of these translations soon thereafter by writing their own *gialli* in their native language, but under Anglo-American pseudonyms.¹⁷¹ The *giallo* can,

referring to the entire crime genre of literature... then it should be possible to identify smaller variations on that genre – the various *filone* that make up the genre." Koven 5-6.

¹⁶⁹ Koven 3.

¹⁷⁰ Gary Needham, "Playing With Genre: An Introduction to the Italian *giallo*," in *Kinoeye* 2.11.

¹⁷¹ Franco Tettamanti, "1929, un'estate 'thriller' con il giallo Mondadori," *Corriere della Sera* 21 November 2007.

in this way, productively be seen as a kind of Italian indigenization or vernacularization of these other genres as foreign – most often Anglo-American – cultural forms.¹⁷²

As a result of this complex and heterogeneous history, and very much like other forms of cultural adaptation, the *giallo* is usually an extremely self-aware form. As a cinematic genre in particular, its texts tend, in one way or another, to deconstruct and disassemble the codes, conventions, and formulas of their various objects of appropriation, and then to recombine and exaggerate them. Argento himself gained experience in this strategy of storytelling early in his career. As a co-screenwriter with Bernardo Bertolucci of Sergio Leone's epic Spaghetti Western, *C'era una volta il West/Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968), Argento claims to have spent six months watching and rewatching American westerns (along with Leone's earlier, Akira Kurosawa-influenced westerns) in order to uncover that genre's most fundamental structures and myths. The film that resulted from this experience is, according to Argento, a sprawling and elegiac combination of the tropes of other westerns – from the “crepuscular themes” of John Ford's work to the “solitary and strange” protagonists of the films Nicholas Ray.¹⁷³

Although it is not as nostalgic or operatic as the Spaghetti Western, the *giallo* does mobilize pastiche and intertextuality in a similar way. Like the Spaghetti Western, it engages with pre-existing formulas and foregrounds the reproducibility of generic clichés and myths. Koven claims, in fact, that the *giallo* is most usefully seen as a kind of

¹⁷² While the influence of German cinematic, artistic, and literary Expressionism on the *giallo* as a cinematic form is apparent, the *gialli* of Argento owe far more to British and American artists like Thomas De Quincey, Alfred Hitchcock, and, above all, perhaps, Edgar Allen Poe.

¹⁷³ Maiello 31.

vernacular cinema. Since *gialli* were “popular” films that were meant to be consumed either on television or in the third-run theaters that I discuss in my introductory chapter, their use of pastiche and pre-existing formulas can be seen as a kind of strategy integral to their mode of address:

To discuss the *giallo* as narrative may invoke the genre’s dependency upon literary models of murder mysteries, but to sit through most of [them] is to *experience* them. Vernacular cinema, then, is largely formulaic cinema: it relies heavily on preexisting formulas that enable the, for example, terza visione audiences to transform the movie theater into a social space for a variety of activities, while still enabling the film text in question to be comprehensible.... Formulaic narratives enable the story to be followed undemandingly.¹⁷⁴

Many *gialli* are, therefore, due to the very nature and history of the genre and its audience – and perhaps other aesthetic reasons that Koven does not get into – quite self-aware around storytelling and stylistic conventions.¹⁷⁵ *Deep Red*, however, as Maitland McDonagh notes, takes this approach to a new level compared to its forebears, and, at the same time represents a shift within Argento’s own approach: “While *The Bird With the Crystal Plumage* is a relatively self-contained film, *Deep Red* casts out allusions in all directions: the more you know, the more it resonates.”¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ Koven 38.

¹⁷⁵ This is an aspect of Argento’s filmmaking that has been often misunderstood by mainstream critics. Vincent Canby of the New York Times panned *Deep Red* upon its release, claiming that it was lacking this very self-awareness and was, therefore, incompetent: *Deep Red*, he writes, “is an English-dubbed Italian-made bucket of ax-murder-movie clichés thoroughly soaked in red paint that seems intended to represent fake blood. I don’t think that director Dario Argento, the director, meant to distance us from the action in this way. He’s simply a director of incomparable incompetence.” Canby “*Deep Red* is a Bucket of Ax-Murder Clichés,” *New York Times* 10 June 1976.

¹⁷⁶ McDonagh 101.

In addition to constructing the film out of references to other films (not least of all to Michelangelo Antonioni's 1966 *Blow-Up*, just the kind of modernist art film that Koven claims forms an opposite social and aesthetic pole to the *giallo*), Argento also heavily foregrounds references to two particular generic structures in *Deep Red* – namely, horror and investigative fiction. *Deep Red* is, in fact, a veritable lexicon of the tropes and narrative conventions provided by the histories of these two genres, and the differing ways in which the same film was marketed in Italy and abroad are symptomatic of this hybrid generic identity. Using a more explicit title – *The Deep Red Hatchet Murders* – *Profondo rosso* was initially advertised to American and British audiences as a slasher film. Mainly comprised of decontextualized images of the most terrifying and startling moments of the film's murder scenes and a soundtrack of uprooted and randomly placed shrieking, its original, English-language trailer emphasizes shock and violence above all else. As is common in the marketing of horror films, the trailer places heavy emphasis on the affective and corporeal effects that the film will have on its viewers by making extensive use of rapid-fire montage and a promotional voice-over delivered in the second person:

You're getting closer, and closer, to the most unnatural kind of death.
Beyond shock, beyond horror, into total terror. Murder runs wild. Blood runs cold. *Deep Red*. Everywhere you look, everywhere you turn, death is running with you. *Deep Red*. It'll put *YOU* into deep shock.

In marked contrast to this, the Italian trailer, though it contains a number of horror signifiers (pools of blood, eerie music, the incessant sound of wind and dripping water, etc.), places more emphasis on the historical importance of Argento's return, after *The Five Days of Milan*, to the *giallo*: "An exceptional event.... Dario Argento returns to the thriller: *Profondo rosso*," the titles read. This trailer, in fact, bypasses shock altogether,

and instead generates an emotional tenor of mystery and suspense. Its temporality, in fact, is completely different from the Anglo-American trailer: it is built less around scenes of full events from the film than out of painstakingly and gorgeously composed *still* images of anticipation, in which the traumatic event so gratuitously depicted in the English trailer seems always *about to* irrupt. The Italian trailer, furthermore, places extremely heavy emphasis on the act of looking by including a series of close-ups from the film of human eyes. The trailer begins, in fact, with one of the film's most unique shots – that of a single eye centered within the dark space of a closet whose rapid, outward zoom creates a terrifying sensation of vertigo.

If, as Leon Hunt argues, “the *giallo* might usefully be seen as the missing link between the protoserial killer narratives of Frederic Brown and Cornell Woolrich and the American slasher films of the late 1970s/early 1980s,” then *Deep Red* is, in its very hybridity, ironically a very pure *giallo*.¹⁷⁷ Because, we might suppose, of where it fits into the trajectory of his career as I've been outlining it here, Argento goes to especially great lengths to capitalize on the *giallo*'s complex and multiplicitous patrimony in *Deep Red*. What I will be arguing is that Argento mobilizes the film's allusions and generic motifs in the direction of a historically specific critique around both domestic and urban space. The domestic is, for example, constructed throughout the film as a space of violence and terror. All of the film's murders take place in their victim's homes and, as is common in both the *giallo* in general and especially in Argento's work, these killings are painstakingly staged in time and space, and constructed – almost like a kind of cinematic

¹⁷⁷ Leon Hunt, “A (Sadistic) Night at the *Opera*: Notes on the Italian Horror Film,” *The Horror Reader*, ed. Ken Gelder (London: Routledge, 2000) 330. (Frederic Brown's novel *The Screaming Mimi* was loosely adapted by Argento to form the screenplay of *The Bird With the Crystal Plumage*.)

and sculptural performance art – out of the architecture and the objects of daily domestic life. Furthermore, through various stylistic devices (camera movement and placement, editing, etc.), Argento posits the boundary zone between domestic and public space – that is, the point at which interior space becomes demarcated from exterior space – as a point of confrontation, anxiety, and violence. On top of this, the film's entire narrative is constructed around the investigative interpretation of interior spaces of various sorts in a way that, I will demonstrate, suggests a certain thematization and spatialization of the psychoanalytic concept of the return of the repressed. Finally, in its choice of urban settings and locations, *Deep Red*, as we will see, produces a rather artificial and displaced version of Rome.

The overall effect is a depiction of both domestic and urban space – and their relationship – as unstable and, indeed, as uncanny. In *Deep Red* the resolution of certain narrative questions is associated with a particularly spatial form of the return of the repressed, and terrific lengths are gone to precisely to dis-locate Rome from itself. As I will suggest at the end of this chapter, this must be read as symptomatic of the larger questions around urban space that I began to raise in my introduction and first chapter. *Deep Red*, I will argue, figures a certain crisis around domestic space resulting from the geographical and historical changes brought about in Rome by the economic miracle – in particular, the advent in the city of abstract and global space. This film reveals, once again, a location in which the historical and critical displacements effected by the *Sessantotto* helped to reopen a series of dormant questions around space – in this case housing and the very nature of the home in Italian urban life – that had been hitherto

entombed within the new socio-spatial structures of modern and postmodern Italian, urban life.

Inter-spatiality

Deep Red begins in a striking and unusual manner that introduces the themes of embeddedness, concealment, the domestic, and the uncanny right from the start. After a series of understated, initial white-on-black credits, the first image of the film is a sequence shot that depicts a murder in an unknown domestic setting at Christmastime. The murder is represented not directly by the camera, but rather as a kind of operatic and oneiric shadow play on the far wall of the room. Argento's awareness of the codes not only of horror but also of domestic melodrama is evident here. The intensity of the event is simultaneously exaggerated and rendered strange by Argento's choice of a highly color-saturated Technicolor film stock, an extremely low angle of framing, and the combination of anguished cries and a rather disturbing fairy tale lullaby on the soundtrack. With the stabbing complete, the bloody murder weapon falls to the ground in the extreme foreground, and the legs and feet of a young, seemingly female child enter the frame next to the knife soon thereafter. Immediately on the heels of this powerfully estranging depiction of domestic terror, the film returns to the credits and Goblins' thumping and haunting prog-rock score. An exaggerated tone of domestic terror and nostalgia is therefore created before the film proper even begins.

After the opening credits and a brief scene introducing the protagonist, an American ex-pat pianist named Marc Daly (David Hemmings), the film cuts to a present day parapsychology conference in Rome where Helga Ulmann, a psychic, senses the

presence of a murderer in the audience. That night, just a few hours later, she is brutally murdered. Marc, after leaving his troubled, alcoholic friend Carlo, witnesses the very end of the murder through Helga's window and then rushes to the apartment. By the time he arrives, though, Helga is already dead, having been hacked multiple times with a cleaver and impaled on the broken glass of the window through which she had been shoved.

Marc, just like *The Bird With the Crystal Plumage*'s Sam Dalmas, believes that he saw something of great importance while inside the apartment, but he is unable to recall precisely what it is. In what is perhaps the film's most obvious intertextual reference, Marc here makes the same mistake that David Hemmings' Thomas makes in Antonioni's *Blowup*: he misperceives an event, and this misperception raises a whole series of epistemological questions around vision, memory, truth, desire, and the image. The next day, the nosy, aggressive newspaper reporter Gianna Brezzi (played by Argento's then-wife Daria Nicolodi) publicly exposes Marc as the crime's only eyewitness. In part, therefore, out an almost obsessive desire to fill in the gaps in his memory, and in part because his own safety depends upon it, Marc begins to investigate the murder on his own. He is accompanied in this by Gianna, with whom he also develops a sexual relationship. Hence, a whole series of tropes and structures descending from detective fiction (archival research, movement throughout the metropolis, surveillance, etc.) is introduced in addition to those of horror (violence, sexuality, terror, etc.).

By the end of the film, we learn that the young child from the shot embedded within the credits is Carlo, and that he has witnessed the vicious murder of his father by his mother, Marta (played by Clara Calamai – who, as the star not only of Visconti's *Ossessione* but also of countless fascist-era melodramas, is an intertextual reference in

herself). Having had her crime exposed at the parapsychology conference, Marta is forced to spectacularly hack not only Helga to death, but also anyone else who might be able to put the pieces together and discover that the corpse of her dead husband was never buried, but remains entombed in their abandoned, decrepit family home. Marc's investigation eventually leads him to the home and the dead body, at which point he remembers that what he saw the night of the murder was Marta's face reflected in a mirror.

Given that it was the result of a highly self-conscious – and, according to the Italian trailer, historically significant – choice on the part of a critic-turned-director to return to what is already a heterogeneous and self-reflexive genre, one would expect to see such high levels of intertextuality in *Deep Red*. But one of the most striking aspects of *Deep Red* is that it is not merely intertextual, but also seems to call for a multiplicity of interpretative strategies. Indeed, beyond just incorporating the generic structures and codes of horror and investigative fiction into its narrative and thematic construction, the film also incorporates the very modes of critical interpretation most often associated with these different genres. Interpretation is not, in other words, at the edges or on the outside of the text here, but is rather one of the very raw materials out of which the text is formed. A successful act of reading the film would, I am suggesting, assimilate a whole series of analytical strategies historically associated with each of these individual genres. As a hybrid film, in other words, *Deep Red* demands an equally hybrid mode of criticism.

The film encourages such composite readings around the category of space in particular, and within that category, around the subcategory of the home – the domestic, interior space of dwelling. As we will see, *Deep Red* pays an inordinate amount of

attention to the space of the home, as well as to its boundaries with the outside world. By including structuring aspects of horror and detective fiction, two genres that traditionally organize narrative space and depict the home in very different ways, *Deep Red* demands a form of interpretation that incorporates two separate critical approaches to the category of interior, domestic space.

The first of these is the “depth” hermeneutic provided by psychoanalysis that is often associated with the interpretation of horror fiction. Horror, constructed as it so often is around the psychological (usually unabashedly Oedipal) trajectory of the individual subject, often incorporates psychoanalysis precisely as a “depth model” into its very narrative and topological structure. This is reflected, for example, in the thematic recurrence of the domestic, and in the trope of the multi-level haunted house (with its “epistemology” of stairways, hidden passages, basements, attics, etc.). It is also reflected in the frequent recourse within the genre to the emotional and psychological tenor of the uncanny, as well as to issues of misrecognition and the role of the family (especially the parents) and home. Indeed, domestic horror cinema can be seen to reflect Freud’s own hierarchical, architectural understanding of the human mind. One image of this “psychoanalytic space” would therefore be Freud’s early, topographical model of the psyche, in which the conscious and preconscious together form a kind of “highest” but smallest layer below which is buried the vast and powerful unconscious.¹⁷⁸ As we will see, *Deep Red* provides countless figurations of this model.

The second model is that of social space, an approach that analyzes the division and demarcation of space in general and that I will use here in particular to examine the

¹⁷⁸ This initial topography was first outlined by Freud in 1900 in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. See Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1955).

relationship between interior and exterior urban space. This interpretative model, which includes such structuring devices and tropes as surveillance and *flânerie*, has been productively used to situate detective fiction within the ethos of urban modernity. Detective fiction generally concerns itself more with the logical, hypothetical reconstruction in time and space of the individual crime or series of crimes than with the psychological trajectory of their author. Hence, in the arguments of Walter Benjamin, Georg Simmel, and Carlo Ginzburg among many others, the role of the detective – amateur or otherwise – is to reconstruct a suspected criminal’s movement through urban space by examining the evidential traces left by this movement.¹⁷⁹ However, going as far back as the beginnings of the genre in Poe’s Auguste Dupin stories, the detective inhabits interior space as much as exterior space, examining the arrangement of furniture and objects in the homes of victims and suspects as much as the alibis and eyewitness reports which allow him to deduct the criminal’s traversal of public space.

This dialectic between interior and exterior space is quite gracefully embodied in Benjamin’s analysis of the *etui* or plush container. Plush furniture was originally placed in train compartments to comfort the bourgeois passenger by absorbing the shock of the train’s bumpy and rapid movement through space. It was a means of making the train feel more like a private space. It took on another set of meanings, however, once it became fashionable in Victorian interior design. Here, not only would it provide insulating separation from the exterior, but it would also bear in the very lushness of its material the tell-tale marks of the individual’s habits of dwelling to anyone (such as a detective or any

¹⁷⁹ See Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, and *One Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London: NLB, 1979), Carlo Ginzburg, “Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm,” in *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins U.P., 1989) 96-125, and Georg Simmel, “The Sociology of Space,” in Frisby et al. 137-169.

other agent of investigation or surveillance) who might care to look for them. Plush furniture, according to Benjamin, therefore bore the potential to extend the gaze of surveillance and the purview of social control into the private realm. Detective fiction developed, therefore, not exclusively around tracing the individual suspect's movement through public, urban space, but also around reading and interpreting the traces left in such plush and nominally private interior spaces.

The mode of detective fiction therefore aligns with other tropes of modernity (such as cinema itself, panoramas, and, of course, Benjamin's famous arcades and other forms of iron and glass architecture) in that it can be seen as symptomatic of the simultaneous division and interpenetration of interior and exterior space in the modern metropolis. As Tom Gunning has noted,

The exterior as interior becomes a crucial emblem for Benjamin's analysis of the nineteenth century, because this ambiguous spatial interpenetration responds to an essential division on which the experience of bourgeois society is founded, the creation of the interior as a radical separation from the exterior, as a home in which the bourgeois can dwell and dream undisturbed by the noise, activity, and threats of the street, the space of the masses and of production.¹⁸⁰

The type of ambiguity around interpenetration that we see in many of Benjamin's favorite icons of modernity, including detective fiction, suggests that this process of spatial separation is always incomplete and based on a false – or at the very least, forced – division of space. Interior, domestic space and the security that it provides the individual subject, according to this model, must always be artificially fortified against the incursions of the public exterior.

¹⁸⁰ Tom Gunning, "The Exterior as *Intérieur*: Benjamin's Optical Detective," *Boundary 2* 30.1 (Spring 2003) 106.

The Violence of Demarcation

Interior space will always, therefore, bare signs and symptoms of what Gunning calls, “the violence of demarcation by which the *intérieur* and its privileges were claimed.”¹⁸¹ What makes this even more complex is that psychoanalysis is the very science of these interior spaces. Gunning’s bourgeois subject, dwelling and dreaming in the private space of the home, is the very *analysand*. As we will see, this dialectical complexity comes in many forms in *Deep Red*. Although the film as a finished product contains a veritable catalogue of types of city space including public, exterior spaces (the street and the piazza) and semi-private, interior spaces (sites of worship, spectacle, and leisure – the church, the cemetery, the theater, and the bar), *Deep Red*’s greatest emphasis is placed squarely on the interior, private space of the home. The film’s most prominent and memorable setting, for example, is Carlo’s crumbling childhood home – the location of the film’s Ur-event (the murder of Carlo’s father) and its resolution.¹⁸² The film’s obsession with domestic space is further evidenced in three main ways. First is the fact

¹⁸¹ Gunning 106. Emphasis added.

¹⁸² Interestingly, this location also matches Argento’s description of the home in which he wrote the film’s script as “tomb-like.” Certain biographical details of Argento’s experience of writing the script are highly suggestive here. Having failed to come to an agreement on a treatment with the longtime Fellini collaborator Bernardino Zapponi whom he enlisted to write his next script, Argento searched for inspiration in his decrepit and uninhabitable former home on the outskirts of Rome. He sequestered himself in the bleak, isolated, empty, and off-the-grid house for weeks, immersed in, “a death-like silence, interrupted only by occasional creaking sounds, noises from the nearby countryside, barking dogs, and whizzing automobiles in the distance.” He emerged with a story with the, “new, more aggressive, more oneiric style,” that he was seeking in his return to the *giallo*. Argento had chosen, in other words, to immerse himself in the closest thing available in his reality to that spatial archetype within the universe of the *giallo* whose generic connotations of domestic, familial terror and repression would provide the emotional tenor he was seeking – namely, the haunted house. We can glean from Argento’s descriptions that, as with the trope of the haunted house, his former home possessed – in its very uninhabitability – the rootless affect and floating signification of bourgeois domesticity without retaining any of the actual functions of the domestic. See Maiello 90-91.

that every single one of its major and supporting characters' homes becomes, at one time or another, settings within the film and, furthermore, that very memorable and extravagantly staged murder scenes take place in many of them. Secondly, the film insists on clearly and concisely mapping the geography of each of these domestic spaces and the placement of objects within them through very carefully considered camera placements and movements along with complex editing techniques, some of which seem to serve no purpose whatsoever except for this activity of cataloguing space and the objects in it. Third and most prominent of all is the great lengths that the film goes to in order to accentuate the borders between these interior spaces and the exteriors from which they are divided. Argento not only regularly places the camera on the threshold between inside and outside, but he also heavily marks the traversal of this threshold as a form of violent intrusion in a variety of ways that I will discuss shortly.

While the first of these three aspects of the film serves mainly to drive home the importance of domestic space, the second suggests some of the ways in which Gunning's "violence of demarcation" of interior from exterior space becomes sublimated into the architecture and design of the interior itself. The film's own architecture in this sense embodies what Benjamin referred to in his work on detective fiction as, "the horror of apartments," where, "the arrangement of the furniture is at the same time the site plan of deadly traps."¹⁸³ In addition, however, *Deep Red's* murders do not just use their extensively elaborated domestic settings as a series of fancy backdrops. Rather, this idea of "the horror of apartments" is, in fact, made literal by the fact that the trappings of everyday bourgeois home life themselves – glass windows, hot water, fireplace mantles,

¹⁸³ Benjamin, *One Way Street* 447. Quoted in Gunning 113.

desk corners, elevators, etc. – become the very weapons of *Deep Red*'s killings. The film's domestic mise-en-scène, in other words, is itself rife with danger: it becomes an active agent in the murders.

However, it is the third category (the film's approach to the boundary between interior, private space and exterior, public space) that, as we would expect given the geographic and generic hybridity that I outline above, is the most fraught in this film. Just as in detective fiction, in *Deep Red*, "ultimately, the interior cannot withstand the exterior."¹⁸⁴ This, in fact, accounts for the film's many tensions around borders and border crossings. *Deep Red* articulates quite explicitly in both its mise-en-scène and camera style, in other words, the "violence of demarcation" inherent to the production of bourgeois, interior space.¹⁸⁵

This is apparent right from the beginning of the film. The two scenes that immediately follow the opening credits suggest a reading of the film's many transitions from exterior to interior as forms of invasion or penetration. The film proper begins with a sweeping, circular camera movement and a series of cut-ins that establishes a small crypt-like church (Rome's Church of Santa Costanza, more on the significance of which later) as a practice space for a jazz band. The film then cuts to a static shot of Marc leading the band. He is framed symmetrically between his band mates and a series of pillars, with the camera positioned on the threshold of the circular nave of the church, right near the building's entrance. The symmetry of both the building and the framing seem to put Marc in a kind of crosshairs. And sure enough, as a squirming, anxious and obviously repressed Marc critiques the band's performance as too "clean" for music that

¹⁸⁴ Gunning 107.

¹⁸⁵ Gunning 107.

was born in and derives its libidinal energies from the “trashy” brothels of the American South, the camera dramatically and slowly but rather aggressively dollies inward on his face, as if it is moving towards penetrating his private space. Not only does the camera get uncomfortably close to him physically, but as his topic drifts more towards the tawdry and seedy aspects of musical performance and sexual desire, it also seems to be probing his mind, and, as his tense body language intimates, very much against his will.

With Marc still talking and the camera still moving towards a close-up, the film dynamically cuts to a similar camera movement (an inward dolly) already in progress in a different location, this one moving rapidly towards a door with a poster advertising the parapsychology conference. Once again, just as this shot is about to arrive at a close-up, there is another cut to an in-progress inward dolly, this time on the other side of the postered door. After proceeding through another set of doors and thick red curtains which sweep open seemingly of their own volition, the camera stops just inside the conference hall and zooms in on Helga and the other participants. Excepting the shot of Marc in the church, all of these shots are coded as point-of-view shots by the style of their movement, by the response of diegetic objects to the camera, and by the direct glances at the camera on the part of actors and extras. As we see commonly with horror films (especially Argento’s), however, the identity of the character whose perspective these point-of-view shots are supposed to represent is withheld.

Later in the same scene when Helga recognizes the presence of her murderer-to-be in the conference audience, however, the film returns to this point-of-view discourse as the killer rises out of her seat and runs away in haste. Retrospectively, therefore, it becomes clear that these inward dolly shots were meant not just to be point-of-view

shots, but point-of-view shots taken from the perspective of a murderer. In addition to establishing a certain dynamic around point-of-view, watching, and violence, these shots therefore also construct a specific cinematic-spatial figure – a border-crossing dolly into a space – as a kind of transgression or violation of that space by a violent and psychopathic person. Just as the killer in this film pierces the external shell of the human body with a hatchet, it is as if the camera itself represents an external force that somehow pierces an illusorily safe interior. This technique is the complement and counterpart to another very frequently used horror device that also figures prominently in this scene and in the rest of the film – the point-of-view shot from the killer’s perspective that softly bobs and lurks at or just past the margins of a room, stalking and waiting to pounce.

This series of spatial penetrations so early in the film frames the many camera positions that emphasize interior-exterior boundaries and movements that traverse them as acts of violation or confrontation. These happen frequently throughout the remainder of the film, especially in the initial presentation of a domestic space. For example, when we first see Marc’s apartment the camera cranes down a wall to reveal an open door beyond which Marc is getting dressed after presumably having sex with Gianna; later when the killer comes after Marc, the emphasis of the editing is squarely on all of his windows, doors, and skylights as potential points of fatal intrusion; both Marta’s and Carlo’s lover’s apartment initially get shot-reverse shot coverage, and as Marc investigates and interrogates more and more aggressively, the camera alternates between positions just inside and just outside the door. And finally, the absent cause of all of the film’s violence – Carlo’s father’s body – is buried in a house behind a plastered-over window, and when it is revealed to us in one of the film’s most shocking and disturbing

moments, the camera resolutely remains just beyond the edge of the room in which it is enclosed.

But the most obvious places where the film connects the crossing of a boundary between inside and out with violence is in its murder sequences. This is particularly evident in the sequence of Helga's death, which also vividly indicates the film's obsessive attention to domestic details and its approach to the home as a space of danger and uncertainty. This sequence begins with a freely moving camera that lightly dollies in on Helga talking on the phone before panning right to reveal what seems at this early point in the scene to be a narratively irrelevant hallway whose stucco walls are lined with a series of expressionist paintings. After a cut back to a shot of Helga that generates suspense while dollying into a tighter framing (once again underlining the aggressiveness of these inward camera movements), the lullaby of the opening credits mysteriously begins to play just at the moment that Helga utters horror dialogue's most stereotypically cursed words: "I am alone." A tensely oblique extreme close-up of Helga's profile from just the cheekbone up follows and renders the massive windows that loom in the right two-thirds of the frame quite threatening. Next, a rapid and precise series of eye-line matched cuts catalogue, map, and imbue the postmodern bourgeois trappings of Helga's home (highlighted by the expressionist paintings, somber and art deco Jewish artifacts, a rubber plant, and an absurdly large scallop shell wall sculpture) with suspense and terror. Eventually, this series of shots brings us to a tight close-up of the front door's handle just as the lullaby suddenly and ominously stops. Seconds later, the door bell rings, Helga's hand reaches for the knob, and she abruptly reels back in horror with a shriek. The door quickly opens, seemingly on its own volition just like the curtains at the conference, and

without any warning a hatchet comes down directly upon Helga and the ferocious assault begins. The killer – covered practically from head to toe in a kind of protective second skin made of black leather – penetrates Helga’s flesh multiple times with the cleaver, just before the film quickly cuts to Marc in the piazza below. Here already, therefore, the passage from exterior to interior is associated with violence – and the kind of violence that explicitly involves the integrity of the skin, the human body’s own boundary with external space.

Marc’s first view of the murder is through Helga’s window, at which he glances just after Carlo has underlined the thematic relationship between violence and penetration by perversely assuming that Helga’s scream had actually come from a “maiden” being “deflowered.” When Marc first sees Helga, she is attempting to scream for help while being crushed against the glass of the window. In a moment strikingly similar to the gallery sequence of *The Bird With the Crystal Plumage* that I discussed at length in the previous chapter, the glass of Helga’s window is able to conduct her image but not her sound. However, unlike in *The Bird With the Crystal Plumage*, this glass soon shatters as Helga is hacked through by the murderer. Helga’s scream is thus released, and her body is allowed to move out into exterior space just enough to be impaled upon the glass. The final cause of her death – as emphasized by two of the film’s most graphic close-ups – is the penetration of her neck by the glass itself. She has been killed, in other words, by the very membrane that separates interior from exterior space. Once Marc arrives in Helga’s apartment, his spatial trajectory echoes that of the dollying penetrations I outline above: it is dominated by his and the camera’s swift movement directly down the apartment’s central hallway, the earlier emphasis on which becomes clear at this point.

We can take the scene of Helga's murder as a kind of allegory for the film's approach to domestic space and to the "violence of demarcation" with which it is associated. Here, as throughout the film, a whole series of narrative, stylistic, and emotional effects are played out precisely around the borders between interior and exterior space. For while Helga's home is given a wholeness and stability by the film's extensive elaboration of her space and her objects, not only does this interior immediately become Benjamin's "site plan of deadly attacks," but the boundary itself between her apartment and the outside world is also presented as a zone of terror, trouble, danger, and death. This interior-exterior discourse is, furthermore, connected to the flesh as a border between the subject and the outside. Argento drives this point home with typical excess and enthusiasm when the glass itself, the very material of the threshold between inside and outside, becomes the final cause of her demise.

The Return of the Spatial Repressed

The other side of this problematic involving the division between interior and exterior space is the "depth" analysis of the interior itself. This involves the psychoanalytic, topographical model of space that I outline above. As we will see, the issues of repression and the return of the repressed raised by the narrative of *Deep Red* are often very closely associated with questions of space. Much of the film's geographic work, in fact, spatializes the psychoanalytic concept of the return of the repressed. The film is structured in many ways and on many levels around the notion of the uncanny, with its relentless spirals of home and not-home, familiar and unfamiliar, inside and outside, and private and public.

Argento has often claimed that his films are a form of “ramshackle” psychoanalysis, and *Deep Red*’s often exaggerated and overdetermined, pop-Freudian themes are quite obvious. For example, we are expected to read the murder sequence embedded in the opening credits – in which the young child takes on a masculine identity at the moment that he picks up the obviously phallic weapon – as a play on the primal scene and, hence, the formation of subjectivity and gender identity. Here, the fact that the mother has killed the father marks a reversal of the classic Freudian scenario, as it is the woman who is endowed with the active/phallic dimension. Within the film’s exaggerated Freudian register, this is meant to explain Carlo’s “sexual inversion,” his homosexuality. The event’s mise-en-scène, in particular the ways in which it signifies memory and pastness, are ripe for a psychoanalytic reading as well. That the violent event is depicted in the form of shadow play suggests a kind of literal embodiment of the Freudian notion of “screen memories,” in which a the traumatic kernel of a memory is never given in its full force but is instead displaced onto associated elements, in this case the literal screen that the far wall of the room becomes. The fact that this scene is presented in a sequence shot, the unusual, tight and low framing of which strips the event of its particulars (who has been murdered by whom) and leaves intact only its bare, Technicolor intensities (bourgeois domestic space and trappings, violence, childhood androgyny, the bloody knife, and, of course, the psychotic lullaby) suggests the participation of cinematic framing in the act of repression. This operates on both spatial and temporal levels, as both the edges of the frame and the fades at the beginning and end of the static shot prevent us – and, we assume whoever is the subject of this flashback – from seeing the entire picture of the murder. The limitations of this perspective are dramatically underlined by Marta’s

flashback to the same event near the end of the film which provides its full disclosure – here, analytical and continuity editing work to establish a stable and complete filmic space and, hence, a kind of narrative omniscience.

A parallel kind of epistemological uncertainty having to do specifically with space defines Marc's inability to remember the killer's face. When Marc returns to the scene of the crime late in the film, he realizes that his obsession with the paintings in the hallway must mean that they contain, in the words of Carlo, "something so important you don't even realize it." This suggests that Marc's poor memory of the night of the murder is not simple forgetfulness; rather, it is a kind of repressed object of perception that wants to return.

The film produces a simple justification for Marc's misperception: namely, that Marta's face appears so briefly that Marc has just enough time to perceive it, but not enough to recognize it. This is due to the remarkably complex staging of this scene. Marta is standing in a hallway, right in front of a painting of distorted faces. Directly across the hallway from her is a mirror. This mirror reflects her image, framed as if her face is just another in the painting, into the perpendicular hallway down which Marc rushes in his attempt to save Helga. In this hallway, there are a number of paintings from the same series that look almost identical to the one behind Marta. Therefore, as Marc rushes down this hallway and glances directly at Marta's reflection, he does not perceive the face he sees as a mirror image of Marta, but rather believes that it is just another of the many faces in the paintings next to him. It is as if everything is perfectly aligned for the total disruption of Marc's ability to comprehend the relationship between the space of the hallway, the space of the paintings, and the space of the mirror. As a result, he never

sees the parallel hallway where Marta, the murderer, is hiding.¹⁸⁶ Marc, then, effectively confuses three-dimensional, architectural space and two-dimensional, pictorial space. Sharing Marc's perspective as we do through point-of-view editing, we too are subjected to the same misperception. This scene therefore depicts – and effects upon the viewer – something like an optical and architectural version of Freudian parapraxis, a “Freudian slip” not at the level of the linguistic signifier, but at that of visual and spatial perception. The *image* of Marta's face has gone missing from Marc's memory and ours, then, precisely because of his/our inability to construct a coherent space around it: there is literally no place in his or our memories for it to take root.

This is where the parallel arises between the missing image of this scene (Marta's face in the mirror) and the film's primal scene (Marta's murder of her husband). The geographic placement of Marta's face is analogous to the spatio-temporal placement of the film's primal scene. The primal scene is embedded within the opening credits, and is coded as a flashback with no established present tense. It is therefore marked as incomprehensible, hovering on the border between diegetic and non-diegetic. Similarly, the image of Marta's face is embedded within a hidden and confusing pocket of space that frustrates both Marc's and our own ability to construct a coherent diegesis around it. Whether it is there or not cannot be affirmed, and it hovers on the border between two-

¹⁸⁶ Further complicating the already bewildering spatial complexity of this moment is the fact that the tracking shots that elaborate Marc's movement down the hallway are themselves spatially impossible: there would not have been enough room to fit a camera, crew, and tracking vehicle in the hallway, which means that one of the walls of the set would have had to be removed to accomplish the shot. This geographic dislocation and unknowability plays into the notion, articulated just moments later by Carlo, that what we see in front of us is just a veil covering up the supposed existence of a desired but hidden truth: “You know, sometimes, what you actually see and what you imagine get mixed up in your memory. Like a cocktail in which you can no longer distinguish one flavor from another. No, Marc. You *think* you're telling the truth. But, in fact, you're telling only your *version* of the truth. It happens to me all the time.”

dimensional virtuality and three-dimensional actuality. Both the primal scene and Marta's face, in other words, share the common property of being placeless. Much like the situation of the analysand in psychoanalysis, neither can be brought into the film's diegesis except through a retrospective act of reading.

Furthermore, it is this very act of reading, this attempt precisely to *place* these images that constitutes the narrative of the film proper. For if we knew the meaning of the primal scene, or if Marc had properly recognized Marta's image, we would have no investigation, and hence no story. The entire story arc of *Deep Red* is, in fact, structured around uncovering the meaning of the primal scene and deciphering the ways in which it explains the film's murders. It is here that the blending of the film's domestic horror and detective fiction influences is most apparent. For just as, as Slavoj Žižek notes, "The detective's role is... to resymbolise the traumatic shock, to integrate it into symbolic reality," so must Marc "reestablish normality" – and, hence, bring the narrative to a close – by finding the proper place of his memory images.¹⁸⁷ In this sense, the opening scene is posited not only as Carlo's but also as the film's primal scene in that the very flow of narrative is motivated by the inevitable return of this repressed scene. Marta's appearance in front of a psychic – and in public, no less – can therefore be seen as suggesting an unconscious desire to allow her repressed murder of her husband to return through mind-reading and to begin a chain of events that will allow her to compulsively repeat the act of murder. And, indeed, once the primal scene/secret murder is uncovered, Marta

¹⁸⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan Through Popular Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991) 58. "The detective's role," Žižek writes, "is...to resymbolise the traumatic shock, to integrate it into symbolic reality. The very presence of the detective guarantees in advance the transformation of the lawless sequence; in other words, the reestablishment of 'normality.'"

attempts to forcibly beat it back into oblivion by murdering all those who know anything about it.

Repression is perhaps most explicitly, chillingly, and obsessively articulated in this film by Helga's words as she reads the killer's thoughts during the conference:

There's a child... singing... in that house.... Death.... Blood.... All blood.... We must hide everything. Everything in the house back the way it was. No one must know. No one. No one. Forget it. Forget it. Forget it. Forever. Forever. Forever.

This directly alludes to the film's most powerful and obvious spatialization of repression: the secret, walled-in room in which Carlo's father is entombed. It is hard to imagine a more obvious Freudian architectural metaphor than the unburied corpse of a murdered father lingering for decades in a secret room only to become an "absent cause" to a series of psychotic murders. Once again, however, there is an explicit intertextual reference here, this one to the very founder of the domestic horror genre, Edgar Allen Poe. The narrator of Poe's 1843 short story, "The Black Cat," after "accidentally" murdering his wife in an attempt to kill a cat that had been tormenting him, places her body within the walls of his home in order to conceal it:

This hideous murder accomplished, I set myself forthwith, and with entire deliberation, to the task of concealing the body. I knew that I could not remove it from the house, either by day or by night, without the risk of being observed by the neighbors.... I determined to wall it up in the cellar – as the monks of the middle ages are recorded to have walled up their victims. For a purpose such as this the cellar was well adapted. Its walls were loosely constructed, and had lately been plastered throughout with a rough plaster, which the dampness of the atmosphere had prevented from hardening. Moreover, in one of the walls was a projection, cause by a false chimney, or fireplace, that had been filled up, and made to resemble the rest of the cellar. I made no doubt that I could readily displace the bricks at this point, insert the corpse, and wall the whole up as before, so that no eye could detect anything suspicious. And in this calculation I was not deceived. By means of a crow-bar I easily dislodged the bricks, and,

having carefully deposited the body against the inner wall, I propped it in that position, while, with little trouble, I re-laid the whole structure as it originally stood. Having procured mortar, sand, and hair, with every possible precaution, I prepared a plaster which could not be distinguished from the old, and with this I very carefully went over the new brick-work. When I had finished, I felt satisfied that all was right. The wall did not present the slightest appearance of having been disturbed.¹⁸⁸

The fate of Carlo's father's body in *Deep Red* is strikingly similar to that of Poe's victim. After the murder, we find out, the body was simply placed on a chair in the room and left to rot. Marta, meanwhile, would have a wall built where there used to be an entryway into the room, thus making the room into a tomb at the end of a hallway. It is precisely this that Marc will literally uncover through his investigations. On his first visit to the house, he notices something about the layout of its rooms and hallways that seems unusual. There is a strange, prematurely terminating hallway, and a discoloration on one of its walls. When he returns to the house a second time, he notices something even stranger – a glaring red stain on another wall that is otherwise covered with a smooth field of gray plaster. Marc scrapes off the plaster with shards of broken glass and pieces of metal that he finds in the house's flooded basement (which is also filled with various, decrepit household items and appears to be yet another spatial metaphor for the unconscious). Eventually, he uncovers a child-like painting of a little boy holding a bloody knife high in the air, a figure covered with blood in the foreground, and a Christmas tree in the background – another representation, in Carlo's own visual language, of the primal scene. Marc is then called away by suspicious neighbors. Just as he walks away and turns his back, the camera begins to slowly dolly in towards the wall, a small piece of plaster falls to the floor (yet another object within the film that acts

¹⁸⁸ Poe, "The Black Cat," in *The Portable Edgar Allen Poe* 305-306.

seemingly of its own volition), and a mysterious third figure who we will later find out is Marta is revealed. Once again, space, vision, and repression are imbricated here, and the image of Marta seems to almost force its way past its plaster covering with the force of the return of the repressed.

Similarly, the corpse of Marta's dead husband – the film's ultimate "repressed" – insistently returns. Because the corpse is entombed in an interior within an interior, it is almost literal embodiment of Freud's notion of the uncanny. One of the most important tenets of psychoanalysis as a theory of subjectivity is that human consciousness is never whole and complete. Rather, it is always constituted through repression and lack, and the inevitable return of the repressed. The uncanny is the name Freud gave to the emotional tenor generated by the return to consciousness of something that has been long forgotten. Hence it can, paradoxically, be defined as a familiar unfamiliarity, or an unfamiliar familiarity ("uncanny only because it is secretly all too familiar, which is why it is repressed," as Theodor Adorno puts it in his reading of Freud).¹⁸⁹ Since this act of forgetting is constitutive of the subject's sensation of ontological consistency, the return of the repressed threatens to undermine this consistency. The uncanny, the tone of unfamiliar familiarity, can therefore be quite a terrifying experience. And, indeed, *Deep Red* frames the "return" of Carlo's father's body precisely as, "that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar."¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁹ Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. C. Lenhardt, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (London: Routledge, 1984) 262.

¹⁹⁰ Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. David McLintock (London: Penguin Books, 2003) 124.

Furthermore, Freud has tied the notion of the uncanny – via its German root *heim*, or home – specifically to the issue of domestic space. In a very well known passage, Freud defines the uncanny through the ambiguity of its German signifier, *Unheimliche*:

In Daniel Sanders's *Wörterbuch der Deutschen Sprache* (1860, 1, 729), there is the following entry under the word "heimlich":

"Heimlich, adj., I. a) Belonging to the house, not strange, familiar, tame, intimate, friendly, etc. b) Of animals: tame, companionable to man. c) Intimate, friendly, comfortable; the enjoyment of quiet content, etc., arousing a sense of agreeable restfulness and security as in one within the four walls of his house.... II. Concealed, kept from sight, so that others do not get to know of or about it, withheld from others...."

Note especially the negative "un-": eerie, weird, arousing gruesome fear: "Seeming quite unheimlich and ghostly to him." "The unheimlich, fearful hours of night." "I had already long since felt an unheimlich," even, "gruesome feeling." "Now I am beginning to have an unheimlich feeling." ... "Feels an unheimlich horror." "Unheimlich and motionless like a stone image." "The unheimlich mist called hill-fog." "These pale youths are unheimlich and are brewing heaven knows what mischief." "Unheimlich is the name for everything that ought to have remained ... secret and hidden but has come to light" (Schelling)....

What interests us most in this long extract is to find that among its different shades of meaning the word "heimlich" exhibits one which is identical with its opposite, "unheimlich." What is heimlich thus comes to be unheimlich.... In general we are reminded that the word "heimlich" is not unambiguous, but belongs to two sets of ideas, which, without being contradictory, are yet very different: on the one hand it means what is familiar and agreeable, and on the other, what is concealed and kept out of sight.... We notice that Schelling says something which throws quite a new light on the concept of the Unheimlich, for which we were certainly not prepared. According to him, everything is unheimlich that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light.¹⁹¹

The *unheimliche*, the estrangement associated with the unfamiliar, is thus, paradoxically, a direct outgrowth of the *heimliche*, the familiar. And as the German root *heim* betrays,

¹⁹¹ Freud, *The Uncanny* 126-134.

the uncanny also has something specifically to do with the idea of the home, the domestic.

The *unheimlich*, uncanny, or, literally, “unhomely,” is itself therefore something like a spatialization of the concept of the return of the repressed. It is the inevitable externalization in some form or other of the unconscious, of the subject’s own ultimate buried, hidden, “interior space,” that always exists underneath consciousness and in an uneasy relation with it. The *heimliche* is a question of the familiar, akin to the interior, domestic space “within the four walls” of the comforting and secure home, but at the same time, it coincides with its opposite, the *unheimliche*, at the point at which the interior is also something precisely, “concealed and kept out of sight.”¹⁹² In its double interiority, buried, “concealed and kept out of sight” and to be “forgotten forever” even by those “within the four walls” of the house, the sealed room in *Deep Red* is the ultimate exemplar of the uncanny as a spatial category. The room once again makes repression into a spatial category, not this time via the edge of the frame or a tortuous *mise-en-abyme* of walls, mirrors, and hallways that trap and trick the gaze, but through the circumscription of an interior within an interior, an interior that is, in a manner of speaking, *so* interior as to become excluded from, exterior to consciousness.

Dislocating Deep Red

¹⁹² As both Mary Ann Doane and Samuel Weber point out, this play of presence and absence alludes specifically to castration anxiety. “For Freud,” Doane writes, “the paradigmatic process through which the familiar becomes strange is situated as the male’s relation to the female body.... The female genitals are uncanny because they represent, for the male, the possibility of castration and the concomitant rupture of the unified body image which supports a narcissistic identity.” See Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire: The Woman’s Film of the 1940s* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana U.P. 1987) 40. See also Samuel Weber, *The Legend of Freud* (Stanford, CA: Stanford U.P., 1982) 207-238.

Just as the word *heimlich* itself is ambiguous and blends with its opposite, so at the level of architectural space the uncanny designates a problematic and unsettled relation between interior and exterior space. *Deep Red* articulates this uneasy relationship in the ways that I've been discussing throughout this chapter. We must begin to ask at this point, however, how we can, in a general sense, account for the film's insistence on mobilizing all of these tropes, generic modes of signification, and intertextual references explicitly in the direction of domestic space and architecture. How, in other words, can we read the film's own troubled, obsessive relationship with space symptomatically?

One way to begin to think about this in the film's overall depiction of the Roman urban space in which it is set, and the ways in which it refers to Rome's highly problematic urban history through its settings and locations. For in addition to being a film about domestic space, *Deep Red* is also an unabashedly urban film, one that goes to great lengths to emphasize location shooting and the geographic and demographic particularities of its Roman setting. However, and quite crucially, the film's *settings* and its *locations* are in fact two very different places. While the film is set in Rome, it was shot – with the absolutely crucial exception of Santa Costanza, as we will see shortly – exclusively in the northern city of Turin. Given not only the enormous architectural, urbanistic, and social differences between these two cities, but also their fraught historical relationship, this kind of urban-cinematic dislocation is more than just sleight of hand.

The fact that *Deep Red* is set in Rome is indicated many times throughout the film. It is mentioned, above all, in the film's dialogue – first by the conference spectator whose mind Helga reads (and who claims to have “only arrived in Rome three hours ago”), later when Carlo's mother tells Marc that he is at 28 Via Crescenzo (a street in the

Prati area of Rome, near the Vatican and Piazza Cavour), subsequently in the first line of the story Marc reads that helps him locate the mysterious mansion (“in a house on the outskirts of Rome”), and finally, when Gianna asks if Marc’s ex-girlfriend is also from Rome.

But what most forcefully situates the diegesis of *Deep Red* in Rome, what makes it from its beginning a film that is somehow *about* Rome itself and its geographic and architectural history, is the choice of the Church of Santa Costanza as the film’s first location. Although the opening scene in Santa Costanza does nothing more for the narrative than what I’ve already listed above (introducing Marc, introducing a subsequently repeated and thematically important camera movement), the striking nature of the building itself along with Argento’s masterful, arching tracking shot seem to invest this scene and this location with a great deal of significance. Although the film never makes this charged meaning explicit, I’d like to suggest that the gravity of this scene has to do with Santa Costanza itself and the particular relationship that it has to Rome.

Argento could easily have chosen a more identifiable geographic marker of Rome than Santa Costanza. The Coliseum or St. Peter’s, for example, would have been more obvious choices. But what Santa Costanza lacks in picture postcard Roman recognizability it more than makes up for in historical identity. One of the ancient world’s most impressively preserved structures, Santa Costanza is an immediate signifier if not of Rome per se, than at least of Rome’s history. Indeed, from the time of its construction, Santa Costanza’s identity has been closely associated with death and pastness. Originally commissioned during the Roman Empire’s transition into Christianity in the fourth century, Santa Costanza was designed as a mausoleum for

Constantine the Great's daughters Constantina and Helena. Today, it forms one part of a vast funerary complex that also includes the Church of Sant' Agnese (itself built to commemorate the rather spectacular martyrdom of the early Christian), its sizeable catacombs, and the ruins of an ancient funerary hall.

In addition to its themes of history and death, the building's own architectural history could not be more quintessentially Roman. For example, as with countless structures in Rome, its original builders pillaged materials from older Roman structures to build it. In addition, over time, the space has been used and re-used by multiple groups (including varying religions) for multiple functions. Like so many buildings in Rome, it also shares structural elements with other, nearby buildings – some of which were constructed at different historical moments alongside, on top of, and even beneath Santa Costanza – to the extent that telling one from another is the subject of archeological research. Finally, despite its consecration as a church by Pope Alexander IV in 1254, many parts of the building have been torn down and then rebuilt throughout its history, making it very difficult to discern what is original and what is the result of subsequent interventions or reinterpretation by restorers.¹⁹³

Santa Costanza is, in a word, a classic, Roman architectural palimpsest.¹⁹⁴ In this sense, among its functions is to introduce the theme of Roman-ness into the film, and

¹⁹³ For a recent polemic about its origins and history see David J. Stanley, "New Discoveries at Santa Costanza," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 48 (1994) 257-261.

¹⁹⁴ In choosing Santa Costanza as the film's first discernible location, Argento also chose a building that is exceptionally symptomatic of the relationship between power and built space that haunts the history of the city. What is unique about this particular church is that its construction coincided with the emergence of Christianity as the dominant religion of the Roman Empire. The mix of pagan and early Christian signifiers thus produced includes a series of spatial particularities that still are fully intact today and that Argento capitalizes upon. The church's simple, fully circular plan, consisting only of a rounded apse separated by double columns from a

therefore to underscore the importance of the film's Roman setting. Because of this close association with Rome and its multiple layers of history, Santa Costanza also provides some clues for how space is to be read in a film that constantly destabilizes the category and produces mysteries and inconsistencies around both domestic architecture and urban geography in all the ways I've been discussing in this chapter. The presence of Santa Costanza in the film signifies, I would argue, that space – and especially Roman space – must always be examined not as a fixed and pure category, but rather as an unsettled and multi-leveled question – precisely, that is, as uncanny. If space here is a question of the repressed and the return of the repressed, then Santa Costanza can be said to represent at

circular ambulatory (around which Argento's camera tracks), for example, is typical of imperial Roman mausolea. Because the building was commissioned by the first Christian Emperor, Constantine, however, it was also used as a site of Christian burial and worship. In marked contrast with the traditional placement of the altar on one end of a nave as in the axial style that was to become the dominant trend in Roman ecclesiastical architecture just one century after the construction of Santa Costanza, and which eventually gave way to the cruciform plan that dominates to this day, Santa Costanza's altar had to be placed at the center-point of a circle (where it remains today, and, indeed, where we first see Marc at his piano in *Deep Red*) – precisely where the sarcophagus laid. The circular plan, with its mystical significations of multiplicity and holism, also seems to conflict with the Christian ideology of the “correctness” of the single, just path towards salvation alongside the one true god that is embodied so well in the axial and cruciform styles with their use of linear perspective, and is practiced in the tradition of the stations of the cross. The complexity of Santa Costanza's aesthetic patrimony is even clearer in the iconography of its famous ceiling mosaics which do not appear in the film. These include not only pagan geometric and floral shapes, but also highly typical Christian images of a young, blonde Jesus as a shepherd, and intentionally vague grape harvest and winemaking scenes that could be interpreted either as Bacchic or as references to Christ's self-proclaimed status as “the vine of life.” These latter are indicative of the highly contested struggle between the two cosmologies (polytheistic paganism that included emperor-worship on the one hand, monotheistic Christianity on the other), and of the fact that the artists of the moment, unsure of the eventual outcome of the struggle had to cater equally to both sides. The presence of these conflicting influences, the mystery surrounding both the origins of the building and its multiple, palimpsestic waves of restoration, and the combination of magnificent, life-affirming mosaics with the solemnity of a space intimately connected with death – all of this is architecturally uncanny indeed. This particular uncanny, however, also alludes to questions of power based given that the individual aspects which form the palimpsest of Santa Costanza come from radically different representational universes and regimes of authority, one about to eclipse the other.

the urban level what the haunted mansion with the father's corpse buried inside of it represents at the architectural level.

With Santa Costanza in mind as an interpretative clue, it begins to become clear that this uncanny space describes the film's version of Roman geography as well. In addition to elaborating upon the implications of Freud's theory of the uncanny for thinking about buildings and architecture, Anthony Vidler has also expanded the argument to encompass the experience of the modern metropolis as well:

As a concept... the uncanny has, not unnaturally, found its metaphorical home in architecture: first in the home, haunted or not, that pretends to offer the utmost security while opening itself to the secret intrusion of terror, and then in the city, where what was once walled and intimate, the confirmation of community... has been rendered strange by the spatial incursions of modernity.¹⁹⁵

Indeed, as I have detailed extensively, Rome, like all other cities, did undergo a series of "spatial incursions" in the name of modernity and modernization that altered its geography, its appearance, and the lives of its citizens. For all intents and purposes, these began, as we have seen, with the 1870 breach of the Porta Pia that made Rome the capital city of the newly formed nation of Italy. This marked the advent of the Third Rome, a phase in the city's history that would encompass the massive post-war interventions that I discuss in my introduction and first chapter.

In attempting to mobilize the uncanny as a critical, urban concept, *Deep Red* constructs an urban diegesis for itself that is not Rome per se, but is rather a kind of archeological archive of various stages in the city's development. A superficial glance at the film's settings tells us this. They include: a 4th century mausoleum-turned-church (Santa Costanza); a medieval cemetery; a Renaissance-era theater; late 19th and early 20th

¹⁹⁵ Vidler 11.

century gridded streets; modern, metropolitan spaces of leisure like arcades and cinema; a haunted Art Nouveau mansion (that of Carlo's childhood) inside of which is an early 20th century bourgeois domestic space complete with phonograph and electric light; a fascist-modernist piazza; and contemporary, postmodern spaces such as coffee bars, police stations, and newsrooms. In addition, in almost every case Argento uses framing, camera movement, and editing to emphasize the architectural particularities of the given location: the staid, low framing in the primal scene, the aforementioned arching tracking shot in Santa Costanza, the dolly through thick, velvet curtains onto a fully embracing symmetry in the theater, the iconic placement of the fascist piazza's enormous neoclassical river god squarely between Marc and Carlo, the extreme high angle shots of Marc and the Blue Bar that reference the visual modernism of the city symphony film, the extensive and fascinating shot-reverse shot confrontation between Marc, the camera, and the haunted mansion, etc.

With the exception of Santa Costanza, however, not one of these locations is in Rome. The vast majority of them (including the Teatro Carignano, Piazza C.L.N., the modern, gridded streets, the Galleria Subalpina, the Cinema Lux, and, of course, the Villa Scott) are in Turin. What makes the choice to shoot a film ostensibly set in Rome in Turin even more puzzling is that the Turin locations that Argento chose are very specifically and recognizably Turinese, and therefore, obviously, non-Roman. A good example of this is the choice of Piazza C.L.N. (Comitato della Liberazione Nazionale). As the location of the Blue Bar, the first murder, and both Marc's and Carlo's homes and places of work, Piazza C.L.N. serves as a kind of geographic epicenter for the film. But despite geographically *centering* the film's diegesis, the choice of Piazza C.L.N. actually

decenters the connection of that diegesis to Rome. This is not just because Piazza C.L.N. is not actually in Rome. It is also because, given the particular history of fascist planning and architecture in Rome, there is nothing that even comes close to resembling a piazza with this particular combination of urban density, rectilinear form, and a heavily foregrounded, fascist neoclassicist style anywhere in Rome. Such a piazza could have been constructed in EUR, of course, but then it would not have had nearly the building and population density around it that Piazza C.L.N. does.

Piazza C.L.N., in other words, fits into the Roman urban landscape as poorly as Santa Costanza would fit into the more modern Turinese landscape. An equally striking example is the choice of the Villa Scott as the haunted house supposedly, “on the outskirts of Rome.” Not only is Turin much more closely associated than Rome with the Art Nouveau style in general (not least of all because the 1902 and 1911 Esposizioni Universali were held there), but also, while Rome does have some areas of Art Nouveau architecture (around Viale Regina Margherita, especially in the Coppedè, for example), there is no place in or near Rome where one finds this style of architecture situated, as this building is, within a windy, forested series of roads of low population density. My point here is, simply put, that the supposedly Roman locations catalogued by this film range from being slightly at odds with to explicitly contradictory to the architectural possibilities provided by Rome’s actual urban plan and history. The very presence of this piazza and this building in a film that is ostensibly set in Rome – and that also features a landmark as typically Roman as Santa Costanza – renders place and location uncanny indeed in this film.

What must be explored in relation to the issue of the uncanny, then, is the significance of Argento's choice simply to *graft* Turin onto Rome in a film that is so concerned with various divisions, levels, and meanings of space. The urban morphologies of Rome and Turin have completely different origins and histories. Their chief difference at the level of urban design is that Turin is completely defined by the original grid of streets laid out by the Romans, while Rome's urban fabric – as I detail in my first chapter – is defined more by a dialectic between “opaque” and unregulated building in depth in the ancient center, the gridded, 19th and 20th century neighborhoods with their fraught relationships to history and power, and the sprawling periphery of the postmodern city. While Rome is one of the world's most historically complex cities and has an urban morphology that bears the chaotic and contradictory traces of multiple millennia of ambitious building, Turin is built on a program of limitless, rationalist clarity and elegance that is most clearly embodied in the vanishing point perspective provided by its wide boulevards, porticoes, and monumental buildings. It is an eminently legible and efficient city (especially by Italian standards), and it would therefore be forced to undergo far less trauma than Rome in its processes of modernization. Perhaps because of its urban geography, Turin was able to accommodate the city's transitions not only into modernist nationalism when it became Italy's first national capital (a title which it held only between 1861 and 1864), but also into Fordism when it became Italy's industrial capital.

Despite these differences, the choice to graft Turin onto Rome in this film is perfectly in keeping with what actually did happen in the planning and construction of modern Rome. As we have seen in various places throughout this dissertation, the dominant ideology of the post-Risorgimento planning of Rome was the kind of clarity

and efficiency of urban space that Turin was already built around. The idea of “Turinizing” Rome – that is, installing gridded neighborhoods as a means of regulating the future growth of the city – was even part of the official discourse of city planners.¹⁹⁶ As we have also seen elsewhere, the late 19th and early 20th century gridded neighborhoods of Rome – these little *piemontesi* islands, as Mario Sanfilippo has called them – represented the earliest emergence in Rome of what Henri Lefebvre has called “abstract space,” a homogenized and quantifiable form of space removed from any specific, “concrete,” and local qualities.¹⁹⁷ The “abstract” qualities of the film’s Turin locations are, furthermore, brought into relief by the pre-modern, heterogeneous, and palimpsestic space of Santa Costanza – exactly the kind of “absolute” space that, Lefebvre claims, was superseded under capitalism by abstract space.

The film’s uncanny combination of Rome and Turin therefore serves the critical purpose of highlighting the emergence of abstract space in Rome. It is interesting to note in this regard that despite shooting the film in the city that has the most rational and coherent urban fabric of any major Italian city, the geography of *Deep Red* itself remains almost completely incoherent. We are never provided with any understanding of how all of these many spaces relate to each other – no establishing shot that gives us a clear picture of urban geography (not even a retrospective one, as in the single sweeping crane shot in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* that situates that film’s story in the Flaminio), very few if any cues as to how to patch together different locations, and not even a map

¹⁹⁶ Insolera notes that the neighborhoods built in Rome in accordance with the Master Plan of 1873 (that is, immediately after Risorgimento) took their inspiration directly from those associated with the 19th century expansion of Turin. This was at least in part due to the importation to Rome of *piemontesi* architects and planners. See Insolera 35.

¹⁹⁷ Sanfilippo 3.

in a police inspector's office to give a sense that this spatial coherence is out there to be found and represented. It is in this way, perhaps, that *Deep Red* finally comes closest to representing Rome.

Conclusion: An Identity Crisis in Contemporary Dwelling

The choice to splice Rome and Turin together therefore has specific political and social meanings, and picking them apart may suggest a way in which we can begin read the set of symptoms and slippages introduced in this intertextual and hybrid genre film – the horror of the domestic, the violence of demarcation between interior and exterior, and the spatialization of repression, as I have laid them out above – around space, place, and location. The history of modern Rome is one of urban trauma, one laid on top of another, almost without end. The first, ironically, was the breach of Rome's safe interior confines by Garibaldian troops at the Porta Pia in 1870. Rome was forced to become a modern city practically overnight when it was immediately thereafter named capital of the new nation of Italy. Rome's quiet mediocrity was violently penetrated by the modernity of the outside world, and the city was forced to expand enormously in a very short time. The Roman city and Italian state government's historically unsuccessful, disorganized, and at times corrupt and/or apathetic response to such growth has been well documented.¹⁹⁸ Various regimes attempted to regulate growth and modernize the city by Turinizing it (building small pockets of gridded, residential space at its external reaches).

But because it was in constant crisis mode, certain crucial, socio-spatial questions around housing and the meaning of the domestic in Italian urban life that should have been addressed from the beginning of Rome's modernity were never properly raised. On

¹⁹⁸ See Fried, Insolera, Sanfilippo, and Vidotto.

the heels of WWII and the laissez-faire economic policies of the post-war economic boom, this situation came to a head in the form of a massive housing crisis. Throughout the 1950s and '60s, Italian cities, especially Rome, witnessed massive housing shortages and insufficiencies, the continuing centrifugalization and suburbanization of city space, and the consequent destruction of previously existing social communities. Instead of pursuing this housing crisis as the social problem that it was, postwar governments opted to see it as an opportunity to stimulate economic growth in the private sector. As the historian Paul Ginsborg has pointed out, the government's consistent choices, "to allow the maximum degree of freedom to private initiative and speculation in the building sector," turned a fraught situation into a disastrous one. New dwellings were built with blinding speed, and "they were built how and where private interest dictated. No provision was made for town-planning, none for parks, landscaping or even adequate parking facilities. Often the *palazzi* were constructed without regard for building norms or safety regulations." What resulted was what Ginsborg has called the "rape" of the Italian landscape, which was to become dotted with a series of "unplanned jungles of cement." By 1970, one of every six inhabited dwellings in Rome fell under the category of *edilizia abusiva*.¹⁹⁹

By the time of *Deep Red*, therefore, Rome was experiencing what we might call, borrowing from architectural theorist Steven Jacobs, an, "identity crisis of contemporary dwelling."²⁰⁰ The home and, quite literally, its *place* in Italian life were very much in question by the time the movements of the *Sessantotto* finally began to raise these

¹⁹⁹ Ginsborg 246.

²⁰⁰ Steven Jacobs, *The Wrong House: The Architecture of Alfred Hitchcock* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2007) 34.

questions in a visible form. Critical questions would also be raised, as we have seen, about the inhabitants of this dislocated spatial category of the domestic as well, the nuclear family, and their social and consumption patterns. The values of the economic miracle – the modern family’s autonomy, the emphasis on consumerism, the primacy of the private individual – were called into question at this moment. The historical dislocations of the *Sessantotto*, in other words, re-opened for the first time, as it were, a series of dormant questions around space, place, and the role of the domestic and the familial in Italian urban modernity.

Indeed, as we have seen, these economic miracle values also left quite visible traces on the spaces of everyday life in Italy. The very question of domestic space and its relation to urban space therefore appears with the force of the return of the repressed in *Deep Red*. Like the more general, philosophical questions around space that I raise in my introduction, these specific, historical questions were very much repressed by the particular unfolding of Italian and Roman modernity. *Deep Red*, I have argued, raises key historical questions around space and place and the rapidly changing meaning of the domestic in Italian, urban life at a time when all of these categories were indeed very much in flux. As a film that is explicitly “about” the space of the home, it challenges the meanings attributed to the domestic from its very first moments, by beginning with an exaggerated mockery of an idealized domesticity only to shatter this vision almost immediately with an act of violence, and then proceeding to depict a number of other “broken” homes (some literally, such as the mansion), all of which become actualized as spaces of violence and terror or contain a history of violence. Throughout this, it constantly approaches the very point at which interior space is articulated as separate

from exterior space as a point of violence, turns the return of the repressed into an explicitly spatial trope, and dislocates its own locations.

Marc chipping away at the tomb of the murdered father with all of his strength and wit provides yet another metaphor for the film as a whole. For *Deep Red*'s work is to laboriously and symptomatically use the platform of popular, genre cinema within the ethos of historical displacement provided by the *Sessantotto* to uncover a series of questions about the home and the family precisely entombed within Italian modernity.

CHAPTER THREE

Tenebre, EUR, and the Postmetropolis

“The sky was clear and the air clean, yet from the telescopes on the Gianicolo hill the Roman panorama appeared hazy and out of focus. The first protests came from a group of Swiss tourists complaining that they had wasted their hundred lire on malfunctioning devices. The city sent out an expert technician, who had the lenses replaced. Nonetheless, protests kept coming, in writing and by phone. City Hall sent out another expert to test the telescopes again. A peculiar new element emerged: the panorama from the Gianicolo appeared blurry not only through the lenses of the telescopes but also to the naked eye.”

-Luigi Malerba, “Consuming the View”²⁰¹

Rome, Overexposed City

In Luigi Malerba’s 1981 magical realist short story, “Consuming the View,” the normally pristine view of Rome’s *centro storico* from the telescopes on the Gianicolo hill is in the process of eroding and disappearing. But it is not just the telescopic image of Rome that has gone blurry; rather, the skyline itself has begun to lose its resolution and definition. Despite finding various types of particulate interference in the atmosphere around the hill, experts cannot settle on either a definitive cause or a working solution for the decomposition of central Rome’s iconic cityscape. Finally, a startling new theory emerges: “The constant gaze of tourists was consuming the Roman panorama; a subtle

²⁰¹ Luigi Malerba, “Consuming the View,” in Massimo Riva, ed., *Italian Tales: An Anthology of Contemporary Italian Fiction* (New Haven, CT: Yale U.P., 2004) 3.

leprosy was slowly corroding the image of the so-called Eternal City.”²⁰² Rome itself was vanishing; it was being, quite literally, visually consumed.

Malerba’s choice of Rome as the setting for this allegory of visual consumption, depletion, and the tourist gaze is a compelling one. In the story, Rome vanishes not because it slips into the dark shadows of invisibility, but rather because it disintegrates under the force of an ultra bright hypervisibility: it fades not to black, but to white. Malerba’s Rome is ruined by an excess of vision, by a hypertrophied gaze that has somehow become destructive of its object. It is not hidden in the mist or obscured by clouds; it simply has been looked at too many times.

Massimo Riva has suggested that this story illustrates one of the central themes of decades of modern Italian cultural production, that made in the midst of rapid and at times unsettling modernization and urbanization: namely, “remapping the *virtual place* that Italy is today, so familiar and yet unfamiliar to its inhabitants and its visitors alike.”²⁰³ By invoking the concept of the virtual, Riva posits a form of remapping for the story very unlike that which we encounter in various Italian modernist practices. It is generally accepted that one of the tasks of the generation that lived through Fascism and World War II in Italy, for example, was to “remap” the Italian nation and its cities – especially the capital, Rome – after the war. The fulcrum of this post-war remapping was, it is generally accepted, post-war cinema, in particular neorealism. Neorealism, as Angelo Restivo, Mark Shiel, David Forgacs, and others have argued, attempted to “remap” Rome in such a way as to produce a new ideological geography for the city and, by extension,

²⁰² Malerba 4.

²⁰³ Riva 3. My emphasis.

the nation.²⁰⁴ Nevertheless, on both ideological and formal levels, within neorealism the concrete existence of the city as an actual site always retained its primacy over the virtual image of the city.²⁰⁵

In Malerba, it is precisely this primacy that is called into question. Indeed, as Riva implies with his use of the word “virtual,” the story hints at a transition underway in the very ontology of the Italian city. Something fundamental has changed that has enabled this canonical city to come under an existential threat from vision itself, and it is this change that “Consuming the View” ultimately maps. What has changed, of course, is in the relation between the city itself and representations of the city. Malerba’s brief tale suggests, in short, that the image of Rome and the reality of Rome have become so intertwined as to be completely inseparable, that a virtual Rome has emerged to overlay and displace the supposedly “eternal” city. What Malerba “maps” is therefore a displacement in the very nature of the Italian city, one that resituates the city no longer in the traditional, corporeal-phenomenological experience of space, place, and community, but rather in the virtual one of vision, visuality, and technological reproducibility. In this media-saturated Rome, virtual and actual, image and reality, sign and referent, sight and site, have collapsed.

The invisibility of Rome in Malerba’s story is therefore not the result of any lack, of the city, for example, being out of scene, off frame, blocked, repressed, or obscured. It

²⁰⁴ See David Forgacs, *Rome Open City (Roma città aperta)* (London: British Film Institute, 2000), Restivo, *The Cinema of Economic Miracles*, and Mark Shiel, *Italian Neorealism: Rebuilding the Cinematic City* (London: Wallflower Press, 2006).

²⁰⁵ This is simply to restate in urban terms the commonly accepted notion that neorealist film images purported to have a specific relationship with the “real” itself. This general argument stems from the realist film theory of André Bazin, who is still, in many ways, the most significant commentator on neorealism. See Bazin, *What Is Cinema? Vol. 2*, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: U.C. Press, 1971) 16-101.

is, rather, the result of an excess, of too much vision – of too many images. Like a long-exposure image of single, feature-length film, in which twenty-four frames per second collect over the span of two hours on a static wall and eventually amount to a shimmering, ghostly white rectangle, Malerba's Rome is endlessly and serially overlaid with images of itself – an overexposed, ultra bright fade-to-white on a massive, urban scale.²⁰⁶ Rome is no longer so much a concrete bearer of social, cultural, historical, and geographic orientation as it is a regime of images; no longer simply the material from which a cinematic diegesis takes form, but rather a diegesis – a “virtual place” – unto itself.

The Postmetropolitan Genesis of Tenebre

Malerba's story therefore augurs a new regime of what Edward Soja has called “postmetropolitan” urbanity. An abbreviated form of “postmodern metropolitan,” Soja uses the term postmetropolitan to begin to unify socio-cultural, socio-economic, and socio-spatial perspectives on what is new and different about the contemporary city.²⁰⁷ Owing to developments in urbanity itself (including the growing hegemony of abstract space and suburban sprawl), in media technology and dissemination (especially electronic transmission), and in culture (changing notions of space, time, and subjectivity), the city has indeed undergone fundamental changes during the period of late, multinational capitalism. The contemporary city, Soja argues,

²⁰⁶ Here I am referring specifically to the work of the Japanese photographer Hiroki Sugimoto which is discussed at length in Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film* (London: Verso, 2002) 50-53.

²⁰⁷ Soja, *Postmetropolis* xii.

seems to be increasingly unmoored from its spatial specificity, from the city as a fixed point of collective reference, memory, and identity.... An increasing blurriness intercedes between the real and imagined city, making the ‘city’ as much an imaginary or simulated reality as a real place.²⁰⁸

In the place of the familiar metropolis, we now find a postmetropolis, a new sense of urban geography and identity defined, according to Iain Chambers, by a “sweeping urban fringe” of “endless suburbs” – more of a “metro-network... linked up via the telephone, the TV, the video, the computer terminal, and other branches of the mass media” to a larger, global, urban network.²⁰⁹

“Consuming the View” figures precisely this shift within the Roman context of the 1970s and 80s by imagining a city vanishing under the weight of its own representations. This moment witnessed not only the massive expansion in the role of mass media in everyday, Italian urban life (as I detail in my introduction), but also fundamental urban geographic changes as well. During the economic miracle and after, Mario Sanfilippo notes, “the city exploded into its surrounding areas; it fragmented; it subdivided. The population fractured into so many metropolitan ‘tribes’ which often had no historical memory of the old city and, more often, ignored each other’s existence.”²¹⁰ Malerba’s story can be seen as symptomatically recording these very shifts. In this way, it helps to bring into relief some of the central questions of this dissertation: what are some of the parameters and consequences of Rome’s transformation from a modern into a

²⁰⁸ Soja, *Postmetropolis* 150.

²⁰⁹ Iain Chambers, *Border Dialogues: Journeys in Postmodernity* (New York: Routledge, 1990) 53. See also Saskia Sassen, ed., *Global Networks, Linked Cities* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

²¹⁰ Sanfilippo 64.

postmodern city? What are some of the ways in which we can detect the traces of this unfolding history of neocapitalism in Roman urban space itself? How are these issues connected to questions of power? How are cinema and other forms of mass visual consumption imbricated in this process? And how do Dario Argento's films make this particular history visible – that is, how do they *read* Rome?

Dario Argento's 1982 *Tenebre* (which can be literally translated into English as “shadows” or “darkness,” but was released in the UK and US as *Unsane*) raises precisely these questions. Like *Deep Red* (1975), this film represented a return to the *giallo* for Argento after a foray into another genre. Between *Deep Red* (1975) and *Tenebre*, Argento made two of his most important films – the supernatural horror pieces *Suspiria* (1977) and *Inferno* (1980). The first two of a three-part adaptation of excerpts from Thomas de Quincey's 1845 *Suspiria de Profundis* (the third being 2007's *La terza madre/The Mother of Tears*), each of these films concerns one of a triumvirate of powerful, ancient witches. The two witches of *Suspiria* and *Inferno* install themselves in homes built specifically for them (respectively in Freiburg and New York) and that stand as architectural embodiments of their evil. Argento's interest in geography and narrative space remains foregrounded in these films, especially in their murder sequences, which once again are the occasion of now even more intensified, elaborate, and surreal spatial and architectural explorations.

The chief characteristic of both films is, as Maitland McDonagh has bluntly put it, their “mind-boggling artificiality.”²¹¹ Argento would use the realm of the paranormal – not to mention the literary foundations of the film's scripts in De Quincey's opium-induced fantasies – to motivate all sorts of cinematic experiments, especially in the fields

²¹¹ McDonagh 128.

of light and color. The mise-en-scène of both films is a hallucinatory mixture of Disney-esque fairy tales and early horror cinema (“Lewis Carroll meeting Caligari,” according to critic John Coleman).²¹² This is underscored by the films’ lush, dense, and highly saturated cinematography, the result of Argento’s and cameraman Luciano Tovoli’s decision to use a discontinued, 1950s Technicolor stock for *Suspiria* and to imitate its unique, three layer color process using contemporary stock in *Inferno*. Both films, in McDonagh’s excellent description, present a “psychedelic world of swirling red, yellow, and blue jewel-tones... in which the riotous day-glo colours embody the hypersensitive world of witchcraft and sorcery.”²¹³

That *Tenebre* is a sharp departure from this is signaled in many ways. To begin with, although filmed once again by Tovoli, *Tenebre* could not possibly look more different from its hyper-colorful antecedents. As Domenico Monetti has put it, “contrary to its title, *Tenebre* is a white film; almost as white a film as one could make.”²¹⁴ Indeed, the film is almost completely drained of color – excepting, of course, the excessively bright, Pollock-esque swaths of primary red blood that so frequently splatter the otherwise antiseptic sets. That *Tenebre* is a *giallo* and not another supernatural horror fantasy is obvious from the film’s first moments, not only because of the pages of protagonist Peter Neal’s newest hard-boiled, murder mystery book, *Tenebre*, read aloud during the opening credits, but also because of the way in which the film so powerfully

²¹² Quoted in McDonagh 128. McDonagh also notes that Argento and cinematographer Luciano Tovoli aimed with *Suspiria* to capture the visual style and color palette of Disney’s *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937). McDonagh 142. For an article-length approach to the cinematography of *Suspiria* in particular, see Stanley Manders, “Terror in Technicolor,” *American Cinematographer* 91.1 (Feb 2010) 68-76.

²¹³ McDonagh 143-144.

²¹⁴ Domenico Monetti, “Un crudele gioco metalinguistico. *Tenebre*,” in Zagarrio 299.

and immediately situates its story as an urban one. With its very first shot, this “film of clear, cold light” emerges with an almost playful vengeance from the gaudy, colorful confines of supernatural, domestic horror that define its predecessors within Argento’s oeuvre. After the opening credits, Peter is seen biking across the 59th Street Bridge on his way to Kennedy Airport to catch a flight to Rome. He is tracked by a backwards-moving camera that bumps along through the extended fabric of New York City on a typically bleak, gray day. From its very beginnings in New York, then, and throughout the remainder of the film in Rome, in its theme, setting, stylistics, and color palette, *Tenebre* plainly announces itself as an urban *giallo*.

That it is an urban film, however, does not quite in itself account for Argento’s unusual choices around cinematography and mise-en-scène. Argento’s earlier, noir-influenced, urban *gialli* (which include both of the films I’ve discussed in this dissertation – *The Bird With the Crystal Plumage* and *Deep Red*), for example, with their utter excesses around color and shading, somewhat match the visual style of these later supernatural horror films. Argento intended *Tenebre*, however, to be a “rupture” with his previous work: “leaving the enflamed chromatism of the earlier films,” he has claimed, “I practically switched to black and white.”²¹⁵ Although it was shot using color stock, *Tenebre* is, especially seen in the context of *Suspiria* and *Inferno* and even the earlier *gialli*, a remarkably desaturated, bright, flat, and empty film. What does begin to account for these choices is the fact that, with *Tenebre*, Argento attempted to produce a radically new depiction of urbanity as such, one that, as we will see shortly, would respond to specific shifts in the identity and morphology of the city in which it was shot exclusively on location, Rome.

²¹⁵ Maiello 144.

Argento has hinted at this new approach to representing urban space in a number of interviews. In particular, he specifically ties his unusual decision to eliminate all shadows from a film with a title signifying “shadows” to a series of experiences he had with the postmodern, postmetropolitan city par excellence, Los Angeles.²¹⁶ While in Los Angeles on business with MGM, Argento began to receive increasingly threatening phone calls from an obsessive fan who had gotten his room’s phone number from the company.²¹⁷ This experience provoked a reconsideration on Argento’s part of the relationship between urbanity and violence, as well as a shift in thinking about his new film, then in its developmental stages:

It seemed to me symptomatic of that city – the home of senseless crime. I wanted to put that sort of atmosphere into *Tenebre*. To kill for nothing says it all.... While we were staying at the Hilton Hotel, three men entered and shot dead a Japanese tourist. I also heard about a car driving past a line outside a cinema and shooting randomly at it. Why? Maybe this sort of violence does have a warped reasoning behind it. But just imagine if there wasn’t any. It was precisely that sort of mythology that excited me and hopefully it is contained in *Tenebre*.²¹⁸

Above all, that such senseless violence could irrupt “in this mild city, always so bathed in sunlight,” inspired Argento to move past the old, horror formula that he has called, “darkness=fear,” by instead “showing that darkness is not the only place where crime and

²¹⁶ Soja dedicates entire chapters and sections to the study of Los Angeles in both *Postmodern Geographies* (“It All Comes Together in Los Angeles,” 190-221, and “Taking Los Angeles Apart: Towards a Postmodern Geography,” 222-248) and *Postmetropolis* (“An Introduction to the Conurbation of Greater Los Angeles,” 117-144, and “Lived Space: Rethinking 1992 in Los Angeles,” 349-415).

²¹⁷ Maiello 142.

²¹⁸ Quoted in Jones 120. In Italian, the word *senso* (as has been similarly illustrated with the French word *sens*) has two meanings: signification or meaning on the one hand, and direction or heading on the other. In my analysis, I draw on both of these meanings.

horror can occur.”²¹⁹ *Tenebre*’s bright, almost overexposed visual plan, inspired by this particularly urban experience of senseless and ubiquitous violence, would be meant to demonstrate that even the “darkest” events could suddenly irrupt in the brightest of places. The result of this approach – the diegesis of the film – marks, according to Roberto Pugliese,

a passage from the deepest abysses of *Inferno* to the exalted peaks of postmodernity *en plein air* – where bare and functional furnishings dominate; where light falls horizontally and flatly on everything; where streets, buildings, and gardens are empty; where everything is white, vacant, sun-drenched, and glacial.²²⁰

Although this is a description of *Tenebre*, it resembles a great deal of critical literature on Los Angeles itself, the city that inspired the film. It is, in fact, strikingly similar to Frederic Jameson’s famous analysis of the Westin Bonaventure Hotel in downtown Los Angeles – a “total space” whose immersive qualities eliminate, in Jameson’s argument, the very urban, architectural, and geographic cues with which humans are accustomed to mapping themselves in space (clear boundaries with the outside world, depth, light, volume, etc.).²²¹ For Jameson, therefore, the hotel, and by extension the entire fabric of Los Angeles, stands as an analogy for the unrepresentable and increasingly abstract totality of multi-national capitalism.

If *Tenebre* can, in this sense, be seen as a kind of fantastical evocation of postmetropolitan Los Angeles, then what I will be arguing throughout this chapter is that this fantasy is produced for the purposes of raising specific questions around postmetropolitan Rome, the city in which the film is shot and set. For what had occurred

²¹⁹ Maiello 144-145.

²²⁰ Pugliese 50.

²²¹ Jameson, *Postmodernism* 38-45.

in Rome in the seven years between Argento's previous Roman film, *Deep Red*, and *Tenebre* – that is, between 1975 and 1982 – was the total entrenchment of the kind of abstract, global, and postmodern city space that I have been discussing throughout this dissertation. By 1982, all of the urban interventions that I discuss in my introduction – the growth of freeway culture, the southwestward expansion and development of EUR associated with the 1960 Olympics, the growing dominance of SGI and other private real estate conglomerates and, with this, the emergence of American-style subdivisions, and, finally, the presence of an international airport – had become dominant, even constitutive aspects of Roman life. Furthermore, with the end of the period of the *Sessantotto*, as Paul Ginsborg notes, there was far less of a critical counterbalance than there had previously been to this form of urban growth and the emergent society it represented. On the contrary, in fact, this society and its space, which had its origins in the economic miracle, had become rather accepted by the 1980s:

In the fifties and sixties the *ceti medi* [middle classes], attracted by the bright lights of consumerism and the possibility of individual advancement, had become the firm supporters of the moderate, democratic status quo. In the 1980s it is possible to suggest that this consensus, first established amongst the *ceti medi*, has become generalized to society as a whole. In other words, the traditional values of the family have become wedded to those of parliamentary democracy and consumer capitalism. Such values have, with very few exceptions, become predominant in all sectors of society. Italy's great transformation, then, has been in keeping with the model of modernity which first emerged at the time of the "economic miracle"; a model with strong American influences, which was heavily contested between 1968 and 1973, but which seems to have entered a golden age in the 1980s.²²²

With *Tenebre*, Argento returned to the urban problematic of Rome precisely on the other side of these shifts. This film's depiction of Rome is not surprisingly, therefore, a

²²² Ginsborg 424-425.

somewhat cynical one: this Rome, in the ways that I will detail throughout this chapter, is a fully corporatized, consumerist city populated by politically and socially disengaged, identity-less non-individuals.

EUR and the Proleptic Eternal City

In his attempts to capture this new, postmetropolitan sense of Roman urban geography and subjectivity, Argento made the choice to set *Tenebre* in the future.

“*Tenebre*,” he says,

isn’t based in the present, but about five or more years in the future. It was never meant to be a story about something that is happening now.... *Tenebre* occurs in a world inhabited by fewer people with the results that the remainder are wealthier and less crowded. Something has happened to make it that way but no one remembers, or wants to remember.²²³

This is, as McDonagh notes, reflected in the film’s representation of the city itself and its architecture:

Tenebre takes place in a city of dazzling white concrete, high-rise apartment buildings, malls, airports, television studios, and modern private homes; no baroque or rococo influence is permitted to sully the mise en scène, no superfluous ornament clutters its clean planes. It’s all cool, stark, and slightly remote.... Its imaginary geography is pieced together out of fragments of “Rome”... that emphasize vast underpopulated boulevards, piazzas that look like nothing more than suburban American malls, hard-edged Bauhaus apartment buildings, anonymous clubs and parking garages.²²⁴

But unlike other urban dystopian films, which often combine studio work with location, shooting in heavily altered if somewhat recognizable urban sites (and Argento specifically cites Ridley Scott’s classic *Blade Runner*, which also came out in 1982, the

²²³ Quoted in McDonagh 166.

²²⁴ McDonagh 166.

same year as *Tenebre*), Argento chose to shoot exclusively on location and without any modifications whatsoever. He produced, in other words, a “future” Rome at the level of *Tenebre*’s diegesis by working exclusively, at the pro-filmic level, with what was available to him in his actual, contemporary Rome.

While much of the film may appear as though it could have been shot in a literally and figuratively empty “anywhere,” *Tenebre* was, in fact, shot exclusively in one particular – and particularly fraught – area of Rome. The film’s, “city of dazzling white concrete, high-rise apartment buildings, malls, airports, television studios, and modern private homes,” is none other than EUR (Esposizione Universale di Roma), the fascist showpiece city originally commissioned by Mussolini that, after the war, became the center of global corporate power in Rome.

Argento himself has referred to EUR as, “a kind of imaginary city” that “doesn’t exist.”²²⁵ Although EUR does decidedly exist, given its original conception as the site of fascist Italy’s World’s Fair (in 1941), Argento’s comment does make a certain amount of historical sense. EUR was intended as a kind of simultaneous microcosm and utopian fantasy of the actualities and potentialities of Roman urbanity. The proximity of 1941 to the twentieth anniversary of fascist rule in Italy (Mussolini’s famous “March on Rome” was in October 1922) allowed the regime to conceive of the project (which came to be called E’42) as a commemoration of twenty years of fascist achievement. But the object was also, according to Borden S. Painter, “to create a *new* quarter of Rome consistent with fascist Rome’s *new* status as the center of the *new* Italy’s *new* fascist empire.”²²⁶ At the level of style, this paradoxical combination of historical renewal and period marking

²²⁵ Pugliese 10.

²²⁶ Pugliese 10. Emphasis added.

would be embodied in the monumental, neoclassicist aesthetic preferred by chief architect Marcello Piacentini. E'42 was to be dominated by clean and orderly horizontal lines, oversized columns, revisionist mosaics, exaggeratedly muscular statues, and an obscene amount of white travertine marble.

This use of the past for purposes of renewal is not the only temporal paradox that would come to define EUR. As John David Rhodes has suggested, from its inception, the EUR district has been bound up within a very complex, “problematic of periodization and historicity.”²²⁷ EUR refers to the past through its anniversarial intentions, but it does so, as Rhodes notes, in fascism’s favored temporal mode – that of prolepsis and inevitability:

The deepest intentions of its framers (with Mussolini playing a very hands-on role among them) were to deploy it as a period marker, or a marker of periods: the Fascist period (1922-42) that filled up the space-time of whatever came before it and the same Fascism that would continue (it was hoped, believed) as an ongoing, self-generating period (1942-∞) that would extend into time, yet without ever aging.²²⁸

The same regime whose pretensions to historical redemption led it as far as producing a new calendar (with October 1922’s march marking the first day of “Year One of Fascism”) intended with E'42, in other words, to produce a paradoxically new “eternal” city. This “new” eternal city was, furthermore, meant both to mirror and re-imagine the old Eternal City on some level: not only did the neoclassicism of E'42 refer specifically to Augustan Rome, and not only would it be the site of and occasion for the construction of the most detailed reproduction of the ancient city ever produced (the enormous model in the Museo della Civiltà Romana), but in addition, as Rhodes notes, “the area occupied

²²⁷ John David Rhodes, “The Allure of the Fascist Suburb,” forthcoming in *The Place of the Moving Image* (Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press, 2010).

²²⁸ Rhodes, “The Allure of the Fascist Suburb.”

by the original exhibition site was planned to occupy an area exactly equal to that of Rome's *centro storico*.²²⁹ E'42 would, it was hoped by its framers, move forward into the fascist future as a parallel, simulacral, Imperial Rome.

In addition to providing a spectral image of the ancient city with a distinctly bombastic and fascist hue, E'42 was also to serve a specific and rational urban purpose: namely, to organize the expansion of the rapidly and haphazardly growing modern city southwestward – symbolically, towards the same Mediterranean Sea that the Roman Empire dominated at the time of Augustus. This was one of the few goals that E'42's planners achieved, although through no fault of their own. For while the sudden halt of construction due to the war and the fall of the regime left E'42 nothing more than, in the words of architectural historians Luigi di Majo and Italo Insolera, “an enormous marble deposit,” EUR, as the district came to be re-christened after the war, did indeed, as I discuss in my introduction, play an important function in guiding postwar growth.²³⁰ “After the World's Fair,” Rhodes writes, “E'42's monumental core would serve as a nucleus of conurbation that would encourage an orderly expansion of Rome's suburban growth.”²³¹ In addition to effectively doubling Rome, therefore, EUR would help to displace the city's center of gravity in the direction of new suburban municipalities resting on top of reclaimed swampland, and all the way to the sea.

This goal would not be effectively achieved until after the war, however, at which point the postwar growth organized around the monumental core of EUR would, as a

²²⁹ Rhodes, “The Allure of the Fascist Suburb.”

²³⁰ Luigi Di Majo and Italo Insolera, *L'Eur e Roma, dagli anni Trenta al Duemila* (Bari: Editori Laterza, 1986) 63.

²³¹ Rhodes, “The Allure of the Fascist Suburb.”

direct response to reconstruction and the Marshall Plan-provoked economic miracle, be resolutely corporate-bourgeois in nature. In a short time, the ghostly and monumental fascist heterotopia – “a future already forgotten” and “a dream interrupted... created for ghosts” in the words of Federico Fellini – would, under the management of post-war building commissioner Virgilio Testa (a longtime Christian Democrat mid-level technocrat with a strongly free market ideology) undergo a rebirth and a shift in symbolic registers.²³² By the 1950s, it would become, in Rhodes’ words, “a modern, progressive residential and business district,” one that, according to architectural and urban historian Manfredo Tafuri, signified, “Italy’s confidence and optimism as it ‘modernized’ itself in the midst of a real economic miracle.”²³³ These ideals were materialized in the lush and sunny district’s towering glass and steel international style office buildings (most famously that of ENI, Italy’s national energy corporation, but also including the new headquarters of Alitalia, Esso, various banks, and the Christian Democratic Party itself), wide boulevards and distended green spaces, large apartment blocks, and detached, single-family dwellings built to house a new caste of middle class clerical employees.²³⁴ All of this began to define the architectural, urban, and social landscape of EUR throughout the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, eventually becoming, in Argento’s hands, *Tenebre*’s very “city of dazzling white concrete, high-rise apartment buildings, malls, airports, television studios, and modern private homes.”

²³² The quotation is from the made for television film, *Fellini e Eur* (1972). Quoted in Rhodes, “The Allure of the Fascist Suburb.”

²³³ Manfredo Tafuri, *History of Italian Architecture, 1944-1985*, trans. Jessica Levine (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990) 81. Also quoted in Rhodes, “The Allure of the Fascist Suburb.”

²³⁴ Vidotto 291.

The presence of this EUR in the Roman urban landscape meant that the city of Rome would indeed expand in the direction of Mussolini's *mare nostrum*, and in a manner that embodied and materialized the bourgeois (and, indeed, fascist) values of uniformity, conformity, privatization, and consumption that were so heavily privileged by economic miracle Italy. Nowhere would this be more evident than in the formerly fascist EUR's "garden city" areas like upper middle class, Southern California-esque Casal Palocco, the section of postwar EUR in which *Tenebre* is largely shot.

A kind of residential suburb of a suburb southwest of EUR, Casal Palocco is one of the final neighborhoods of the periphery of Rome on the direct line (formed by Via Cristoforo Colombo) leading from the ancient city center to the sea. It is unique not only in the history of Rome but also that of Italy itself as the very first entire neighborhood designed and built from scratch by a single, private corporation, namely SGI. As we have seen, SGI's effect on Rome during this period was immeasurable. In the years after the war, the conglomerate began buying cheap, unused land from the government for purposes of private development. Under the majority ownership of Gulf Western, SGI, according to Vittorio Vidotto, was, "the leading protagonist in the transformation of Rome," during the Christian Democrat 60s and 70s. In all of its interventions, such as that of the infamous Monte Mario Hilton (constructed in 1961) and, indeed, Casal Palocco (finished in 1962), SGI aimed to offer its clients, "a particularly American form of modernity." As such, during this time, SGI would come to be seen as synonymous with rampant building speculation and a consumerist, bourgeois lifestyle centered on the nuclear family. It was, according to Vidotto, "public enemy number one"; its projects,

“the *longa manus* of an obscure and hidden power that would condition and control almost all public sector and administrative activities in the field of building.”²³⁵

The design and construction phases of Casal Palocco were typical of SGI’s *modus operandi*. In the late 1950s, after a series of studies that took the new district’s design team all throughout Europe, Japan, and North America, chief architect Adalberto Libera completed a plan for the sprawling, 900-acre residential site that would make enormous provisions for green space. It would emphasize, above all, according to Casal Palocco’s public relations department, the quintessentially bourgeois value of “livability”:

Greenery was considered the most important trait of the planned neighborhood: through extensive landscaping work, patches of trees and shrubbery and lawns of exceptional quality were to be harmonized throughout the entire area with the construction of residences. Also studied were the distances by foot – relative to their importance in the lives of the would-be citizens – necessary to reach a whole series of services like churches, schools, malls, and especially “Le Terrazze,” the mall that would become the center of social life. The team determined various ways in which the distribution of urban fabric could function as a mode of structuring the life of the community. As for the homes themselves, they were built not on principles of beauty, but on those of livability. All of the studies were closely connected to an analysis of social structure.²³⁶

Construction on this American-style subdivision began immediately, a strategy which allowed Casal Palocco to be a *fait accompli* by the time the dust settled on the comically tumultuous debates leading up to the city government’s new Master Plan of 1962.²³⁷

Not surprisingly given this historical background, and like so many similar examples of 1960s residential urbanism and social engineering, the social reality of this

²³⁵ Vidotto 284.

²³⁶ Paolo Scacciavillani, “La storia,” and “Casalpalocco memoria da non perdere,” Consorzio di Casalpalocco. 3 January 2010 <<http://www.consorziocasalpalocco.it/storia.htm>>

²³⁷ Scacciavillani.

so-called “community” – in which one can supposedly find a, “harmonious integration of architecture, nature, housing, and services,” and “tree-lined pedestrian zones equipped with fountains, benches, and various shopping possibilities,” – is today and always has been one of individualism and privatization centered above all on the nuclear family.²³⁸ Casal Palocco, according to its official website, is now populated by forward thinking people, “individuals who already, forty years ago, made a choice to live here... based on certain lifestyle issues such as health and livability.”²³⁹

Casal Palocco represents, in other words, one of the quintessential elements of the postmetropolis – what Soja would call, “a mass produced suburban municipality.” It would, like similar developments throughout Europe and in the United States, be a place for those in need of breathing room, of refuge from the supposed horrors of the modern metropolis, and of the insularity and protection of a home space cut off from the city’s well-defined – if imperfect and sometimes downright dysfunctional – neighborhood communities.

•

In all of these ways, Argento found in EUR and Casal Palocco the perfect places to make visible on film the new identity of postmetropolitan Rome. Geographically and architecturally, these zones are direct manifestations of the kind of abstract, global, and postmodern space that had taken over Rome after the war. Urbanistically, they are – and contain – microcosms, virtual doubles, and simulations of the city. Historically, they suggest the unusual and contradictory rhetorical temporality of prolepsis or anticipation that Argento wished to convey by setting his film in the near future. And socially and

²³⁸ Scacciavillani.

²³⁹ Scacciavillani.

culturally, they represent just the kind of total reification of everyday life and its spaces that Henri Lefebvre laments – and which another Roman filmmaker, Pier Paolo Pasolini, has called the, “ongoing banality of the fascism of consumer capitalism.”²⁴⁰ As we will see in the next section, these historically fraught sections of Rome would become the background against which *Tenebre*’s story of brutal and senseless violence would occur. It is in the way in which this narrative activates this space that we can see Argento’s own critical reading of Rome at work.

The Dissemination of Violence

As we have seen, the choice to shoot an “urban” film not just in EUR but in Casal Palocco (and, as we will see, at the still relatively new international airport at Fiumicino) has enormous significance. *Tenebre*’s diegesis is, not surprisingly, the exact kind of overall, decentralized morphology of space, light, and lifestyle – green, sunlit, and manicured, and populated with sites of transport, transmission, and consumption – that our minds tend to conjure up when we imagine Iain Chambers’ postmetropolitan, “sweeping urban fringe of endless suburbs.”²⁴¹ In what remains of this chapter, I will demonstrate the ways in which *Tenebre* uses almost every tool at its disposal – narrative structure and organization, characterization, cinematic style and technique, and narrative perspective and character point-of-view – to insistently figure and interrogate this new postmetropolitan urban environment

Tenebre concerns the American writer Peter Neal’s visit to Rome to promote his newest *giallo*, also entitled *Tenebre*. Awaiting him are his agent, Bullmer (who is having

²⁴⁰ Rhodes, *Stupendous, Miserable City* 13.

²⁴¹ Chambers 53.

an affair with Peter's ex-wife, Jane), his extremely dedicated secretary, Anne (played by, at this point, Argento's ex-wife Daria Nicolodi), and an errand boy named Gianni. Upon Peter's arrival, he is informed by Captain Germani that a serial killer has been stuffing pages of *Tenebre* into the throats of his Roman victims and claiming the novel as his inspiration. Like so many of Argento's earlier characters, Peter is, in this way, drawn into the police investigation.

After the book critic, Christiano Berti, betrays a series of violent and sexually reactionary interpretations of *Tenebre* in an interview with Peter, Peter and Gianni stake out the critic's home. Gianni hears Berti confess to the crimes, but the moment he does, Berti is murdered with an axe by someone that Gianni cannot see. A search of Berti's home subsequently reveals that he was indeed violent, mentally ill, obsessed with Peter and his work, and the *Tenebre* murderer. The new investigative imperative becomes discovering not only Berti's own murderer, but also who is still continuing to kill people in Rome in such violent and spectacular ways (now including Gianni, Bullmer, and Jane).

The second killer turns out to be none other than Peter himself. Haunted by a traumatic early sexual encounter, Peter shrewdly saw Berti's own psychotic rampage as an opportunity to both unleash his own murderous psychosis and enact revenge against Jane and Bullmer. When Germani and Anne finally catch him in Jane's apartment, Peter fakes his own suicide in front of them. Subsequently, after they've left what they believe to be his dead body, he murders Germani and lays in wait for Anne. When she enters Jane's apartment and Peter charges the door, he is inadvertently impaled on a steel sculpture. As Jane shrieks in abject terror, the opening credits immediately fill the screen.

Tenebre's violence, as may be apparent from this description, departs from that of Argento's earlier work – especially the *gialli* – in a number of ways. For one, there is more of it, and it is more extreme. As Domenico Monetti has noted, in *Tenebre*, all of the typical elements of Argento's filmmaking accumulate and multiply: "more murders, more blood, more flaunting of cinematographic technique, more characters – even more murderers, two."²⁴² The film offers no real explanation for this multiplication. As Maitland McDonagh has put it, there is "no viable way of dealing with the eruption of concealed madness, no structure that can be used to contain the whirlwind of violence that rushes through *Tenebre*.... [M]adness and irrationality inform its inspiration, its subject matter and its method in equal degrees."²⁴³

Argento's earlier films, in order to ground their – however incomplete – explanations of violence and murder, tended to plumb the psychoanalytic and historic depths of repression, the dreamwork, and the uncanny. Their plots therefore centered around uncovering individual experiences of trauma and psychosis, and often playfully positing them as absent causes of violent activity. This interpretative model is proffered by *Tenebre* in the form of a series of flashbacks (which turn out to be of Peter's youth in Rhode Island) to a moment of violent, adolescent sexual humiliation. However, not only is their explanatory power quite attenuated even in Peter's case, but, in addition, as the only references to the past in the film, they say nothing, obviously, about Berti's own psychosis.

Rather, in keeping with Argento's experience of Los Angeles that I describe above, *Tenebre*'s quite shocking and torrid violence is almost completely senseless,

²⁴² Monetti 300.

²⁴³ McDonagh 179.

random, and depersonalized. It does not emerge from the slowly simmering darkness of the individual unconscious, in other words, but seems instead to be almost immanent to the places in which it occurs, erupting within the seemingly secure surfaces of the everyday, and spreading like a virus. Although the urban is not, therefore, offered as an explanation of violence per se, the film does produce a great number of correspondences between the new, sprawling, postmetropolitan geography of the Rome in which it is set, and new, similarly operative forms of violence and culpability. Both *Tenebre*'s urban diegesis and its narrative mechanisms around violence privilege speed, technology, reproducibility, displacement, and serialization. *Tenebre*, in other words, offers forms of both violence and culpability that are as decentered and dispersed as the centrifugal, postmetropolitan Rome that provides them with their mise-en-scène.

The attempt to explain where violent desires come from and what causes individuals to kill – normally a central part of the suspense/horror film – is therefore quite attenuated in *Tenebre*. The film instead depicts violence as a form of movement or displacement across a series of spaces, surfaces, and subjects. McDonagh has referred to this form of narrative organization as a, “free-floating anxiety that’s specifically sexual in nature, but... doesn’t spring from a particular act of sexual transgression (Oedipal murder, rape or the like).”²⁴⁴ This tone of “free-floating anxiety” allegorizes and approximates the urban identity of *Tenebre*'s EUR and Casal Palocco, which lack origin, nucleus, and any unifying context.

²⁴⁴ McDonagh 176.

One place where this is visible is in the ways in which the film rewrites the famous Hitchcockian device of the “transfer” or “transference of guilt.”²⁴⁵ A number of Hitchcock’s films, as many critics have pointed out, are structured around the realization by one character of another’s repressed desires. In *Strangers on a Train* (1951), for example, Bruno Anthony (Robert Walker) takes Guy Haines’ (Farley Granger) joke about murdering his wife seriously and kills her as an unsolicited favor. Bruno therefore actualizes Guy’s most perverse, destructive, and unconscious motives, and, according to Robin Wood, represents the “tempting overthrow of all responsibility” that dominates Guy’s unconscious.²⁴⁶ Guy’s desire to effectively destroy the life that he has carefully constructed for himself is, furthermore, intimately bound up with his sexual repression, and with his and Bruno’s unconscious, mutual sexual attraction. In *Strangers on a Train* as elsewhere in Hitchcock, then, the concept of “transference of guilt” suggests an urge or need to destroy that resides within the trajectory of an individual’s repressive, psychosexual subject formation, waiting to be reactivated in what Slavoj Žižek has called an, “intersubjective logic of exchange,” not unlike psychoanalytic transference.²⁴⁷

In *Tenebre*’s take on this Hitchcockian motif, by contrast, the desire to kill is rootless and depersonalized, and violence is ubiquitous. At the core of *Tenebre*’s double-

²⁴⁵ First introduced by Eric Rohmer and Claude Chabrol in their seminal 1957 book *Hitchcock*, the notion of “transfer of guilt” has become a commonplace in Hitchcock criticism. See Eric Rohmer and Claude Chabrol, *Hitchcock* (Paris: Editions d’Aujourd’hui, 1957) 92. The concept is further developed by Slavoj Žižek who writes: “In Hitchcock’s films, murder is never simply an affair between a murderer and his victim; murder always implies a third party.... The murderer kills for this third person, his act is described in the framework of a symbolic exchange with him.” Žižek, *Looking Awry* 74. See also Michael Walker, *Hitchcock’s Motifs* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005) 210-212.

²⁴⁶ Robin Wood, *Hitchcock’s Films Revisited* (New York: Columbia U.P., 2002) 87.

²⁴⁷ Žižek, *Looking Awry* 74.

murderer structure is not a situation in which one character activates another's repressed desire to kill. To the extent that the film cites this Hitchcockian device, it does so only to systematically strip it of the centering gravity that an individual or dialectical psychological narrative might provide. For where in *Strangers on a Train* the logic of the double murderer is implicit, in *Tenebre* there are actually multiple killers – Peter and Berti. And unlike the case of Bruno and Guy, *Tenebre* never suggests that Berti fulfills Peter's repressed, violent desires or vice versa. In addition, in *Tenebre*, the two killers interact not through a local and corporeal exchange like that of Bruno and Guy (whose feet accidentally meet in the quintessentially urban space of a crowded train), but rather within the more virtual and dispersed network of mass media – here, that of commercial literature. The overall suggestion is therefore not of a dialectical activation of repressed desire, but rather of an entire symbolic order – the medium of popular literature, and therefore of late capitalist mass culture in general – that has itself become a network for the dissemination of rootless and violent desires, a generalized field of rage that any given, anonymous subject can draw upon at any time.²⁴⁸ As I will discuss later, this is symptomatic in a film that is so heavily concerned with mass media, one in which the boundaries between representation – literary, cinematic, and, indeed, televisual – and reality are so tenuous.

In a related way, that violent rage is ubiquitous and absent of any substantiated cause or origin is also borne out by the narrative organization of the film's murder

²⁴⁸ In typically anarchic fashion, however, once this reading is set up, Argento, having himself already been accused of inspiring real world crime with the gore and violence in his films, playfully tears it down via Peter's response to Captain Germani's questioning at the beginning of the film: "If someone is killed with a Smith and Wesson revolver, do you go interview the president of Smith and Wesson?"

sequences. *Tenebre*'s murders, contrary to what we are accustomed to in horror cinema, are not spatially constructed around a subjective exchange between killer and victim, nor are they temporally constructed around the kind of suspense that normally derives from differing levels of narrative knowledge between spectator and victim. Each murder sequence is preceded and in some cases caused either by a random, separate threat from which the victim narrowly flees only to arrive directly in the murderers' actual trap, or by a simple chance event that places the victim in the wrong place at the wrong time. The film's first victim, the shoplifter, is, for example, murdered in her home just moments after escaping a lecherous homeless man who had tried to rape her on the street. And it is an irrationally aggressive, relentless, nimble, and intelligent neighborhood Doberman that causes Maria to take shelter in Berti's house just before he unexpectedly returns home to retrieve the keys he forgot while out stalking another potential victim.

Perhaps the clearest example of this sense that violence is fully pervasive and immanent to the very environment the characters inhabit, however, comes in the organization of vision in the scene in which Bullmer is murdered, a scene that Argento has called one of the best of his career.²⁴⁹ The scene begins with Bullmer waiting for Jane in a suburban strip-mall (the shimmering white, American-style "Le Terrazze" in Casal Palocco). "His face doesn't reveal the slightest sign of nervousness," Argento says, as he interacts with a child, glances at rollerskaters and strolling couples, watches a fight, gazes off at nearby residential high-rise buildings, and seems to derive a true sense of contentment from the quotidian life of the Orange County-esque suburban

²⁴⁹ Maiello 145.

development.²⁵⁰ The abundance of medium-long, long, and extreme-long shots in this sequence provide a 360-degree geography, and render everything as perfectly visible and transparent as the sunlight that illuminates the quintessentially postmetropolitan location. Yet somehow – and as shockingly to the spectator as to Bullmer himself – the killer (Peter, at this point) is still able to take Bullmer by surprise, stab him multiple times, and flee without being seen by anyone (including the camera). In the sun drenched strip-mall sequence there is, quite literally, no off-screen space, no shadow to lurk in, and nowhere to hide. Yet violence erupts in the midst of all of this overexposed, high-resolution banality, seeming almost to emerge directly out of the dispersed and harmless suburban events themselves. Wryly underlining the sudden meaninglessness of this act of violence, Argento states, “I wanted to show this brusque, vulgar, and aggressive man really moved by discovering the life around him. What a shame that he dies the very moment in which this happens.”²⁵¹

As a lead up to murder, such random events – a slightly less threatening threat, a coincidence, or the natural rhythms of quotidian, suburban public space – represent a dramatic break from the organization of narrative space and time in the murder sequences of Argento’s earlier films. The more self-consciously Hitchcockian suspense efforts preceding *Tenebre* tended not only to privilege spectatorial knowledge, but also to emphasize the perverse, voyeuristic nature of the gaze of the murderer by using one technique in particular: namely the handheld point-of-view shot from the perspective of

²⁵⁰ Maiello 145.

²⁵¹ Maiello 145.

the psychotic killer as he (or she) stalks his (or her) victims.²⁵² Such use of optical and narrative perspective in horror films often functions as a kind of tease, raising the very whodunit questions that a film's plot often structures itself around answering: whoever is lurking off-screen and endowing the roving camera with a threatening power must be the killer, and the film's narrative project becomes therefore precisely to bring what is out-of-field into the gaze of the camera, and hence to solve the mystery. Even when this hermeneutic game is almost endlessly and tortuously deferred, as in the earlier Argento, such shots always at the very least function to suggest the possibility of grounding violence and the desire to commit murder in a specific psychological-geographic location within the film's diegesis – that is, in a single subject who simply has yet to appear on screen.

Tenebre rarely offers such a concrete and resolved sense of point of view. In fact, throughout the film, Argento instead uses various means (disguise, disruption, exaggeration, etc.) to disrupt and problematize common spectatorial expectations around cinematic point-of-view. This is the case from the very outset, even in the relatively insignificant early department store sequence when the first victim steals *Tenebre* the novel. This sequence begins – after an establishing shot of the famous, modernist Rinascente department store on Piazza Fiume behind the title “Rome” – with a medium shot that gazes from a position on the street, through the store window, and upon the victim-to-be as she glances through articles of clothing. It is only when she defensively glares back at the camera that this first medium shot is disclosed as a point-of-view shot,

²⁵² See, for example, my analysis of Helga's murder in *Deep Red* in chapter two of this dissertation.

the reverse shot of which subsequently reveals the face of a passerby who is never seen again in the film.

This unusual and seemingly irrelevant exchange of glances functions, however, to introduce a sequence that will explicitly challenge the camera's ability to take up a character's point-of-view within the diegesis. Throughout the sequence, the bumpy, handheld camera is expressly personified. It obsessively and voyeuristically observes the shoplifter, stalking her from behind parallel rows of merchandise, framing her in relation to mirrors and displays, and even "ducking" when she seems to notice the presence of someone (or something) watching her. In all of these ways, that the camera is taking up one character's perspective is heavily marked. But just as the shoplifter sneaks the book into her bag, a figure suddenly emerges into the frame from the very position from which the camera suggested someone had previously been watching – that is, from behind the camera – and yet the point of view shot, with all of its bumpiness and "embodiedness" continues. The figure whose gaze the camera had been claiming to be taking up is suddenly – and seemingly impossibly – an object of that very gaze. This sudden entry of a character into the frame thus immediately shatters the point-of-view discourse that the film had been going to such great lengths to signal, and undermines any sense that the film's signifiers of point of view are reliable and trustworthy ones. Furthermore, the figure is not, as we might expect, the murderer, whose prior presence behind the camera would at least retrospectively justify the association of the camera's gaze with sadism, voyeurism, and threat, but is instead the store's comically inept security guard, who we have already seen having conversations within the frame of these supposed point-of-view

shots, and whose utterly non-threatening character is indicated just moments later when he accepts the shoplifter's offer of her phone number in return for her release.

Between the insignificant, non-hostile extra taking up the camera's position of threatening voyeur at the beginning of the scene, and the security guard's entering the frame of his own point-of-view shot at the end, any sense that the hostility of the voyeuristic, stalking camera can be easily explained via point-of-view conventions is undermined. What remains in this scene in place of a geographically and subjectively sutured camera is simply the – literally – floating signification of point of view, of desire, and of the voyeuristic-sadistic.

This work of detaching the camera's point-of-view from that of the killer is accomplished in multiple ways in the film's murder sequences as well. Perhaps the film's most famous and virtuosic murder sequence, for example, that of the lesbian couple in their home, is preceded by a three-minute crane shot that begins on an open window, climbs up one wall, somersaults the roof, slides into and out of a series of other windows, slithers down the other side of the house, and finally ends in the position of an over-the-shoulder shot, watching the killer clip and pry open a window shade to get to his unsuspecting victims. The camera here takes a very unusual trajectory, one that would be impossible for an embodied individual to follow. In a moment where one would reasonably expect the murderer's perspective given generic convention, Argento instead chooses a strategy that, in effect, amounts to a radical fugue from any possible diegetic point-of-view.

Although the murder of Peter's landlord's daughter, Maria, is shot in the exact opposite way – it exaggeratedly localizes the camera in the perspective of a single body

within the diegesis – it nevertheless has the same function of dismantling the point-of-view system, on this occasion through excess instead of absence. While Maria mulls about Berti's postmodern home, unaware that she is awaiting the killer, she is first observed from a series of perspectives that highlight the camera's ability to achieve positions that a character could not – squeezed into narrow hallways, gracefully arching around pillars, impossibly high in the rafters of the home, and otherwise mechanically and geometrically framing Maria in relation to the entangled space of her impending doom. Such disembodied points of view serve in the end, however, not only to suggest her entrapment, but also to offset and highlight what will become by far the most heavily marked point-of-view sequence in the film. During the entire three-minute sequence after Berti arrives home, the camera never once leaves his perspective, and we see everything that he does the whole time – Maria herself screaming while running away from the camera in awkwardly bumpy, inward-moving handheld shots, gloved hands gripping the wooden handle of an axe in extreme close-up, and finally, inevitably, the blade of the axe coming down upon Maria's flesh and causing an obscene amount of absurdly high contrast red blood to spurt out in high angle close-ups. Against the background of the systematically disembodied shots that precede it, such a gratuitous and comically excessive over-signification of character point-of-view functions to effectively detach point-of-view from its normal function of situating the camera within the body of a single, diegetic subject. This sequence, furthermore, leads into a subsequent one that also excessively marks the point-of-view of yet another unnamed and insignificant extra, this one mowing the lawn the day after the murder and discovering Maria's body.

All of this works to undercut any centering power that the film's point-of-view discourse would normally provide. The systematic deconstruction of point-of-view; the very ubiquity of threat and the suddenness with which it erupts; the chance nature of the film's murders – together all of these suggest a diegetic universe in which violence, destruction, and the desire to kill are simply not rooted in any singular subject position. Rather, violence is a kind of ubiquitous and disembodied force that moves as freely as coincidence, and seemingly without sense or direction, between various characters and elements within the film. It encompasses not only the moralistic critic and psychotic author, but also various components of postmetropolitan urban and suburban life: among them the homeless vagrant, the neighborhood dog, and new forms of both private and public space (the single-family dwelling, the strip-mall, etc.).

Tenebre is, in all of these senses, built less around transference per se – which, again, would imply a closed, dialectical unit around which to center and place affect and desire – than the endless and indefinite movement of dispersal and displacement. Violence, destruction, desire, culpability, and causality, are not just doubled as they are in Hitchcock's work, nor are they simply stretched as they are in Argento's earlier films. Here, rather, they are detached, serialized, and unmoored – an endless and subjectless reproduction with no origin. They exist in this film, in other words, on a centerless, metonymic continuum of energy that seems to sprawl on to infinity, destroying anything that gets in its way, and, in the process, figuring and allegorizing the new, postmetropolitan urban morphology that they traverse.

From Christiano Berti to Peter Neal: Tenebre's Killers

However, while it may be true that nothing in the film *explains* the quantity or intensity of *Tenebre*'s violence or anchors it in a particular geographic point or psychic location, I would like to argue that the relationship between the two killers – Peter and Berti – does provide a kind of Jamesonian cognitive map that can help us make some historical and political sense of this film's senselessness. It is, in fact, this progression that periodizes the kind of groundlessness that we see so much of in the film within a history of Italian urban subjectivity.

In an essay that I also discuss at length in my introduction, Jameson argues that a certain progression in the functioning of power and capital in American life is figured in Sidney Lumet's 1975 film *Dog Day Afternoon* in the form of a struggle for precedence between two figures of authority – the local, neighborhood cop, and the FBI agent.²⁵³ What is articulated by the faceless, affectless, and coolly detached FBI agent, as offset by the extremely fleshly, sweaty, and highly characterized local cop, is what Jameson calls, “the essential impersonality and post-individualistic structure of the power structure of our society.”²⁵⁴ The FBI agent, with his signification of technocracy, anonymity, and abstraction, and his network-televisual acting style, “comes to occupy the place of that immense and decentralized power network which marks the present multinational stage of monopoly capitalism.”²⁵⁵ By providing a whole series of characters that offset the FBI agent's depersonalization with the kind of “existential individuality” that Jameson associates with the modernist cultural production of monopoly capitalism (not just the robust local cop, but also the “inessential,” and “utterly marginalized,” staff of the sieged

²⁵³ Jameson, *Signatures* 35-54.

²⁵⁴ Jameson, *Signatures* 48.

²⁵⁵ Jameson, *Signatures* 50.

branch bank and, to some degree the protagonist himself, Sonny – played in the “authentically expressive” method acting style by Al Pacino), *Dog Day Afternoon* renders visible through allegory what would otherwise be as yet impossible to apprehend – namely, the historical emergence of the essentially unrepresentable global, capitalist world system of multinational, post-monopoly capitalism.

A similar allegory is at play in *Tenebre* – not, however, at the level of authority, as in *Dog Day Afternoon* (since, after all, the single authority figure in *Tenebre*, Captain Germani, is presented as nothing more than a very skilled consumer of such durable goods as articles of clothing and Peter’s “literature”), but rather at the level of those who most wantonly violate authority, the murderers. Berti, the first killer, is, for example, the very image of a disturbed, repressed, and vengeful individual. His poor mental health is visually conveyed by his pale, wiry, and gaunt physical stature, and is expressed in his compulsive, convulsive, giggly laughter. He is a classically marginalized subject – a fact that is expressed not only in his extreme, reactionary belief system and utter aloneness, but also in his peripheral placement in the mise-en-scène of Peter’s welcome party at Fiumicino airport, the scene in which he is first introduced. Berti, the hate-filled literary critic, produces the justification for killing a shoplifter and a lesbian couple via his interpretations of Peter’s books. *Tenebre* the novel, he tells a very skeptical Peter, “is about human perversion and its effects on society.” “Two of the victims are deviants,” he says, and, “the killer’s motivation is to eliminate what he calls ‘corruption.’” Berti’s quasi-fascist moral code, his troubling corporeal self-expression, and his personal vindictiveness suggest a crisis of the self that seems rooted in the very type of psychosexual repression and existential anxiety that is so noticeably missing from the rest

of the film. For Berti, murder would seem to function as a form of catharsis, one that answers to a truly violent inner rage that, judging by the extremely tense nature of his embodiment, would seem to stem from sexual repression. He is the stand-in, in this sense, for the murderers of Argento's early films – individuals, according to Monetti, whose, “sexual repression finds release in the penetration of their victims’ flesh with a knife.”²⁵⁶ His acts of murder therefore articulate a trajectory of some sort from the inner gravity of psychological lack to its destructive, externalized expression.

Peter Neal, the second killer and Berti's own murderer, is a very different case. For one, he exists on the other side of the social, affective, and physiological spectrum. The first time we see Peter, as I note above, he is (preposterously) biking across the 59th Street Bridge, on his way from Midtown Manhattan to JFK International Airport to catch a flight to Rome. In his tan, fit body and tracksuit, the handsome Peter appears as the very embodiment of physical and mental health as he bikes on the freeway. Not only is he creatively successful and the center of everyone's attention, but he also handles the spotlight with fantastic grace and, it seems, great pleasure as well. From his stylish clothing to his well-adjusted smile, Peter's exterior appearance expresses a nearly total harmony with the social world, one that, however, seems to come at the cost of an inner banality, blankness, and impersonality that are as every bit as total. His overall emotional tenor vis-à-vis both life and murder is, in fact, given voice in the very first moments of *Tenebre* the film by the lean, direct, and anonymous words read in voice-over (in the Italian-language version of the film, by Argento himself) from his own novel, *Tenebre*:

The impulse had become irresistible. There was only one answer to the fury that tortured him. And so he committed his first act of murder. He had broken the most

²⁵⁶ Monetti 301.

deep-rooted taboo and found not guilt, not anxiety or fear, but freedom. Every humiliation which stood in his way could be swept away by this simple act of annihilation: murder.

While it may be typical for a *giallo* to be written in such hollow, rational prose, this passage – crucially, the only one we ever see or hear from the novel – is almost technocratic in its solutions to deep human problems, and it chooses to convey emotion in a mode as fit for mass production and consumption as an instruction manual. Any meaningful and personal experience of human suffering or hope that the concepts of fury, anxiety, humiliation, or freedom may be capable of evoking are, in other words, undermined by Peter's own words (and, in the English version of the film, by their over-voiced and exaggerated, almost Shakespearean delivery). In the case of Peter, the healthy and utterly boring writer, in other words, even if a logical motive seems to exist for his killings – he must kill Jane and Bullmer for “betraying” him, and then he must kill anyone who might discover his crime – murder, on the emotional level, is not the answer to or expression of a specific and private tragedy (after all, at no point does Peter seem to feel anything towards Jane except condescension) or the extension of an “authentic,” individual experience of angst. Peter is associated instead, from the very first moments of the film, with words, emotions, and solutions that are empty, personality-less, abstract, and entirely disposable – a point that is literalized when *Tenebre* the book is suddenly, unceremoniously, and inexplicably thrown into a loudly crackling fire just before Goblins' witty, synth-pop soundtrack swells, and the film's title proudly and playfully hits the screen.

The shift from Berti to Peter maps the transition that I outline above from the violence of Argento's earlier films – that rooted in the personal experience of

marginalization and sexual repression – to the more dispersed and desubjectified violence of *Tenebre*. Two characterological and affective categories are therefore set up within the film. They are, borrowing terminology once again from Jameson, the “existential and private-tragic” on the one hand, and the “post-individualistic” on the other. Jameson associates these two poles respectively with modernism and monopoly capitalism, and postmodernism and multinational, corporate capitalism.²⁵⁷ Berti and Peter represent their respective poles in that ways that I convey above, but the film’s other characters begin to collect around each as well. Close to Berti is Peter’s disturbed ex-wife Jane, whose large, dark sunglasses, perfect lipstick and hair, white mink coat, steely gaze and dark, manipulative behavior (filling Peter’s travel bag with bloody clothes, sleeping with her ex-husband’s agent, and perhaps, the film implies at one point, even planning to murder Peter) allow us to recognize her as a kind of exaggerated, jilted femme fatale – as, in other words, a characterological stereotype associated with scorn, retribution, vanity, shrewd and intentional maneuvering, etc. Also on this side, but to a lesser extent, is Bullmer, whose idiosyncratic obsession with his own bowler hat serves to imbue him with a certain level of individuation and “quirk” that many of the film’s other characters lack.

Offsetting these over-characterized, eccentric, “private-tragic” figures and accruing, on the other hand, to the “post-individualistic” pole is Peter’s entire entourage of saccharine and submissive underlings in Rome. These include his secretary Anne, whose dutiful, acquiescent, and comically empty politeness extend not only to guessing what Peter wants before he himself knows, but also to having sex with him after a bad day; his errand-boy Gianni, whose smile and eyes are as vacuous as they are worshipful;

²⁵⁷ Jameson, *Signatures* 49.

and the beautiful and precocious, but utterly boring teenager, Maria. What the characters of this latter pole have in common, above all, is that they represent the absolute reification of all of the social relations surrounding Peter Neal: both Anne and Gianni are his employees, and Maria, as the daughter of the man to whom Peter cuts a rent check, interacts with Peter only while turning on his hot water heater and delivering a typewriter. Partly because of this and partly because of Anthony Franciosa's unendingly business-casual performance, Peter Neal, despite being a writer, is for his part characterized more as an exchangeable corporate yes-man (whose very anonymous identity is dispersed across two first names) than as an individual artist or intellectual locked in a bloody struggle with the dark parts of his soul.

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Violence in *Tenebre* is no longer centered on an individualized or dialectical subjective experience of trauma, sexual repression, and existential angst, but now exists instead within a more random, sprawling, decentered, serialized, and endlessly displaced modality. In articulating this shift in the causality, motivation, and emotional experience behind acts of violence, *Tenebre*, I am arguing, allegorizes the emergence of the new forms of postmetropolitan social subjectivity and urbanity that I have been mapping out throughout this chapter. By embodying both of these forms of violence in two separate characters, the film makes the emergence of the centerless, postmodern metro-network – that is, the postmetropolis – visible in highly symptomatic form.

Beyond City and Country Alike – Collective, Yet Without People

In his *Dog Day Afternoon* argument, Jameson also makes clear that the social, historical, and characterological trajectory that he maps out is an urban one as well. Not only does the personality-less FBI agent articulate a new, post-individualistic subjectivity and power structure, but he also figures a new modality of space: the decentralized mass of the global, a spatiality whose historical emergence is expressed in the film, according to Jameson, by its general, geographic movement from the bank's location in the densely social, brick and stone urbanity of Brooklyn to the dark, empty, machine world of John F. Kennedy International Airport. The ever-growing hegemony of multi-national capitalism, Jameson writes,

is inscribed in the film's spatial trajectory from the ghettoized squalor of the bank interior to that eerie and impersonal science fiction landscape of the airport finale: a corporate space without inhabitants, utterly technologized and functional, a place beyond city and country alike – collective, yet without people, automated and computerized, yet without any of that older utopian or dystopian clamor, without any of those still distinctive qualities that characterized the then still “modern” and streamlined futuristic vision of the corporate future in our own recent past.²⁵⁸

The airport here is the very signifier and embodiment, within the extended reaches of postmetropolitan New York City, of the global reach of multi-national capitalism.

The airport is, in fact, one of the more frequently recurring and symbolically loaded sites in Argento's work as well. As I discuss in chapter one, in his first film, *The Bird With the Crystal Plumage*, airports and air travel are used to express the limitations of cinematic representation vis-à-vis the emergent mediatized, postmodern, and globally oriented city of the late 1960s and early 70s. In his most discussed airport scene, the

²⁵⁸ Jameson, *Signatures* 51.

arrival of Suzy Banyon in Freiburg at the beginning of *Suspiria*, the airport is represented as a site of estrangement, anonymity, displacement and confinement.²⁵⁹

What makes *Tenebre*'s depiction of the airport different from that of the earlier films, however, is that the airport's identifying spatiality of repetition, anonymity, and flatness is no longer contained by the actual site of the airport itself, but now seems rather to have leaked out to contaminate the entire city. This is already suggested by the film's beginnings with two scenes in two airports (in two cities, in two countries) that nevertheless look almost identical – Kennedy in New York, and Leonardo Da Vinci in Rome. This look, in fact, defines the film's remarkably consistent mise-en-scène: regardless of such normally determinate issues such as the time of day or night, interior or exterior setting, intended emotional impact, or narrative perspective, *Tenebre* maintains a uniform look throughout that is uncannily similar to that of its opening airport scenes.

The film's entire diegesis, in fact, resembles Jameson's description of the airport as a, "corporate space without inhabitants, utterly technologized and functional, a place beyond city and country alike – collective, yet without people."²⁶⁰ For being shot on location in a city of over 2.5 million people, the few images of city streets – that is, the few that are not of the private, often corporate interiors which make up the bulk of the film's settings – are strikingly empty.²⁶¹ The film's mise-en-scène, constructed as it is out of pieces of Casal Palocco (incidentally, a popular place for the residences of airline

²⁵⁹ See, for example, Linda Schulte-Sasse, "The 'Mother' of All Horror Movies," in *Kinoeye* 2.11.

²⁶⁰ Jameson, *Signatures* 51.

²⁶¹ Fried 266.

employees due to its proximity to Fiumicino), features a diffuse and depopulated agglomeration of private dwellings, sites of media, technology, consumption, and travel such as television studios, department stores, and airports, and postmodern offices, bars, and hotel rooms. All of these are dotted with fake plants, surrounded by carefully landscaped swaths of green, and filled with more parked cars than there seem to be people to drive them. One would be hard pressed indeed to offer a description of any single one of these spaces that would visually distinguish it from the others. The shoddy, simulacral, and mass produced materials that we see in the airport scenes – plastic, fake brick and stone, cheap wood, and aluminum (all, however, as was fashionable in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, made to appear “upscale”) – dominate all of these sites. The entirety of the film’s furniture and clothing seems, in addition, to be covered with fabric of the same sandy white or burnt sienna color and tweed texture of both JFK’s and Fiumicino’s lounges. Furthermore, at no point does the film provide any unifying context for these individual spaces. Deprived of any element or cinematic figure that might situate these locations in relation to each other (a map, a particular landmark, a synoptic overview shot, a journey that moves from one to another, even a piece of dialogue), *Tenebre*’s diegesis remains more a confused and splintered, dilated and horizontally scattered assemblage of independent sites than a mappable and geographically comprehensive cinematic city.

As we have seen, such a diegesis, was, of course, an accurate, general figuration of Argento’s contemporary, sprawling, and splintered Rome – especially the EUR district. Indeed, in this vein one of the most conspicuous aspects of this film is its insistent, subdivided, repetitive and fractured flatness – in every sense of the word. In

addition to the plays on emotional “depthlessness” at the level of performance and characterization that I discuss above, the film is architecturally flat as well. Its constant recourse to neutral, eye-level camera angles, its refusal to provide urban or architectural vistas of any sort, its even, frontal, and almost entirely shadowless style of lighting, and its lack of vertical staging of any sort (via elements common to Argento’s earlier work like stairways, elevators, upward tilts to second storey windows, etc.) contribute to a sense of total horizontality, one that the film’s lack of geographic orientation, furthermore, renders utterly fragmented.

Even the single shot and the single building that seem to have the express purpose of providing three-dimensional depth and heaviness to this otherwise two-dimensional diegesis – namely the Louma crane shot over the exterior home of Tilde and her partner that I describe above – ends up contributing to the film’s flatness. The house is a monstrous riot of raw concrete cubes and blocks, and the staging of the couple inside their home – Tilde at the bottom of a stairway (the only one of the entire film), her lover at the top, behind and above her – exploits the vertical possibilities of the structure in a way that no other scene in the film does. The exterior crane shot itself, made possible by a Louma crane specially ordered by Argento from Paris for this particular moment of the film, contains a very distinct movement that almost caresses or embraces the building by covering multiple walls, levels, folds, and even the roof. The shot seems therefore to have been designed to produce a powerful sense of the structure’s phenomenological existence as an object in three-dimensional space. The sudden and startling appearance of such a robust and spatially complex structure in an otherwise distended and diffuse urban

geography stands out powerfully, and the overall impression is of a radically different spatiality from the rest of the film.

The building – like many Brutalist structures – can be seen as a kind of stand-in and thematization of the more fixed and solid, “disciplinary” spatiality of the modern metropolis from which the rest of the film differs so heavily. Soja’s description of the parameters – the “hidden instrumentality” – of modern, industrial urban spatiality is, in fact, uncannily appropriate to this particular building: “In its broad outlines of concentricities and wedges, centers and peripheries, as well as in its more intricate webs of cells, ranks, enclosures, and partitionings, [the modern, industrial city] was a disciplinary spatialization.”²⁶²

However, what is most striking about the somersaulting, building-caressing Louma crane shot is not the extremely volumetric, “disciplinary” architecture that it depicts, but just how flat this concrete mass is made to appear on screen. Because the camera lens hovers so close to the surfaces of the building that it traverses as to render them in one long, spatially decontextualized close-up, the shot does not adequately convey the sense of mass that the structure itself contains. Instead, the shot appears on the flat surface of the screen less as a representation of a building than as a continuously unfolding series of horizontal textures and planes. The one seemingly well-founded and spatially rooted object in the film is, in this way, rendered a two-dimensional graphic – less a solid, geometrical object in a fixed location in urban space than a flat image that resembles nothing more than an overhead, planar view of the endlessly fragmented and expanding urban sprawl of the postmodern, postmetropolitan city.

²⁶² Soja, *Postmodern Geographies* 178.

Conclusion: The Violence of Dissemination

Commenting on the use of EUR as the setting for *Tenebre*'s violent, urban critique, Mauro Gervasini has noted,

Until now, horror in Rome has, predictably, found its domain in the characteristically Roman Coppedè district, around Via Tagliamento and Piazza Buenos Aires [a historical area of Rome characterized by the kind of modern gothic and Art Nouveau architecture exploited so successfully by Argento in *Deep Red*]. Argento came up with the idea of relocating it to one of the most modern and luxurious – and, in that sense, most atypical – areas of the Capital. And with terrific success, since those large homes, those rooms with their ample and enormous windows, are far more permeable, far more vulnerable to attacks from the outside than any ancient mansion.²⁶³

Gervasini's suggestive commentary here reminds us once again that we are dealing, in *Tenebre*, with a new kind of violence. This violence is no longer contained within the psychodynamics and architectonics of the domestic interior; rather, it traverses various levels and modalities of space seemingly without any geographic or temporal impediments whatsoever. It does not gravitationally orbit around a discrete psychic or social lack, but rather exists as a kind of immanently available and mobile network that permeates everything. I have argued throughout this chapter that this figures the new postmetropolitan identity of Rome.

When one takes into account the enormous upheavals in the Italian media landscape that defined the 1970s and early '80s, then it is tempting, in addition, to read this borderless and boundariless violence as a figuration not just the "metro-network" of postmetropolitan Rome, but also of the electronic network of image dissemination increasingly dominant in Italy at this time – that is, television. As we have seen,

²⁶³ Quoted in Monetti 300.

throughout the 1970s and early '80s, due to poor governmental leadership and savvy entrepreneurialism, private businessmen and corporations were able to bypass regulations and strong-arm new legislation in such a way as to make private ownership of nationally broadcasting, commercial television stations a widespread reality by the middle of the 1980s. Although the ultimate *dénouement* came with the Berlusconi Decree of 1984, policy debates and media transformation had been ongoing since the end of RAI's government-imposed television monopoly in 1972. By the time of *Tenebre*, in other words, Italian mass media was a whole decade into a fundamental transformation that would permanently and drastically change Italian daily life and consumption patterns.

Italy today is, of course, a fully networked, media-saturated society, and we can trace the origins of this process to this precise moment. Retrospectively, then, we would expect to see symptoms of these shifts in the cultural production of this era – and especially in the products of popular, mass media. As I have suggested throughout this dissertation, this was certainly the case with Dario Argento's films from this era. As I noted at the end of chapter one, for example, the very ending of *The Bird With the Crystal Plumage* (the chaotic, rapid-fire montage of jets on the runway at the then sparkling new Fiumicino Airport) opened a series of questions about the future of the city in the face of the new spatialities, temporalities, and power structures of a postmodernity that was just beginning to take root in Rome. And although the film never provided answers to these questions, it did posit the parallel emergence of television as a new form of representation and dissemination more well adapted to the emerging postmetropolis.

Television exists diegetically in one form or other in many of Argento's 1970s films. Besides the multiple references in *The Bird With the Crystal Plumage* that I discuss

in chapter one, the medium also makes an appearance in *Deep Red*, when news coverage of the killing spree plays on a set tucked inside a shop within the arcade Marc and Carlo stroll through together. With the exception of the symptomatic ending of *The Bird With the Crystal Plumage*, in each of television's diegetic appearances, the boundaries between television and the given film's "reality" are quite fixed. This is accomplished through the careful spatial delimitation of television – both television production and transmission – as separate from the remainder of the film's mise-en-scène. For example, television broadcasts always appear in these films within the frame of the television set itself. Often, the televisual image is even doubly framed, within both the set and some other architectural frame. In *The Bird With the Crystal Plumage*, for example, television first appears within a shop window. In *Deep Red*, as I mention above, television appears in a tangential pocket of urban space that is clearly divided from the protagonists' world by a doorframe.

Diegetic references to television abound in *Tenebre* as well. Berti is, for example, a television critic, and one of the film's most memorable and narratively significant scenes takes place in his studio. In addition, Argento lampoons the television news' unique combination of banality, sensationalism, and watered down comic chatter in a scene in which Anne dresses for the evening while watching the news coverage of Maria's death. During the report, a chuckling field reporter insensitively says, "The killer warns he will strike again. The next victim will be someone he refers to as 'The Great Corruptor.' Well, as a matter of fact, this message is expected to result in several businessmen and politicians leaving the city."

But *Tenebre*'s overall approach to the medium of television is quite different from

that of these other films. Returning to an above example, I would like to suggest that if the sudden presence of television at the end of *The Bird With the Crystal Plumage* signals the arrival of a means of surpassing the complex urban dialectics of segmentation, transparency, and opacity that the film articulates, then *Tenebre*'s Rome is one in which this has already taken place. In other words, the opposition between set and world, so carefully cultivated in the prior films, is abandoned here. Television is no longer diegetically contained in any way, but rather saturates the entirety of the film's diegesis.

I have already begun to hint at this in my reading above. I argued, for example, that the two killers, Peter and Berti, are first linked not by any physical or corporeal contact as in previous examples of films that use structures of doubling, but rather through the virtual and dispersed network of mass media (both literature and television). I also highlight the ways in which the film visits various *topoi* of postmodernity – the suburban subdivision, the mall, and the airport, for example. Television, as we know, can be counted among these – perhaps even as the most central.

But there are a number of other, more fundamental ways in which television saturates *Tenebre*. The film as a whole is, in fact, according to Monetti, “apocalyptically televisual.”²⁶⁴ The overall décor, for one, in the ways that I describe above (mass-produced, repetitive objects and spaces, etc.) is reminiscent of the set of a television talk show. This is underscored by the film's extensive use of shot-reverse shot sequences, which, among other things, serve to banalize and normalize Peter – and therefore to persuade us not to suspect him – by depicting him within such a familiar, television-friendly discursive register. In addition, Argento claims that he and Tovoli patterned the

²⁶⁴ Monetti 300.

film's bright, sometimes overexposed cinematography directly after the American television police series that were just beginning to air in Italy at this time (shows such as *Columbo*, *Charlie's Angels*, *Kojak*, *Police Story*, and *Starsky and Hutch*). That *Tenebre* is such a powerful break from its predecessors – such a “white” film, as Monetti has labeled it – is therefore the direct result of Argento's and Tovoli's desire to emulate the “cathode light” and “modern photography” of these shows.²⁶⁵

The film's “neo-catholic aesthetic,” as Gervasini has put it, is nothing more than the logical outcome of a historical challenge presented to cinema to “rethink itself” by the radically “new mode of conceiving stories in images” that defined both public and private TV at this time.²⁶⁶ Indeed, this moment saw the abandonment of the classical model of televisual storytelling known as the *teleromanzo* (the brief, usually six-part drama mini-series that ended with total narrative closure), and its replacement with more modern and lucrative serial dramas – both foreign imports, and original Italian productions.²⁶⁷ These

²⁶⁵ Argento has said, “We started from American television series like *Columbo* and *Charlie's Angels* in defining a realistic manner of lighting. People spit on this kind of police show, but personally I find in them a very precise aesthetic, produced in all these shows by the quick shooting schedules and the cathode light. This economically imposed standard and the conditions of projection are embedded in the style, which is deranged by way of its directness... I adopted a modern style of photography, deliberately breaking with the legacy of German Expressionism.” Quoted in McDonagh 170-171.

²⁶⁶ Monetti 300.

²⁶⁷ Milly Buonanno, “Television Drama as Central Story-telling System in Contemporary Italy,” presented at Narrating the Nation Conference, Tarragonna, Spain, 4-6 October 2007. Commenting on this moment, Buonanno writes, “The most immediate effect of this transformation was an enormous increase of the television supply and a dramatic need to fill the schedules.... Therefore, private networks gave way to heavy imports of American fiction and public television, caught in the competition, felt obliged to do the same. It was during this stage that Italian viewers got to know, and became familiar with, new formats and genres such as the sitcom and the serial, either open or closed; they experienced for the first time, and were fascinated by the daily narratives of the North American soaps and Latin American *telenovelas*, and were exposed to an unending offer of US police series.”

series and their more “televisual” temporality of flow, segmentation, and indefinite openness helped to redefine television in Italy more along the lines of the generalized and continuous textual experience that already characterized American television.²⁶⁸ *Tenebre*, Monetti claims, writes this new temporality into its very narrative structure “by frequently mimicking various televisual tropes: not only do the frequent flashbacks, for example, ‘interrupt’ the flow of narrative as if they were some kind of TV advertisement, but their very aesthetic is, in addition, right out of a perfume commercial.”²⁶⁹ Similarly, Argento has also described the disproportionately extreme level of violence in *Tenebre* as a response to media saturation: “The mass media are themselves of a terrifying violence.... One must therefore make films that are equally violent.”²⁷⁰

If television stalks the borders of Argento’s earlier work, in other words, then it positively infuses every molecule of *Tenebre*. The film’s mise-en-scène, editing, and cinematography, its temporal and narrative structure, and its excesses of violence can all be explained in relation to the emergence of commercial television in Italy at this moment.

That *Tenebre*’s world is, therefore, a televisual one sheds new light – pun intended – on its connection with the Luigi Malerba short story, “Consuming the View,” with which I opened this chapter. As we have seen, Malerba’s story allegorizes cultural

²⁶⁸ Here I am loosely referring to classic work from the field of television studies, particularly that of Nick Browne, John Ellis, John Fiske, and Raymond Williams. See Nick Browne, “The Political Economy of the Television (Super) Text,” *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 9.3 (Summer 1984) 174-182. Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, John Fiske, *Television Culture* (London: Routledge, 2003), and Raymond Williams, *Television* (London: Routledge Classics, 2003).

²⁶⁹ Monetti 300.

²⁷⁰ Pugliese 4.

and technological processes of visual consumption. It posits a form of looking that is destructive of its object not through control, penetration, or any other form of suppression, but through excessive representation, reproduction, and ubiquity. The result, within this literary diegesis, is not the disappearance of Rome into the dark shadows of invisibility (*le tenebre*), but an overexposed city, a hyper-illuminated, urban fade-to-white. *Tenebre* and “Consuming the View,” both products of the media-saturated early 1980s, and both specifically and self-consciously concerned with Rome, its history, and its history of representation, visualize their shared dystopian dream of the Eternal City in the same exact, televisual terms.

If, as Samuel Weber notes, “television... does not transmit *representations* but rather the *semblance of presentation* as such, understood as the power not just to see and hear but *to place before us*,” then what exactly is this Rome that these televisual diegeses place before us?²⁷¹ Ironically, what they “transport” and “set” immediately before us in such televisual terms is an eminently televisual city – continuous, centerless, and electronically networked, and, therefore, without any semblance of invisibility or outside. This new urban reality had its expression as much in its representations and figurations as in its actual, postmodern morphology of space and objects.

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At both of these levels, this is embodied, as Argento has noted, in a new kind of light, “cathode light,” a form of light that is “deranged because of its directness”:

Today’s light is the light of neon, headlights, streetlamps, and omnipresent flashes, at home and on the streets. Caring about shadows suddenly

²⁷¹ Samuel Weber, *Mass Mediauras: Form, Technics, Media* (Stanford, CA: Stanford U.P., 1996) 117.

seemed ridiculous to me and, more than that, reassuring. In the gloom one can hide what one wants to reject, what one doesn't dare show. But we are ill at ease in the harsh glare. We have everything right in front of us.²⁷²

Throughout this dissertation, I have attempted to bring to light the sometimes subtle and sometimes blatant language of space within the Roman films of Dario Argento. I have confronted virtually all of the means available to cinematic representation – narrative form and structure, textuality and intertextuality, mise-en-scène and cinematography, editing and perspective, sound, etc. – and demonstrated the ways in which they are used in these films to emulate, allegorize, figure, displace, and interrogate their Roman settings and locations along with the histories embedded therein. Among my aims has been to demonstrate the ways in which these three Argento films illuminate and make visible – if sometimes in contradictory and/or symptomatic form – the mystified socio-spatiality of late capitalist Rome, with its abstract and global spaces. Fittingly, then, I come to a close at the rather paradoxical point at which this particular, postmetropolitan spatiality that is “unrepresentable as such,” and that hides socio-spatial relations from view is now itself figured by a form of visuality that – hauntingly, terrifyingly – hides nothing.

²⁷² Argento, quoted in McDonagh 171.

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