Il thrilling Italiano:
Opening up the giallo

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Table of contents

Introduction 1
The problem of genre 5
La Morte accarezza a mezzanotte 9
Fumetti neri 11
The question of horror 14
The eyewitness 21
Point(s) of view 25
La Ragazza che sapeva troppo 27
Grand Guignol Giallo 29
Perché quelle strane gocce di sangue sul corpo di Jennifer? 36
Serial thrills 39
The giallo hero 42
Chi l’ha vista morire? 46
Filmography 49
Bibliography 51
Abstract

Il thrilling Italiano: Opening up the giallo

This study is a conscious attempt at opening up the discussion on the Italian giallo film of the 1960’s & 1970’s. Part of its mission is examine views and writings currently available on the giallo and using these to analyse the body of films known as the giallo. It is also an attempt at the generic definition seeing the giallo as a series of thriller films according to Tzvetan Todorov’s model and in depth discussing the influence of the horror story and the whodunit. Beyond that it is a close look upon the form and devices of giallo narration, with focus upon the role of the eyewitness, focalization and point of view as first person narration. The study also traces the giallo’s influences interdisciplinary including placing it in the cultural context of the Italian adult comics known as fumetti neri. The study also includes a close look upon the idea of the eroticised violent set piece tracing it to the French theatre of horror – the Grand Guignol. Furthermore the study addresses the concept of seriality as understood in reference to the giallo. Finally the study examines the role of the giallo hero and suggests that the giallo is posing existential questions, and can be understood as existential suspense thrillers. The findings are exemplified through a wide scope of films including brief references and longer analytic examples elaborating on topical discussions in this developing field of study.
Introduction

“These films had a sensibility that can be called ‘European’, instead of having special effects they bring more intellectual truth.”

– Renato Polselli, Director

Taking its cue from Gary Needham’s Kino Eye article Playing with genre – an introduction to the Italian giallo (2002) this study is an effort in opening up rather than closing down the subject of the giallo. As such it aims to explore rather than define, suggesting avenues rather than blind alleys. As I have seen it, part of this effort is examining the views and writings available on the giallo. Therefore much of the study is spent on analysing and comparing different ideas and theories. I have made a conscious attempt to bring ideas from various fields together and as it were, pitch them against each other not in antagonism but in an attempt to find a common ground. Obviously this method is employed to present my views, not only upon the work that has been done, but also to create ideas of my own. However I have been deliberate about a form of presentation within the study that will introduce the reader to several topical discussions of this developing field as well as allowing a certain freedom in evaluating my argumentation and findings. Subsequently within this study I do not settle with posing one question, arriving at a single conclusion. Actually, I have intentionally avoided the use of the traditional summary and conclusion in favour of posing a series of question with the intention to open up the subject. I have thus taken it upon myself to gather ideas from other studies that I feel has not been given enough scrutiny with the intention of developing them and considers their implications.

In short the questions that I pose in are concerned with generic definition of the giallo and its interdisciplinary influences. But also I study the devices and form of giallo narration in an effort to show a connection between form and contents. In conclusion I delve into the world of the giallo protagonists in an effort to find the drive and meaning of the giallo hero. Throughout the study I try to canvas a wide scope of films and use them both as reference points in the discussion and as analytic examples fore fronting the observations of the study itself. In his conclusion Needham decides that the giallo is difficult to pin down and thus my hope is that this study will provide ideas that will consist a steppingstone towards a wider understanding as well as opening up for further discussion.

The Italian *giallo* occupies a peculiar place in film history; once almost globally successful, it today remains obscure to many, almost ignored. But still it is a unique cultural phenomenon, attracting new cult followers with every coming year and new re-release on home video. Strangely little has been said from the point of view of film studies. Apart from the obvious exception of the fascination for renowned horror film director Dario Argento and subsequent critical writing on his films, the literature to be found addressing the *giallo* almost exclusively is concerned with labelling and listing of the films. Of course this important task taken up in pillar works such as Luca M. Palmerini and Gaetano Mistretta’s *Spaghetti Nightmares* (1996) or Adrian Luther Smith’s *Blood & Black Lace* (1993) should not be belittled. Their arduous work holds extreme importance and has managed to establish an overview of the *giallo* body of films. Something more easily said than done when history has been unkind to the films and accessibility to them still presents a problem. These books in general and the two aforementioned in particular form an indispensable framework for both commercial interest and academic studies of the *giallo*. But apart from a few biographies on Italian horror directors there is still little in the way of detailed observations of these films. Where it does take place it’s mostly concerned with psychological analysis like in the fascinating Creation Books series *Necronomicon*, or simply the role of violence in cinema in general. Again I am not suggesting one should overlook any studies, on the contrary, but it is obvious that much is to be done in mapping the *giallo* and this study is meant as a step in this direction.

In his insightful, but sadly all too brief text, *Playing with genre; an introduction to the Italian ‘giallo’*, Gary Needham explain the *giallo* not as a genre, but as a “conceptual category with highly movable and permeable boundaries that shift around from year to year”.

And along the line of Palmerini/Mistretta and Luther Smith, he goes on to describe a set of familiar aspects of the *giallo*. But more importantly, Needham also traces the *giallo* back to its literary origins in the mystery, suspense and hard boiled serial novels published in Italy by Mondadori from the 30’s and onwards. Indeed the name ‘*giallo*’ (translate as ‘yellow’) in itself comes from the actual colour of the covers of these pulp fiction novels. This is echoed by Mikel J. Koven in the early pages of *La Dolce Morte – Vernacular cinema and the Italian giallo film*, a book that of course is of a particular interest as it is to this day the only academic book exclusively on the topic of the *giallo* and I will find reason return to it many times within this study. In the opening chapter Koven determines that “The ‘*giallo* film’ draws

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heavily upon the tradition of Agatha Christie’s fiction, hard boiled American detective novels and film noir.”\(^3\) It is interesting to note that the *giallo* not only shares common literary roots with the American Film Noir but also shares its problem in being defined as a genre. In 1955 Raymond Borde and Étienne Chaumeton defined film noir not as a genre but as a *series* of films:

> A series can be defined as a group of motion pictures from one country sharing certain traits (style, atmosphere, subject matter…) strongly enough to mark them unequivocally and give them, over time, an unmistakable character. Series persist for different amounts of time: sometimes two years, sometimes ten. To some extent the viewer decides on this.\(^4\)

In the light of Needham’s statement I would extend to say that Borde and Chaumeton’s words ring true for a description of the *giallo* as a series as well. Needham suggests that rather than “genre” the Italians use the word “*filone*, which is often used to refer to both genres and cycles as well as to currents and trends.\(^5\) Koven uses this word throughout *La Dolce Morte* and adds that “we can see *filone* more idiomatically, as a ‘tradition’ to be followed, [...] the *giallo* appears more as a tradition of film narrative than as a genre.”\(^6\)

However for this study I have opted for the more established term “series” as defined by Borde and Chaumeton in describing the *giallo*. This not so much because I find Needham’s and Koven’s use of the term *filone* particularly problematic within their respective arguments, but I do find *series* a more direct term. Also, more importantly, *series* holds connotations of temporality and containment which is fitting as, just like film noir, the *giallo* today is widely understood in connection to a specific canon of films which is unique to Italy, and indeed a certain period of history. Finally *series* also evokes an appropriate notion of *seriality* which I will return to later in the study.

Interestingly the German *krimi*, which served as an early inspiration on the *giallo* also had a definite cycle, a series of films based upon the detective stories of Edgar Wallace, confided solely to the late 1950’s and the 1960’s. Koven explains that “In West Germany at the time, there was a parallel movement in crime cinema, the *krimi*.”\(^7\) Similar to the *giallo* the *krimi* film series had literary roots in the murder mystery – More specifically in

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5 http://www.kinoeye.org/02/11/needham11.php
6 Koven, p. 6
7 Ibid. p. 4
pulp reprints of novels of the British authors Edgar Wallace and his son Bryan Edgar Wallace, books that enjoyed a particular vogue in West Germany in the 50’s and 60’s. Even though a handful of gialli were loosely based on books by the Wallaces the most distinct example of the krimi ascendancy is arguably Dino Tavella’s 1965 film Il Mostro di Venezia (The Monster of Venice). However rather than an enduring influence, the krimi should be seen more as an aesthetic point of departure for the giallo, which swiftly moved from the light detection procedurals and humorous tone of the krimi into more daring territories. Furthermore whereas the krimi hero was almost exclusively a sharp Scotland Yard detective, often with a slapstick sidekick, the typical giallo hero, as we will see, is an amateur detective, more likely to be a victim of the horrific than the comedic.

The period of the giallo, as it has been canonized, start with Mario Bava’s highly acclaimed La Ragazza che sapeva troppo (The Girl Who Knew Too Much) in 1962 and end with Lucio Fulci’s infamous Lo Squartatore di New York (The New York Ripper) in 1982. Any film with traits similar to the giallo prior or post this period, immediately come under debate whether it actually is a giallo or not. An argument could be put ahead that any giallo post-1982 is either revival gialli like Dario Argento’s Non ho sonno (Sleepless, 2001) widely acknowledged as “a return to his roots” or neo gialli fore fronting radically new influences, like for instance Michele Soavi’s Deliria (Stage Fright, 1987) influenced by American slasher films. Similarly the very few Italian thrillers pre-1962 boast characteristics radically apart from those of the giallo series. Consider, for instance, Luchino Visconti’s Ossessione (Obsession, 1942) which rather than a giallo is considered the first neo-realist film. As observed by Koven the giallo series peaked in the years 1970-75. Koven fittingly dubs this the time of the “classical giallo” after which, he argues that the rise in popularity of the poliziotto (police film) marked an end to the giallo series. 

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8 Paul, p. 38
9 Koven, p. 8
The problem of genre

As insightful as it is, Needham’s giallo article still establishes something of a problem, if the giallo is a series of films rather than a genre, which genre does this series belong to? In defining this, Tzvetan Todorov’s seminal text The typology of detective fiction (1966), can be of much help.

It is clear that the giallo, as understood by the films of its canon, constitutes stories of mystery, crime, sex and violence. This in the light of Needham’s claim that the category’s conceptual boundaries is in some way shift able, the giallo obviously echoes Todorov’s description of the thriller: “The contemporary thriller has been constituted not around a method of presentation but around the milieu represented, around specific characters and behavior; in other words, its constitutive character is in its themes. […] it is around these few constants that the thriller is constituted: violence, generally sordid crime, the amorality of the characters.”

But one could possibly argue that the giallo also builds on the tradition of the whodunit mystery, especially since the earliest Mondadori gialli (plural of giallo) was primarily of the “rational deduction” variety, i.e. in the style of the likes of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle or Agatha Christie. But returning to Todorov’s text, we soon learn that the key aspect of the whodunit does not match the giallo canon at all. Todorov describes the whodunit in the following way: “The first story, that of the crime, ends before the second begins. But what happens in the second? Not much. The characters of this second story, the story of the investigation, do not act, they learn. Nothing can happen to them: a rule of the genre postulates the detective’s immunity.” Clearly this is not true for the giallo where the protagonist and amateur (also unlike in the whodunit) detectives are at constant risk. For instance Jane Harrison (Edwige Fenech), in Sergio Martino’s Tutti colore nel buio (All the colours of the dark, 1972) is certainly no Hercule Poirot. If anything Feneche’s character is more like Mia Farrow’s in Rosemary’s Baby (Roman Polanski, 1968) – at the centre of a fiendish conspiracy unable to trust even her own vision. This very much unlike the classical detective of the whodunit who is always a distanced observer, a reader clear in his position and securely defined as on the side of law and order. Detection is the story of the whodunit, and therefore, needs to be clear and logical. The giallo as a rule is anything but clear and logical, and constitutes an often unfathomable series of murders – like in Tutti colore nel

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11 http://www.kinoeye.org/02/11/needham11.php
12 Todorov, p. 139
*buio*: a film built on characters who can’t distinguish reality from fantasy. Or consider the acid trip world of Lucio Fulci’s *Una Lucertola con la pelle di donna* (A Lizard in a Woman’s Skin, 1971) – a veritable whirlpool of fragmented hallucinations, never adding up, resulting in horror, violence and murder. Or indeed Riccardo Freda’s *Follia Omicida* (Murder Obsession, 1981), a film that delivers a string of gruesome killings but never clearly differentiates between raving nightmares, horrific past trauma and insane reality.

“The traditional giallo demands that one observe the numerous murders, thus placing strict attention on acts of violence,” writes Ray Guins in *Tortured Looks - Dario Argento And Visual Displeasure* (1996). In other words, in the giallo a developing chain of crimes is the story, not detection. Todorov writes: “[the thriller] fuses the two stories [past and present i.e. detection and crime] or in other words, suppresses the first and vitalize the second. We are no longer told about a crime anterior to the moment of the narrative; the narrative coincides with the action.”¹³ What this means is that unlike the thriller, the whodunit is foremost an intellectual puzzle, distanced and logical, working to discover a past truth, whereas in the thriller prospection, takes the place of retrospection, and suspense takes the place of curiosity. This is also very true of the giallo, and with a few small modifications Todorov’s following description of the thriller could stand for the giallo:

There is no story to be guessed; and there is no mystery, in the sense that it was present in the whodunit […] we realize here that two entirely different forms of interest exist. The first can be called *curiosity*; it proceeds from effect to cause: starting from a certain effect (a corpse and certain clues) we must find its cause (the culprit and his motive). The second form is *suspense*, and here the movement is from cause to effect: we are first shown the causes, the initial *données* (gangsters preparing a heist), and our interest is sustained by the expectation of what will happen, that is certain effects (corpses, crimes, fights). This type of interest was inconceivable in the whodunit, for its chief characters (the detective and his friend the narrator) were, by definition, immunized: nothing could happen to them. The situation is reversed in the thriller: everything is possible, and the detective risks his health, if not his life. ¹⁴

Also, adding to this, I would like to propose the idea that in the giallo detection is more of a personal mission than an intellectual practice. I will return to this notion later in this study. Suffice to say at this point, that more often than not in the giallo the actual investigative incitement comes not so much from a will to utilize rational deduction to solve a past enigma, but rather from the panic of the amateur detective character to save his/her own life. In the masked face of a ghostly giallo killer, past motives and factual explanation are secondary at

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¹³ Todorov, p. 141
¹⁴ Ibid.
best, and subsequently often only gone into in order for the character to be spared the carnage or to expose the lurking threat of psychosexual murderers under the surface of seemingly every day urban society.

Consider David Hemming’s role as jazz pianist and sole eyewitness to a murder in Argento’s Profondo rosso, (Deep Red, 1975) repeatedly targeted by the unknown killer, or Edwige Feneche’s portrayal of a young nude model moving into the apartment of a murdered young nude model in Giuliano Carnimeo’s Perché quelle strane gocce di sangue sul corpo di Jennifer? (The Case of the Bloody Iris, 1972) or Mimsy Farmer’s forensic pathologist stalked by the murderer in Armando Crispino’s Macchie solari (Autopsy, 1974), indeed the list could be made longer. Writing about the amateur detective in giallo, Koven touches upon this issue and claims that “[o]ccasionally the amateur detective recognizes him- or her- self as a potential victim of the killer, and so their investigation is motivated as much by self-preservation as by determination to solve the mystery.”¹⁵ Unlike a part of any intellectual enigma of the whodunit, Yvonne Leffler, in Horror as a Pleasure (2000), describes this as crucial to the creation of suspense: “The more convinced the reader or viewer is that the sympathetic character is in real danger for a particular time and risks defeat, the more suspense he or she will feel.”¹⁶

The detective of the giallo canon is as mentioned earlier almost exclusively an amateur, often victimized or even suspected. He or she is seldom connected to any instances of law and order and works his or her detection in an area, if not in-between law and crime, at least freed from having to conform to any of its institutions. For example, Franco Nero’s character, Andrea Bild, in Luigi Bazzoni’s Giornata nera per l’ariete (The Fifth Cord, 1971) is a journalist and an alcoholic on a diffuse personal mission. Acting both as prime suspect and detective, he is thrown utterly at random into a series of gruesome murders. He is not able to trust any one and is himself trusted by no one.

Julia Hoxter writes in Anna with a Devil Inside – Klein, Argento & “The Stendhal Syndrome” (1998), on Dario Argento’s canonized gialli that “Argento’s protagonists have to fight for their understanding in a world which is organised specifically for its denial.”¹⁷ Of course, a world organized for denial is no scene for a whodunit. In La Dolce Morte, Koven acknowledges the giallo’s origins within whodunit mysteries but suggests that

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¹⁵ Koven, p. 86
¹⁶ Yvonne Leffler, Horror as Pleasure (Almqvist & Wiksell International, Stockolm, 2000), p. 102
“[the gialli] appealed to the most salacious aspects of literary crime fiction, thereby making these films closer in spirit to horror films than to mysteries.”

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18 Koven, p. 16
La Morte accarezza a mezzanotte

La Morte accarezza a mezzanotte, (Death Walks at Midnight, 1972) is Luciano Ercoli’s third and possibly most formulaic giallo, remembered today mainly for its camp style and lush groovy score by Gianni Ferrio. Of course camp sensibilities are part of the allure of the giallo and Needham deems it one of its “familiar aspects”\textsuperscript{19}. But La Morte accarezza a mezzanotte also boasts a fascinating premise which could be said to epitomize the giallo structurally.

Susan Scott plays fashion model Valentina, who agrees to take part in a scientific experiment with a new hallucinogenic drug overseen by a university professor and a journalist. Little does she know that it is really a set up by a scandal newspaper. However, the scandal compares little to the grim events of the experiment. Whilst under the influence of the drug, Valentina appears to witness a young woman being brutally murdered by a man with a viciously spiked glove, all in the penthouse apartment across the street from hers. As she comes to from the drug, the vision haunts her and she seems to develop paranoid delusions of being stalked by the murderer. Neither the journalist, the Police or Valentina’s boyfriend believes her. As Valentina prepares to settle for the explanation that it was in fact only a hallucination, she discovers that a murder just like the one she envisioned was committed at the exact same location six months earlier. The journalist suggests that she has in fact witnessed the murder but was so traumatized by it that she repressed the memory of it, arguing that the psychedelic drug has finally unlocked it. But as a woman claiming to be the grieving sister of the murder victim approaches Valentina, it seems her vision does not comply with the reality of the murder. Still, what she reportedly experienced has reached a killer who is prepared to kill again and again to ensure a secret kept and subsequently Valentina faces mortal danger.

Apart from being a perfect example of the giallo’s obsession with the eyewitness and unreliable sight or in the words of Needham, “hallucinations and subjective ‘visions’ […] central to both protagonists and the narrative enigma”\textsuperscript{20}, La Morte accarezza a mezzanotte is also a prime example of how the giallo is structured like a thriller rather than a whodunit. This is partly due to the obvious reason of the failing logic of its “detective”, and partly because of her inability to distance herself from the crime itself. But more than that, the film emphasizes that the giallo is always built on ambiguous and deceiving narrative information rather than factual clues leading to a logical conclusion. The giallo is often the very opposite of logical, and plots are always impressively convoluted. La Morte accarezza a

\textsuperscript{19} http://www.kinoeye.org/02/11/needham11.php
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
mezzanotte blatantly exemplifies this as the narrative initially does not even differentiate past from present.
**Fumetti neri**

Possibly due to lack of English language material on the subject or an unwillingness to indulge in interdisciplinary studies the influence of Italian adult comics known as *fumetti neri* on the *giallo* is yet to be explored. Neither Needham nor Koven even mention the *fumetti neri*. However in *Italian Horror Film Directors* Louis Paul notes that the “popularity and wealth of adult Italian comic strips […] caused some directors to look to these sadistic, sexy and violent illustrated stories for their inspiration.”\(^{21}\) Sadly Paul does not scrutinize this inspiration and settles for only briefly addressing a few films adopted from *fumetti*. This is unfortunate as it could be argued that as the *giallo* evolved the influence of the *fumetti neri* became more tangible than any influence from the West German *krimi*. In the following paragraphs I try to shed some light over this influence.

*Fumetto* translates as ”puff of smoke”, and refers to the speech balloon in comics. The word *nero* of course means “black/dark” and suggests the tone of these particular comics as adult themed. Interestingly the official birth of the *fumetto nero* coincides with the birth of the *giallo* in 1962. A year which saw the first publication of *Diabolik – Il Fumetto del Brivido*, that is; *Diabolik – The Comic of Thrills*, created by the sisters Angela & Luciana Giussani. *Diabolik* was a masked anti-hero executing daring diamond heists with his sidekick Eva Kant. *Diabolik* was shown to enjoy killing and he battled with the Italian establishment in random acts of violence and its financial institutions with bombs. As suggested by Len Wein in *Danger: Diabolik – From Fumetti to Film*, *Diabolik* can be seen as a terrorist, but he is in effect battling fascists of the 30’s and 40’s who still are in power through the institutions of a corrupt Italian society.\(^{22}\) In any case the *Diabolik fumetto* was a mere starting point for a veritable anti-hero culture densely populated by spectacular terrorists, criminals and murderous madmen of every kind, be them ideologically tainted or not. The names of these *fumetti* almost speak for themselves; *Satanik, Kriminal, Killing, Infernal* and *Sadik* to name but a few.

In *Esotika, Erotika, Psicotika* Roberto Guidotti describes the birth of the *giallo* and *fumetto nero* as a paradigm shift where the “naïve, neorealist Italy of the fifties would become the scandalous country of later years. Scandalous in a ‘Sadeianistically’ positive sense”.\(^{23}\) He dubs this the “*kaleidoscopic era*”, a time of hedonistic excess when Italian

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popular culture ventured to explore every dimly lit corner of the under world and the erotic, generously dwelling upon crime, violence, sadomasochism, fetishism and lustmord\textsuperscript{25}, all under an air permeated by the seductive pop jazz sounds of Ennio Morricone, Stelvio Cipriani or Piero Umliani. Spectacular as this description may be it goes a long way in placing the giallo within an interdisciplinary cultural context.

Like the giallo the fumetto nero, rather than engaging in themes of the supernatural, alluringly exploited the horrors of the modern city “in realistically conceived stories dealing with daily life themes”, and if the protagonist was violent, he was so because “he represents the society of that era which was brutal.”\textsuperscript{26} Furthermore it did so by often utilising a style of cinematic framing and settings. Several of these comics were even adapted into films: Marchio di Kriminal (Fernando Cerchio, 1967), Satanik (Piero Vivarelli, 1968) and Baba Yaga (Corrado Farina, 1973), just to mention a few. Furthermore prolific giallo directors like Mario Bava and Umberto Lenzi made their own, and in hindsight arguably two of the most successful adaptations of fumetti neri: Diabolik (Danger: Diabolik, Mario Bava, 1968), Kriminal (Umberto Lenzi, 1966), thus bringing a certain cinematic connection between the fumetti nero and the giallo.

Another fascinating aspect of the fumetti is the development of the cineromazo, still photography comics adaptations of current films. The phenomenon developed during the 60’s out of the earlier fotoromanzo which were original stories told in still photographs. The fotoromanzo “was first conceived in post war Italy to entertain young ladies and housewives alike with sloppish love stories”\textsuperscript{27}, but by the mid-60’s the first fotoromanzi for adult male audiences appeared comprised of photographic set pieces “full of violence, vices, nude girls and sex”\textsuperscript{28}, and “featuring the same dramatic and erotical [sic] elements characterizing Italian pulp fiction such as: romance, corruption, jealousy, sadism, fetishism, sex and death.”\textsuperscript{29}

Conclusively an image emerges incorporating Italian pulp fiction, fumetti and gialli within the same cultural, but to some extent, also thematic framework. Furthermore this framework extends into the practical, partly because of the connection of adaptations of fumetti into films made by gialli directors but notably also the other way around. The

\textsuperscript{24} Guidotti, p. 13
\textsuperscript{25} Pleasure killing
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid. p. 58
connection between the Italian film industry and the *fotoromanzi* needs to be further studied but it is interesting to note that several *gialli* seem to have been either previewed or subsequently adopted into *fotoromanzi*, for instance sequences from Renato Polselli’s *Delirio caldo* (Delirium, 1972) and Sergio Martino’s *Tutti i colori del buio* both appeared in the *cineromanzo* magazine *Cinesex Attualità*\(^\text{30}\).

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The question of horror

According to Koven, there is an argument to suggest that *gialli* are, in fact, part of the horror genre. He writes: “with their focus on the more exploitative aspects of crime fiction, namely the graphic depiction of violence and murder, these *gialli* films are often linked directly with the horror genre despite the absence of any supernatural agency.” In *Beyond Terror – The Films of Lucio Fulci* (2002) Stephen Thrower supports this idea and laconically claims that the *giallo* “crossbreeds the murder mystery with horror”. Troy Howarth claims that this is an over-simplification, but Koven counters with the fact that the *giallo* filmmakers also tend to be contextualized within other forms of exploitation horror cinema, and concludes: “So most histories of *giallo* cinema, such as are available, contextualize the genre within the history of Italian horror cinema”. Considering that Palmerini/Mistretta and Luther Smith respectively use the subtitles *Italian Fantasy-Horrors as seen through the eyes of their protagonists* and *The Definite Guide to Italian Sex and Horror Movies* to describe their books, suggests that the *giallo* could fall into the horror category. However, upon a closer look, it becomes clear that even within these books the *giallo* is discussed in different terms than horror films. Palmerini/Mistretta clearly separates *giallo* or “thriller and mysteries” from “horror films”. Adrian Luther Smith, on his side, just a few lines into his introduction, is perfectly clear about dubbing the *gialli* “Italian thrillers”. Furthermore he claims that his book “goes beyond recognised genre boundaries” to also include horror and erotic films on the grounds that they “will undoubtedly be of interest to those who enjoy lurid Italian movies”, this rather than actually suggesting them to be within the same genre.

Louis Paul goes even further in his chronological description of the development of Italian horror: he more or less omits the *giallo* altogether. Pointing out that what he clearly names the “*giallo* thriller”, as early as in Mario Bava’s *Sei donne per l'assassino* (Blood and Black Lace, 1964), “signalled the coming end of the […] Italian Gothic horror cinema.”

Paul further goes on to establish that Dario Argento’s seminal 1969 *giallo*, *L'Uccello dalle piume di cristallo* (The Bird With the Crystal Plumage), in fact “heralds the end of the

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31 Koven, p. 9
33 Koven, p. 9
34 Ibid. p. 3
35 Luca M Palmerini & Gaetano Mistretta, *Spaghetti Nightmares - Italian Fantasy-Horrors as seen through the eyes of their protagonists* (Fantasma Books, Key West, 1996), p. 171
36 Ibid. p. 163
38 Paul, p. 92
classical Italian horror film”. However these observations may be all too literal and even though they seem to show a practical, perhaps commercial, division of the giallo from horror films in general what is actually at question here are the giallo films in themselves.

Looking at Noël Carroll’s seminal work, *The Philosophy of Horror* (1990), where Carroll claims to write a Poetics of horror, or as he calls it Art-Horror, is a staring point in assessing the giallo vis-à-vis horror. Carroll declares that “The object of suspense is a situation or an event; the object of horror is an entity, a monster.” At face value, a statement like that would seem to settle the debate swiftly, but even Carroll admits that “it may be true that a sharp line cannot be drawn between art-horror and its neighbours because its boundaries are somewhat fluid.” My reading is that the recognition of any given work of fiction to belong to horror as a genre to Carroll is a matter of exploration and discussion.

Carroll claims that horror requires a monster and he means this not metaphorically, but in a very literary sense: “In works of horror, the humans regard the monsters they meet as abnormal, as disturbances of the natural order”, and furthermore that “monster” refers to any being not believed to exist now according to contemporary science. The definition of a monster obviously starts with the fact that it is dangerous. Carroll writes: “Horrific monsters are threatening […] they must be dangerous […] That it kills and maims is enough. The monster can also be threatening psychologically, morally, or socially.” He goes on to state that “Monsters may also trigger certain enduring infantile fears, such as those of being eaten or dismembered, or sexual fears, concerning rape and incest.” Carroll exemplifies using traditional monsters like Mr. Hyde, Dracula, The Phantom of the Opera and the Monster of Dr. Frankenstein. He explains that these monsters are entities that serve as the particular objects of the actual emotion of horror. Obviously Carroll is talking about monsters of a supernatural kind, not about humans performing monstrous acts, which could be argued to be the focus of the giallo. Carroll also points out that monsters are always disgusting (even associated with vermin) or impure, either in an obvious physical way or in the way that “these creatures are not classifiable according to our standing categories”. Thus in essence a monster is something that denies boundaries and exists in a constant transgression with its

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39 Paul, p. 25  
40 Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of the Heart*, (Routledge, New York, 1990), p. 143  
41 Ibid. p. 38  
42 Ibid. p. 16  
43 Ibid. p. 27  
44 Ibid. p. 43  
45 Ibid. p. 32
surrounding world. Carroll explains that the moment a monster becomes a harmonious part of its surrounding world the fiction leaves horror and enters the realm of the fairy tale.\textsuperscript{46}

Applying Carroll’s definition of horror to the \textit{giallo} is no easy task, since at first glance he seems to be talking about something entirely different. However, if we explore what he actually writes, things become less obvious. Certainly the serial murderer of the \textit{giallo} can be said to be monstrous and obviously they are at least one of the objects of the \textit{giallo} that arouse emotions of horror. They use often sexualized violence to kill and maim, and are threatening both physically and psychologically to their victims. They induce fear, harm, death and paranoia. They exist in and threaten all levels of society, families, the church, law enforcement and high finance. They accept no moral or physical boundaries and in a few spectacular examples even transgress gender boundaries. They are more often than not dualist characters in the manner of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Just consider George Hilton’s character in Sergio Martino’s \textit{La Coda dello scorpione} (The Case of the Scorpions Tail, 1971) doubled as romantic lead and cold-hearted killer, or Anthony Franciosa as Peter Neal in Argento’s \textit{Tenebre} (Tenebre, 1982), a sympathetic mystery writer who goes amateur detective only to be exposed as a deranged serial killer. These killers are certainly believed to exist, but contemporary science can be said to have a hard time explaining them, and the institutions of society are incapable of incorporating them or even catching them. However this is perhaps something of a stretch of Carroll’s original argument. More importantly in ways the \textit{giallo} killer appear supernatural, seemingly able to be in many places at the same time, or disappearing into thin air. They are at times accompanied by atmospheric effects like thunder or fog and even able to haunt their victim’s dreams. Also the killers are almost exclusively portrayed as unstoppable, relentless forces of evil, all of which is played for supernatural effect.

For example, consider Carol’s (Conchita Airoldi) demise in Sergio Martino’s \textit{I Corpi presentano tracce di violenza carnale} (Torso, 1973). Carol leaves a party, stepping out into the night and comes upon an eerily mist enshrouded swamp with leafless birch trees. As she enters the swamp her steps become strained and the mud seems to pull her, if not down, at least to a halt. She freezes completely in her step as a dark featureless figure suddenly appears at the far end of the swamp. A bird croaks ominously as the figure evaporates into mist. Carol fearfully looks around her, scanning her surroundings. The fog thickens, as the swamp takes on the quality of a phantasmagoric labyrinth. All is quiet and still. Suddenly the figure appears

\textsuperscript{46} Carroll, p. 16
as out of nowhere behind Carol. Horror strikes her and she stumbles backwards and falls over, covered in muddy water, unable to get back on her feet, she frantically tries to crawl away from the masked featureless figure who closes in on her, silent, relentless with forceful steps. There is no escape, she cannot fight, the swamp has become a nightmare world, where logic is suspended and Carol seems to be pulled down into its water. The featureless killer commands the situation with his presence, and seemingly the whole world of the swamp.

The titles of the films sometimes even allude to verminous or mysterious creatures and animals like for example La Tarantola dal ventre nero, (The Black Belly of the Tarantula, Paolo Cavara, 1971), L’Iguana dalla lingua di fuoco (The Iguana with the Tongue of Fire, Riccardo Freda, 1971), 4 mosche di velluto grigio (4 Flies on Grey Velvet, Dario Argento, 1971), Una Lucertola con la pelle di donna (A Lizard in a Woman’s Skin, Lucio Fulci, 1971), La Coda dello scorpione etc. The giallo killer furthermore can even be said to be disgusting in the sense that they wreak gore and mutilation where they go. A key connection to Carroll’s definition, as he writes that “the association of such impure creatures with perpetually pronounced gore or other disgusting trappings is a means of underscoring the repulsive nature of the being.”

Importantly in La Dolce Morte Koven points out that there is no term for serial killer in the Italian language. He writes that “there is no Italian equivalent for ‘serial killer’. When such killers do strike in the country, the press refers to them as il mostro, monsters.” He goes on to explain how designating these killers as monsters is an important linguistic operation that transports the unthinkable to the fantastic terrain where monsters dwell. He concludes: “The Italian il mostro maintains that mysterious quality to the killer. It is not part of everyday life.” On the other hand, Koven also writes clearly that: “Most of these films intentionally eschew a supernatural explanation in favour of a more rational one. Some supernatural explanations may be used as cover for the murders (as in Crispino’s Autopsy), but the murderer is always human.”

To this one could add the fact that the giallo killer is not the particular object of the emotion of horror in the strictest sense. For obviously a key thematic of the giallo is that anyone can be the killer. Murder and paranoia lurk in every dark corner of the modern city and horror is, as it were, omnipresent rather than confided to one single easily identified entity. In this the giallo stems from the tradition of the Grand Guignol theatre of horror, which

47 Carroll, p.52
48 Koven, p. 97
49 Ibid. p. 9
Louis Paul defines as exploiting not so much the imagined and ancient fears or terrors of fantastic monsters but the more shocking horrors of contemporary city life.  

However in *Horror as Pleasure* Yvonne Leffler argues that Carroll’s definition of horror is too narrow. Leffler goes on to criticise the fact that Carroll suggests that the narrative structure of the horror story is not genre-specific and that the experience of horror is triggered solely by confrontation with a monster. Leffler also writes that Carroll underestimates the specific features of the horror genre, which she claims consists of “an emotive representational technique quite different from thriller fiction in general”. She explains that although the horror story employs the *erotetic* structure of mystery, that is; a narrative built upon continuous questions and answers, where delaying those answers is what generates suspense; the structure is not the same. Leffler points out that “In the crime novel or police film, clear questions are asked and eventually answered”, but that in horror; “[t]he primary function of the questions is not to be answered, but to leave the reader or viewer in expectant uncertainty”. She therefore concludes that; “the mystery in the horror story is emotional, rather than intellectual in character.”

Leffler goes on to declare that in horror the viewer is not invited to solve the mystery as a disassociated observer but placed in a subjective closeness to the main protagonist and furthermore: “[c]onstant mystifications and surprising revelations leave the reader or viewer no time to think about individual details; the mystery must simply be accepted on the given conditions.” She also explains that linking mystery with the destiny of the main protagonist further complicates the mystery structure of the horror story. She explains that the “character is exposed not only to a danger from which escape is vital, but also to something mystical which arouses his or her curiosity and fascination.” Leffler suggests that this curiosity is what leads the protagonist into horror’s domains “towards the unknown and horrific, into a world beyond the logic and morality of everyday life.” This point especially echoes what wrote earlier about the *giallo* as a personal mission. If the key thematic of the *giallo* is that underneath the surface of every day urban life lays a violent absurd, the curiosity and fascination of the *giallo* hero is triggered by the glimpse of this world “beyon the logic and morality of every day life”. The *giallo* hero’s openness to

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50 Paul, p. 10  
51 Leffler, p. 97-113  
52 Ibid. p. 97  
53 Ibid. p. 107  
54 Ibid.  
55 Ibid. p. 110  
56 Ibid. p. 111
envisage this is central, and I will return to it, suffice to say that Leffler’s argument interestingly would suggest that this central giallo theme is influenced by the horror story.

Obviously as this is central, examples are numerous, but just to illustrate consider the opening sequence of Antonio Bido’s Il Gatto dagli occhi di giada, (The Cat’s Victims, 1977) where Mara (Paola Tedesco) by pure chance finds herself outside a pharmacy after closing time, as she tries to enter, someone blocks the door and in hissing voice tells her to go away. She leaves, thinking nothing of it, but the next day she reads in the paper that a murder has been discovered at that same pharmacy, and realizes that she has, as it were ajar the door to another world than her own. She has lifted the lid of every day life and glimpsed the underbelly of urban society. Obviously her life will never be the same.

I will later in this study show the importance, and the problematisation of first person narration deployed in the giallo series along the lines that Leffler suggest is genre specific for horror. I have touched upon it earlier in relation to the whodunit discussion and showed that, like Leffler states about horror protagonists, the giallo amateur detective is no distanced observer. And given the giallo’s kaleidoscope world and labyrinth narratives individual detail is of secondary importance.

Also similarly to Leffler’s definition the main function of the erotetic structure of the giallo certainly is to leave the viewer in expectant uncertainty. Indeed the giallo can only be accepted on given conditions due to its extreme emphasise on unreliable plot information. Again, Leffler claim’s all this as genre specific to horror. However she does point out that the erotetic structure of horror and thriller narratives are not equal, and in the giallo narrative questions are most often answered. I would say to a severally less degree than in whodunit mysteries, but still a solution is given and generally as Koven pointed out it does suspend any supernatural explanation.

But having said that, and as I have touched upon previously, I sincerely believe that it would be a stretch to say that the giallo consists of intellectual mysteries in the actual meaning of puzzle-solving crime novels by the likes of Christie. I would opt for Leffler’s model of the emotional mystery to describe the giallo. This is especially due to the giallo’s dependence on first person narration and focalization. For example in Osvaldo Civirani’s Il Diavolo a sette facce, (The Devil with Seven Faces, 1971) we accept the narrative as focalized upon Carroll Baker and follow her as she embarks on a quest to save her twin sister from mortal danger only to later find out that she, herself is that very sister. The emphasis of focalization as an unreliable source of plot information effectively puts the giallo viewer in subjective closeness with the protagonists rather than in an objective and distanced position.
able to tell truth from falsehood. Thus rendering the world of the *giallo* an emotional world rather than a logical one.

Arguably more devastating for the idea of the *giallo* as horror is the fact that Leffler explains that while “the detective story offers a rational explanation for something previously inexplicable, the horror story confirms the existence of the unknown and incredible”. She goes on to decide that the horror story subsequently is structured as a reasoned argument leading to the confirmation of the unknown. The cruciality of this difference cannot be over stated. She writes that: “The revelation of the mystery at the end of the horror story does not explain or elucidate the earlier train of events [...] The ending of the detective story, in conjunction with the revelation, imposes meaning on what went before and provides answers to all questions.”

Obviously one can’t deny that the solution to mystery in the *giallo* shares this characteristic of the detective story even if narrative emphasizes is placed solidly on crime and violence rather than intellectual puzzle solving and rational explanation. However Koven strikingly notes that: “To discuss the *giallo* as narrative may invoke the genre’s dependence upon literary models of murder mysteries, but to sit through most of the films [...] is to experience them as horror films.”

All in all it is tempting to settle for the laconic statement from Thrower that the *giallo* crossbreeds the murder mystery with horror. For certainly all of this would make for an approximation of the *giallo* to horror? – Certainly, but nevertheless one could argue that what I have achieved here is simply confirming that Carroll’s core theory is accurate to specify art-horror and that the *giallo* thriller borrows trappings from the horror genre to secure its violence within the fantastic rather than addressing it as horrific in reality. This could be seen as an effect to transform what would otherwise be grim realist horror into exciting stylized visuals, alluring spectacle and daring entertainment. Supporting this argument is the fact that Carroll importantly declares that horror blatantly derives its name from the actual affect it intends to promote i.e. “a sense of horror” while Koven contradictorily attests that “these films are designed to give the audience a set of ‘thrills’”

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57 Leffler. p. 111  
58 Koven. p. 38  
59 Ibid. p. 32
The eyewitness

Earlier I concluded that narratively the *giallo* falls in the genre of the thriller rather than the whodunit, but what of the evident role of the past (and past crime) in the *giallo*? Taking Argento’s highly influential *L’Uccello dalle piume di cristallo* as an example, it seems obvious that it falls into the model of the thriller according to Todorov. Using Todorov’s description of the thriller, as quoted earlier, it is easy to “translate” the “gangsters preparing a heist”-remark into the opening scene of the killer preparing a murder, and fetishlike arranging the murder weapons. As it were we are witnessing the cause, and our anticipation of the coming effect is what feeds suspense. Also it is clear to see how Tony Musante’s character is not a classical detective but quite literary caught in the middle of a murder of the present at high risk of being killed himself. Xavier Mendik writes, in *The Investigative Drive Of The Giallo* (1996), that: “Unlike the classical detective, the *giallo* hero’s inability to extricate himself from the site of the real is reiterated at the level of the narrative’s structure. Specifically it is indicated by the failure to close of the act off the crime from that of its investigation.”

So far exactly according to Todorov’s thriller model. But as *L’Uccello dalle piume di cristallo* progresses the past becomes of narrative importance to. The film opens up an investigation of a crime of the past as of the present. This is a common trait of the *giallo*, which arguably could be seen as an influence from its literary origins. Todorov defines this kind of narration as “the suspense novel”. Where the past can be seen as a point of departure but the main interest derive from the story that is taking place in the present. He writes that the suspense novel:

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61 Todorov, p. 143
Interestingly Mendik’s view on the *giallo’s* type of detection brings the idea of the similarities with hardboiled fiction almost full circle when he describes it as “the Philip Marlowe way.” And yet it is at the very heart of this statement the unique possibilities of *giallo* narration reveals itself.

In hardboiled fiction the hero is the absolute focal point, the narrative voice if you will. What we learn in the *Big Sleep* (Raymond Chandler, 1939) we learn through Marlowe. All information is filtered through the detective and we can trust him not to deceive us. In Marlowe films like *The Lady of the Lake* (Robert Montgomery, 1947) narrative use of point of view shots was pioneered specifically to reach hardboiled realism and underscore the position of the detective as first person narrator. To some extent the same can be said for the *giallo*, with a couple of important exceptions. If film noir pioneered the use of point-of-view shots, and did it to achieve the first-person narration of the literary originals, the *giallo* took this device to its logical thematic, narrative and cinematic conclusion. For in the *giallo* the point of view shot is visually as central as in film noir but the agreement is quite different: Central to it is the questioning of vision. Needham writes: “The giallo makes a point about the failings of vision as a source of authority and knowledge”. And goes on to pint out that “All sorts of vision/knowledge dynamics are explored in the giallo” and he exemplifies using *L’Uccello dalle piume di cristallo*:

[...] **flaneur** Sam Dalmas (Tony Musante), is eyewitness to a knife assault in a chic roman art gallery. The gallery is explicitly concerned with maximizing clarity and vision: the space is minimal so there is no distractions for the gaze other than that of the crime; the doors/façade are enormous glass panels; nothing is obscured; the entire area is brightly lit. However despite all of these supports aiding Dalmas’s vision, he fails to see (or in psychoanalytic terms, he *misrecognises*) the truth of his gaze.

This scene from possibly the most influential *giallo* in the canon, (as mentioned by Louis Paul; perhaps bar only Mario Bava’s *Sei donne per la assassino*) is telling for the *giallo* series in several ways. First of all it exemplifies the way in which the point of view shot can not be trusted in the *giallo* for what it carries is a *failing* vision. A vision that installs doubt and paranoia at the heart of the viewer.

The *giallo* plays with our preconceived notion of the objectivity of the camera image as well as our blind trust in first person narrative as true within the realism of films. It

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62 Guins, p. 43
63 http://www.kinoeye.org/02/11/needham11.php
64 Ibid.
addresses the question of who owns a look, and is a technique of an absurd world, where there is never an all-knowing “God position”. Ray Guins writes:

[…]. Argento uses his camera to a dynamic end. The use of point of view shots (I-camera) have virtually become a trade mark of “slasher” films that reached their peak during the mid-’80s. The I-camera is used in order to illustrate the killer’s visual perspective. Argento takes this process to extreme measures by constantly switching the point of view between characters. In some cases the viewer is unsure who is doing the looking.

These lines and Needham’s example manage to capture something very specific about the *giallo*, namely that it is built around vision. More specifically the *giallo* is built upon the eyewitness as narrative device; concerned with the problems of witnessing, and communicating what has been witnessed but also the horror of seeing as “The killer punishes those who attempt to capture him/her in the gaze. The killer attempts to free him or herself from surveillance by going to its source – the vulnerable eye”66. I would go as far as to claim that in the *giallo*, actual solution is irrelevant and comes with mere convention. It is in fact always secondary to problematising issues of baring witness to violent absurdity, and the uncertainty and vulnerability of the very idea of the eyewitness.

It is also interesting to note that Needham, if only in passing, uses the word flâneur to describe Tony Musante’s character in *L’Uccello dalle piume di cristallo*. My reading is that Needham sees no point in further developing this as he sees it as strikingly obvious. And there is no questioning the fact the *giallo* protagonist is at heart a roaming urban observer, just as exemplified by Needham. Actually the *giallo* seems virtually seized with pedestrian exploration of the metropolis, or in other words: “the pace of the flâneur through the chaos of urbanity”67. And as a rule the characters of the *giallo* holds positions in the urban community which signals their openness to new views and the witnessing of unenvisaged events. In some cases they are even models living the very world of the image and, as it were, connected within the narrative to ideas of seeing and being seen, and even professionally associated with the actual camera itself.

But more commonly, and perhaps even more emblematic, the *giallo* world is densely populated by journalists, photographers and artists of any given kind. And if the character is in any other line of profession they are most likely on vacation, students, tourists, or simply travelling jetsetters. Koven notes: “The main thing is that all these types of people

65 Guins, p. 141
66 Ibid. p. 146
have sufficient time on their hands to travel about their respective cities investigating mysteries – particularly the tourists and reporters, as travelling about is precisely what they would be doing anyway.”68 Needham points out that the giallo characters; “don’t seem fixed to a home or location; they are always (in) between different places”69 and that there is an “obsession with travel and tourism”70 – the Baudelairean mobilized gaze with a boarding pass, if you will. Tellingly Anne Friedberg describes the mobilized gaze of the flâneur strikingly similarly to Needham when she describes it as “moving nowhere, neither here nor elsewhere.”71 But unlike as with Baudelaire, in the giallo the body of the observer is not gendered and can be both male and female. Thus we should add to Needham’s passing remark that the giallo eyewitness is not only a flâneur but also often a flâneuse. Just consider the opening scene of Maurizio Pradeaux’s Passi di danza su una lama di rasoio (Death Carries a Cane, 1972) where a Susan Scott plays Swedish journalist in Rome who witnesses a murder through a pair of coin-operated binoculars at a tourist viewpoint overlooking the urban landscape.

Interestingly this focus on professions like journalism and photography, teamed with jet setting, echoes the character of David Hemmings in Michelangelo Antonioni’s Blow Up (1966). In Antonioni’s Blow Up – An Existential Horror Film (2001) Mathew Coniam describes this seminal character like this: “That Hemmings plays a successful fashion photographer is doubly significant. First, it makes him a man of leisure, able to be aimless and bored. […] Secondly, the very nature of Hemming’s ‘freedom’ feeds his sense of unease and dislocation.”72 Coniam’s reading of Blow Up uncovers several important things in regards to the giallo, and I will return to it. Suffice to say at this point that he exposes a definite connection between narrative function and characterization in Blow Up, which to an extent explains what I have now described in regards to the giallo.

Conclusively, in the giallo, the eyewitness is a plot device that both can be understood as a visual narrator and a way to underline the thematic of any truth as subjective. But beyond that I also suggest that the giallo can be read as posing existential problems shaped as suspense thrillers.

68 Koven, p. 87
69 http://www.kinoeye.org/02/11/needham11.php
70 Ibid.
71 Friedberg, p. 30
Point(s) of view

The point of view shot in itself is a limited perspective. As technique it gives the illusion of clear vision, but in reality it is a form of limited first person narrative. It constitutes an edited relationship and is at heart ambiguous, just as we see in *L’Uccello dalle piume di cristallo.*

In existential terms, the *giallo* series focus on failing vision of the eyewitness, tells of man as lost, trapped and wandering. The perseverance of the witness, or in regards to a seeking a possible witness, in face of an absurd world, in the words of Sartre, tells of ‘good faith’ teaming the freedom of the flâneur with ideas of responsibility, truth, isolation and anxiety. Of course all this demands something quite different in regards to the supposed realist point of view shot of the film noir. This difference is mainly communicated through the use of the point of view shot as “unclaimed”. That is; “a series of shots […] held long enough and framed in order to create the impression that someone is watching, but without a reverse shot to show us who”\(^{73}\). A technique that I find can be considered the logical thematic, narrative and cinematic expression of the point of view shot for suspense thrillers in general. Indeed Leffler notes that “our perception of suspense is the result of a variety of points of views combined with a temporary lack of information.”\(^{74}\) But specifically the *giallo*, also builds its tension and suspense on an intricate sense of dislocation, paranoia and unclaimed focalized seeing.

In *Recreational Terror* (1997), Isabel Cristina Pinedo describes several variants of this disembodied look, all of which she explain add up to an haphazard movement “between unconnected points in narrative space [that] defies linear logic and produces a vague, menacing presence by withholding a lucid picture of threat.”\(^{75}\) Something which is echoed in Ray Guins article:

> In regards to points of view, […] the camera does indeed reflect various points of view – only for a limited amount of time in relation to characters. For example, the point of view is shared between the killer and victim. But the point of view is also adopted by others not immediately engaged in struggle such as […] other characters and unknown voyeurs. This allows the spectator access to various perspectives of cinematic identification.\(^{76}\)

A technique which subsequently results in a highly interesting mystery narration - A fragmented world of ambiguous and often horrifying scenes that needs decoding. It also

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\(^{73}\) Pinedo, p.52
\(^{74}\) Leffler, p. 104
\(^{75}\) Ibid.
\(^{76}\) Guins, p. 147
places emphasize on the notion that there is no absolute truth and that the narration in itself is in the eye (witness) of the beholder. Koven notes that “[m]oving into the subjective position of the killer him- or herself, keyed by the change in camerawork, is a visual equivalent of changing speakers or narrators in a story. But as is often the case in these moments in *gialli*, we are denied an establishing shot to determine whose perspective we are now taking”.77

Reading this, together with Ray Guins quote above, one could be led to think that most *gialli* are impossible to comprehend, and actually this is not far from the truth, the focalization of the narrative in any given *giallo* is certainly fleeing at best or utterly deceiving at worst. Thrower even exclaims that in the *giallo* “reliable plot information is obstinately deferred”.78

The examples of this are numerous, but only to illustrate: In Umberto Lenzi’s *Il Coltello di ghiaccio* (Knife of Ice, 1972) we follow the torments of the mute Carroll Baker as she and her family are seemingly victims of a serial killer, the films focalization is upon Carroll Bakers amateur detective character and we are given no reason to doubt her. But in the end it turns out she is actually the killer. In the same director’s *Spasmo* (1973) a wide array of perplexing events amounting to murder is finally explained by the fact that two of the main protagonists, on which focalization depend, are insane. In Riccardo Freda’s *Follia Omicida* (Murder Obsession, 1981), Silvia Dioniso’s character can’t separate truth from dreams. And she ends up witnessing her boyfriend killed by her would be mother-in-law, who is insane to the point of believing her own son being her dead husband, whom she herself murdered whilst traumatizing her son to believe that he committed the deed.

All this would be impossible in a whodunit or in narratives constructed along the lines of classical dramatic principles or straight first person narration. Thus the *giallo* relies heavily on multiple points of view and unclaimed perspectives to achieve its kaleidoscope narration. Facts are always tailored and the viewer has to rely on the “detective” to make a story out of the fragmented world and to find the truth, even if that story or truth at any moment also can be found to be a lie.

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77 Koven, p. 154
78 Thrower, p. 63
La Ragazza che sapeva troppo

Generally considered the first giallo ever made, Mario Bava’s, La Ragazza che sapeva troppo (The Girl Who Knew Too Much), could easily been called The Girl Who Saw Too Much. For the problem of vision as subjective is at the core of this complex thriller – Complex in its use of point of view as its narrative idea and the eyewitness as its central narrative device.

Letícia Román plays Nora Davis, a young American on holiday in Rome who witnesses a murder at the Piazza di Spagna. The nightmarish murder scene is highly ambiguous, as we do not see the actual attack, but the victim dying and a man disposing of the body. The vision is presented in a blurred dreamlike way as Nora is in a semiconscious state from a head blow suffered during a mugging just minutes before the murder. She passes out, and when she comes through the blood has turned into rain puddles and on the count of her dazed condition the police don’t believe her testimony. They go as far as to blame the whole experience on a dream stemming from her predilection for reading gialli(!).

Instead of returning to America, Nora stays in Rome, explaining to her mother that she has to prove to everybody that what she saw was not a dream. Even her romantic interest, a young Doctor Bassi (John Saxon) believes it to be a hallucination caused by head trauma. Upon revisiting the picturesque murder scene he exclaims, “Does this look like the place where a woman could be murdered? This is the real Rome, a dream perhaps, but a nightmare – never.” Highlighting a theme central to the giallo, the sense that violence and paranoia lie in every corner of the modern city to be discovered if you only open your vision to it. In other words, in the giallo there is always a dark underbelly to even the most picturesque and what is seen depends solely on the point of view.

As Nora moves in with a mysterious friend of the family, who lives near the murder scene, menacing things begin to happen and she uncovers clues, leading her to believe that what she saw was a murder by a serial killer on an alphabet murder killing spree. And as the killings seem to continue, her paranoia mounts.

In Italian Horror Films of the 1960’s – A Critical Catalog of 62 Chillers, Lawrence McCallum points out that the central idea of the film is based upon a narration focalized upon Nora’s subjective vision. He writes that “once the basic scenario is established, we see a cat-and-mouse game that exists largely in the mind of the heroine. Nora Drawlston [sic] is obviously in danger, but her encounters with malevolent(?) forces are frightening because we experience her paranoia rather than see the presence of any actual threat.”

goes on to exemplify that in one of the key set pieces of the film, where the killer is stalking Nora, peering into the frosted windows where she stay, and she subsequently sets a trap inspired by “Wallace, Christie and Mickey Spillane”, builds on a deceiving focalization as it turns out it in the end is not the killer at all, but a police officer. McCallum writes that “moments, in which we mistakenly expect the emergence of the killer, are far more frightening than the actual emergence of the killer herself.”

Interestingly even at the very end of the film, after the successful conclusion of the mystery and the killer’s death, even Nora herself doubts what she has seen on the count that she was under the influence of marijuana, and wonders, “Was it all a dream?” The circle is complete, and the final scene of the film underlines the fact that in the giallo world, we can only accept the focalization of the eyewitness as the narrative device, we can never be sure that it isn’t really deceiving us.

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80 McCallum, p. 74
**Grand Guignol Giallo**

As mentioned earlier, it could be argued that the *giallo* stems from the tradition of the Grand Guignol in that it tells of the horrors of modern life rather than of the fantastic. Paul, decisively traces the origin of Italian horror to this French “Theatre of Horror” and describes its gruesome excess using the words of actor Robert Hossein: “The air was bewitching. It was as if the religious fever brought the devil-worshippers to the Grand Guignol. The stage manager always shouted for more blood! The rain sometimes leaked through the roof. The audience thought it was blood!” Spectacular as the account may be, more interesting is the fact that Paul explains that the Grand Guignol worked not so much in the gothic tradition of supernatural horror, but rather explored the horrors of modern city. Paul writes that: “What the theatre of the Grand Guignol exploited was not so much the imagined of ancient fears and terrors of fantastic monsters, but the more shocking horrible truths of contemporary Paris.” He goes on to describe how the horror lies in that anyone you pass on the street can be a killer and that evil lurks in the midst of urbanity: “Each and every night on stage, the Grand Guignol theatre performed acts of such unbelievable cruelty as stabbings, mutilations, beheadings, eye gougings, torture and dismemberment, all in gloriously graphic detail.”

From there on he concludes that the *giallo*, via Mario Bava’s seminal *Sei donne per la assassino* as it reference, stripped away much of the narrative story that propels the plot and added touches of therefore unseen sadistic nature to create a “stylish cinematic interpretation of the Grand Guignol ethic of shock value theatrics.” However establishing, these short remarks by Paul possibly are somewhat simplifications. For although graphic violence is an obvious part of both the *giallo* and the Grand Guignol, the influence run deeper than that.

In *Grand Guignol - The French Theatre of Horror*, Richard J. Hand and Michael Wilson writes that: “the Grand Guignol greatly influenced subsequent horror films” and explains that the Grand Guignol “put great emphasis on ‘the moment of violence’”, not simply as an aspect of the form but as “its most defining and unique feature”, and thus confirms that precisely like in the *giallo* crime is the story, not a simple pretext for detection. Similarly Koven writes that; “[t]he dominant feature that separates the *giallo* film from more

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81 Paul, p. 10
82 Ibid.
83 Ibid.
84 Ibid.
85 Paul, p.19
87 Hand and Wilson, p. 33
traditional murder mysteries and detective cinema is the focus, within these movies, on the 
murders themselves […] these murder sequences are often protracted, longer than they need 
to be to further the plot alone, and act as spectacles in themselves.\textsuperscript{87}

Marty Fluger and Dawn Williams in \textit{Directing Grand Guignol} echo this 
statement when they assess that: “a moment of violence is a scene in its own right with ‘a 
beginning, middle and end’”, which they describe as akin to a musical number\textsuperscript{88}. Strikingly 
Koven echoes this comparison and decides on his side that, “[\textit{giallo}] set pieces, like the 
musical number, are designed to be appreciated in their own right.”

Even the idea that these set pieces are “longer than they need to be” is present in 
the theatre of Grand Guignol where Hand and Wilson explains that the moment of violence is 
“deliberately staggered in order to squeeze every ounce of tension out of the scene.”\textsuperscript{89} 
Interestingly narrative function thus gives way to spectacle, and in both \textit{gialli} and the Grand 
Guignol scenes of violence plays longer than is strictly necessary for narrative purposes. 
Koven writes that “the narrative information [the set pieces] convey is subordinate to the 
visual pleasure they impart.”\textsuperscript{90} Curiously Koven uses the word pleasure, which is highly apt 
as the set pieces in the \textit{giallo} can be either erotic or violent, or more disturbingly but equally 
common, both, as it were mixing sex and horror.

Koven goes on to explain that the \textit{giallo} often promises sex, as well as violence 
and states that there is a “common connection made in these films […] between eroticism and 
murder.”\textsuperscript{91} In his article \textit{A (Sadistic) Night at the Opera} Leon Hunt writes that “the Italian 
horror film located its sadism […] in a sexual-oneiric landscape”\textsuperscript{92}. This blend of eroticism 
and violence is obvious at first glance in any given \textit{giallo}, for instance, just consider the 
following titles: \textit{I Corpi presentano tracce di violenza carnale}, (Carnal Violence aka Torso) 
\textit{Ragazza tutta nuda assassinata nel parco} (Naked Girl Killed in Park, Alfonso Brescia, 1972), 
\textit{Rivelazioni di un maniaco sessuale al capo della squadra mobile} (So Sweet, So Dead aka The 
Slasher is the Sex Maniac, Roberto Bianchi Montero, 1972), \textit{Nude per l'assassino}, (Strip 
Nude For Your Killer, Andrea Bianchi, 1975), or for that matter, the more no nonsense titles 

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\textsuperscript{87} Koven, p. 123  
\textsuperscript{88} http://www.aboutface.org  
\textsuperscript{89} Hand and Wilson, p. 38  
\textsuperscript{90} Koven, p. 127  
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid. p. 129  
\end{flushright}
Actually this mix of eroticism and murder goes far beyond simply employing set pieces of sex and violence respectively. More controversially, in *gialli* the violence itself is often sexualized, again this can be observed in almost any given *giallo* to various degrees but just to illustrate, consider these two brief examples: In Sergio Martino’s *Lo Strano vizio della Signora Wardh* (Blade of the Ripper, 1970) Julie Wardh (Edwige Fenech) is sexually assaulted by blackmailer Jean (Ivan Rassimov) during a heavy downpour. The whole scene plays in slow motion to a soundtrack of dreamlike music. Julie runs from Jean, but is caught and thrown to the ground, he strikes her repeatedly in the face with his fist and she collapses in a rain-soaked ditch, he then forcefully kisses her, sucking blood from her split lip, as she squirms to free herself he rips her dress open and fondles her bosoms. Even more controversially, as the scene then progresses it starts to dissolve the border between rape scene and love scene. It isn’t until much later in the film we understand that Julie and Jean are indulging in a sadomasochistic relationship.

In Renato Polselli’s *Delirio Caldo* Mickey Hargitay portraits psychiatrist Dr. Herbert Lyutak, a serial killer preying on young girls. Lyutak is impotent and find sexual stimulation only through acts of *lustmord*. Upon learning the truth his young wife Marcia (Rita Calderoni), murders another girl to free Herbert of suspicion. Then at their home she surrenders herself to him, urging him to do to her what he does to the girls he kills in such pleasure. As he tightens a grip around her neck she caresses his arm. As he breaks away, claiming he cannot do it, she cries out that she loves him and that he can do anything to her. As tears run down her face she fondles her neck for him, enticing him. He grabs her again, forcing her arm up against her back, her eyes wide in terror; she moves his hand in between her legs, and then she kneels down in front of him begging him to stop. He takes out a sharp instrument and cuts her back as she squirms on the floor. Suddenly he stops, stands up and stares ferociously into a mirror. Screaming “Enough Herbert, hyena, pig, stop it, selfish hyena!” and smashes the mirror.

The observations by Koven and Hunt are highly interesting in light of my argument about the influence of the Grand Guignol on *gialli*. The Grand Guignol was a red light district theatre with a reputation for a “unique mixture of the horrific and erotic, of the graphic and morally dubious, of *sang, sperme et sueur* (blood, sperm and sweat)”.[93] A theatre where eroticism was layered into violence, described by Hand and Wilson to have an

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[93] Hand and Wilson, p. 4
“undeniably erotic—even pornographic—dimension”\textsuperscript{94} where “the horror plays also succeeded in sexually arousing”\textsuperscript{95} the spectators.

On the basis of the set pieces Koven concludes that the \textit{giallo}, belong to shock cinema and thus; “is predicated upon transgressive images of sex and violence”, and that the \textit{giallo} set piece “attempt to grab the audience’s attention through the use of sex, violence and graphic gore”.\textsuperscript{96} Hunt for his part suggests that many would characterize the graphic realism of horror set pieces as pornographic, an argument, which brings to mind Isabel Cristina Pinedo’s theory of violent horror films as “carnography”. She writes that: “[t]he horror film, like pornography, dares not only to violate taboos but to expose the secrets of the flesh, to spill the contents of the body. If pornography is the genre of the wet dream, then horror is the genre of the wet death [...] carnography.”\textsuperscript{97} Pinedo goes on to explain horror’s low cultural standing: “As Richard Dyer points out about porn, both [horror and porn] are disreputable genres because they engage the viewer's body, elicit physical responses such as fear, disgust, and arousal in indeterminate combinations, and thereby privilege the degraded half of the mind/body split. [...] Porn and horror are obsessed with the transgression of bodily boundaries.”\textsuperscript{98} The key interest here being Pinedo’s suggestion that horror, essentially, consists of indeterminate combinations of fear and arousal, something which reminds us of the possibility that the Grand Guignol holds a much more central place than usually attributed to it in the development of the horror film in general.

However Hand and Wilson point out something which, doubled with the set piece structure, makes an even more specific argument for the connection: The centrality of the eyewitness in Grand Guignol. I have already shown the significance of the eye witness as plot device in the \textit{giallo}, and strikingly Hand and Wilson write that in Grand Guignol: “The centrality of the witness can often explain the dynamic of a Grand Guignol play as it helps to locate the focal point of horror within a given scene and explain the motivation and the function of roles played by the various characters onstage.”\textsuperscript{99} As I have suggested the same thing could be said about the role of the eyewitness in the \textit{giallo}. Hand and Wilson argue that there is a dynamic between audience and character in the use of the eyewitness as narrative

\textsuperscript{94} Hand and Wilson, p. 72
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid. p. 73
\textsuperscript{96} Koven, p. 137
\textsuperscript{97} Isabel Cristina Pinedo, \textit{Recreational Terror – Women and the Pleasures of Horror Film Viewing}, (State University of New York Press, New York, 1997), p.61
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{99} Hand and Wilson, p. 46
device which allows the spectator to be “implicated more forcefully within the action.” As I have argued this is reminiscent of the literary first person narrative but in the giallo complicated through the use of a focalization that alternates between victims, witness, killer and an unclaimed point of view.

Although Hand and Wilson’s chapter on the centrality of the eyewitness is sadly brief it is clear to see that they identify both that “the killer is made to function as the witness” as well as that “[t]here are many instances in Grand-Guignol plays where the victim is the witness.” Furthermore, and perhaps most emblematic for its influence on the giallo they note: “The horror can also be located around a bystander, who does not come to any physical harm but in the process of witnessing is taken to the ultimate horror.” All the more strikingly they exemplify this with the play Sous la lumière rouge (In the Darkroom, Maurice Level and Étienne Rey, 1911) where the character of Philippe “is not the victim, as such, but the horror is located around him as a witness, via the medium of the camera/photograph, which acquires a status beyond merely being a prop, becoming a ‘weapon’ in the unfolding drama.” Obviously this description is reminiscent of a serious number of gialli, as well as bringing Michelangelo Antonioni’s Blow Up to mind again. It is clear from this description that the Grand Guignol was interested in the witnessing of ambiguous, and often horrifying scenes that need decoding, a problematic that came to be to be one of the foremost thematic of the giallo.

However there are other telling similarities. For instance, anyone who has seen a giallo will have noticed the highly stylized acting, especially in the set pieces. Some may try to put it down to bad acting, or an over acting as a supposed sign of its times, but both notions are equally naive. It is to be noted that this stylized acting can be observed as influential up to this day, for instance consider the acting of the first victim in Dario Argento’s 2001 revival giallo, Non ho sonno. And reading the extract from the systematic guidelines to body language provided by André de Lorde in Pour Jouer la Comédie de Salon (1908) supplied by Hand and Wilson, more probable is that this acting style is in fact a part of the legacy of the Grand Guignol.

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100 Hand and Wilson, p. 46
101 Ibid.
102 Hand and Wilson, p. 44
103 Ibid.
104 Ibid.
As stated earlier the Grand Guignol influenced subsequent horror films, and interestingly one of the few places that Hand and Wilson practically exemplifies this in their book is in the chapter on acting style stating that the death scenes of Louise (Alida Valli) in *Les yeux sans visage* (Eyes without a face, Georges Franju, 1959) and Christina (Vera Clouzot) in *Les Diaboliques* (Diabolique, Henri-George Clozot, 1954) are excellent examples of Grand-Guignolesque moments. They write that “the deaths of Christina and Louise in these respective films are outstanding examples of the Grand-Guignol death scene: both are stylized, carefully paced with a touch of the grotesque. Importantly, neither victim takes her eyes off her assailant and so the spectator watches the horror of death and also the horror of witnessing.”

Although stemming from naturalism in form, in essence the acting style of the Grand Guignol moment of violence depended on melodramatic “gestures and expressions that are heightened to the extreme” and performed slowly to “[…] rest in the violence—to fully explore it [to] allow the moment its real boldness, its real immediacy and its real terror.”

This clearly echoes Koven’s description of the *giallo* set piece, and examples of the acting style are numerous, but as I have already brought up *Non ho sonno*, let us stay with it and examine that first murder sequence in the film. As I’ve stated *Non ho sonno* is a revival *giallo*, bordering on pastiche and as such it serves as a good example of the *giallo* style.

Early in the film, the prostitute Angela (Barbara Lerici) has unwittingly narrowly escaped the killer, and by mistake she has brought a file of Polaroid’s from the killer’s home. The killer swears to chase her down. In the short scenes prior to this it is already clear that the acting style of Barbara Lerici is heavily stylised, with gestures and expressions heightened. In the sequences on the train leading up to the murder set piece it is even more obvious. She is jittery to the extreme, face twitching and teeth chattering, her body tensely held in, back curved, torso held back, arms held tightly by her side, and eyes extraordinarily wide. Strikingly, this description is in detail faithful to the instructions in André de Lorde’s acting guide for the Grand Guignol. And as the killer finally catches up with Angela in a compartment, after a meticulously tempoed chase through the eerily deserted night train, they stand face-to-face, she frozen in disbelief. Her expression contorted, mouth agape, her eyes screwed up, staring at her assailant, and thus the face of her own death.

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105 Interestingly as early as 1909 the theatre company made its very own first film adaptation; *Le Système du Docteur Goudron et du Professeur Plume* (Robert Saidreau)
106 Hand and Wilson, p. 44
107 Ibid. p. 40
108 Ibid. p. 38
109 Ibid. p. 40
utters a mournful horrified scream. This scene rigorously follows what Hand and Wilson describes as the *Grand-Guignolesque moment of death*.

Finally there is possibly also an argument to suggest that the *giallo*\(^{110}\) even borrowed some of its visual aesthetic from the Grand Guignol. Sadly, today very little appropriate documentation remains to back this claim. Nevertheless I think it’s interesting to compare Hand and Wilson’s account of the lighting of the Grand Guignol with Paul’s description of Mario Bava’s highly influential style.

Hand and Wilson write: “The principal feature of Grand-Guignol lighting design appears to have been the use of shadows achieved through ‘some green or red in a corner giving an all-pervading sense of mystery.’”\(^{111}\) While Paul notes that “Bava’s technique of using various coloured gels to cover particular spotlights to highlight key areas of scenes turned his films into living paintings of the grotesque.”\(^{112}\)

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\(^{110}\) And also the British Hammer horror films.

\(^{111}\) Hand and Wilson, p. 60

\(^{112}\) Paul, p. 14
Perché quelle strane gocce di sangue sul corpo di Jennifer?

Giuliano Carnimeo’s Perché quelle strane gocce di sangue sul corpo di Jennifer? Is arguably one of the more tongue in cheek entries in the giallo series. However, among fans and reviewers alike it has come to be regarded a perfect example of the giallo style in its purest. Certainly it was made in the series heyday in 1972 and as such is a quintessential “classic giallo” in Koven’s terminology but the literal absence of detection in its narrative is probably what makes it work so well as a clear example of giallo tropes.

Interestingly although the film features a Police duo based on the brilliant Scotland Yard detective\footnote{Early 70’s European audiences probably would have instantly recognized this influence but strikingly to underscore this, there is a map of London on the wall of Commissioner Enci’s (Giampiero Albertini) office, although the film is clearly shot and set in Turin, Italy.} and dumb comic relief sidekick, as established by the German krimi films of the 60’s, these characters never drive the narrative of the film with their investigation. Furthermore they make a series of bad judgements and ultimately fail both in their detection and in their conclusion. At the end they are transferred to the fire department.

Furthermore the film features at least one, or perhaps two possible candidates for the role of the amateur detective. Both Andrea Barto (George Hilton) and Jennifer Lansbury (Edwige Fenech) are likely to take on the role. Andrea, in spite or perhaps because of his fear of blood becomes one of the film’s main suspects, something that could push him into the role of detective and first person narrator, but instead he simply disappears for a good part of the film. Jennifer on her part is similarly set to take on the duties, but focalization upon her does not come until nearly an hour into the film, and leaves her only minutes later. Her brief attempts of detection are frantic exercises of fear rather than producing reliable plot information. As she fails to encode what she has seen and heard the Police do not trust her as a witness and neither can the audience. Instead the narrative is a veritable patchwork of unannounced focalizations changes haphazardly blending the different characters first person narration. There is no objective view of the narrative and the thing that binds the film together is the seriality of the crimes committed.

These crimes are of a serial nature and involve sexual molestation and murder. Thus the narrative drive, as it were, is the anticipation of serial crime. The crimes are held together in location and modus operandi in that they are confined to one apartment block, one specific type of victim (nude models) and a set of characteristics in the perpetrator. These characteristics include a masked look influenced by a diegetic fumetto aptly called Killer Man but also some supernatural qualities. For instance at one point in the story the featureless
figure materializes in Jennifer’s room, attacking her, and then disappearing in to thin air. Something, which provokes Jennifer’s flatmate Marilyn (Paola Quattrini) to exclaim, “He’s flown the coup, Dracula!” That the perpetrator of the murders and the molestations are not one and the same is not made clear until the very end and thus does not affect the narrative which does not follow “the killer” but the crimes.

This is essential, as the giallo does not employ internal focalization with the killer in the sense that we know his or her motives or thoughts vis-à-vis the solution of the mystery. Actually, it is perfectly within giallo convention that that when the explanation to the murders are discovered at the end of the film’s they may “clash” with the murder set pieces. “The film has two agendas, one narrative and one visual”, writes Hunt about Bava’s archetype giallo, Sei donne per la assassino, he goes on to say that “[t]he motive for the killings is tied up with an elaborate and inconsequential blackmail plot, but the murders are performed as though something more fundamentally sadosexual is taking place”.114 In other words the predominant aspect of murders in gialli is that they are acts of lustmord rather than shrewdly planned and coldly executed killings for whatever convoluted explanation that may be tagged on at the end of the film. Koven writes that “the narrative information [the set pieces] convey is subordinate to the visual pleasure the impart.”115 But perhaps more to the point Donato Totaro explains that within the context of Italian horror cinema “[t]he focus on spectacle as a mode of entertainment often comes at the expense of narrative coherency and characterization”116

In Perché quelle strane gocce di sangue sul corpo di Jennifer? The killer impersonating a molester to commit moralist murders may be quite a head spin in hindsight but within the film, and specifically within the set pieces narrative logic is suspended to allow a sexual tension to layer the Grand Guignol death scenes. Scenes which are also set up so as they show not only the horror of murder but also the horror of the victim in the face of death. Just consider the first murder scene where the killer after stabbing his victim in the stomach with a scalpel slowly lifts the scalpel, holding it in front of his victim’s eyes, showing her the blood trickling down the blade.

Conclusively what makes Perché quelle strane gocce di sangue sul corpo di Jennifer? a perfect example of the giallo style is its narrative structure based on the anticipation of a series of criminal set pieces, its way of presenting a human killer as an

114 Hunt, p. 330-331
115 Koven, p. 127
almost supernatural monstrosity, its brandishing of both *fumetti neri* and *krimi* influences and its use of Grand Guignol death scenes.
Serial thrills

In *La Dolce Morte* Koven comes to the conclusion that the *giallo* is a manifestation of vernacular cinema. Vernacular in the sense that it lay outside the modernist discourse of what and how, cinema should be, and that it was made for audiences that did not share the academic, and therefore bourgeois views of what constitutes cinematic quality. He goes on to suggest that attempting to impose classical models on these films is redundant as they were designed to give the audience what the filmmakers thought they wanted, a set of thrills ranging from erotic to violent. Koven goes as far as writing that “[t]he complexity of the *giallo* narrative, while always present in these films, is irrelevant. It becomes a flimsy framework on which to hang the various set pieces of graphic sex and violence.”

Furthermore he suggests “[t]hat vernacular cinema audiences do not necessarily watch (or want to watch) movies as a classically integrated whole, but are sufficiently entertained by a series of graphic set pieces.”

I agree with Koven in so much as that the *giallo* series did not adhere to elitist notions of “the artistic”; it was and to a substantial degree still is disregarded by critics. Furthermore I agree that the *giallo*, as it were, is about the journey more often than the conclusion - which is often perfunctory, but in his argument Koven neglects that the *giallo* is dependent on seriality. Both from the perspective of a single *giallo*, as I explained in my argument about *Perché quelle strane gocce di sangue sul corpo di Jennifer?*, but even more so in the perspective of *gialli* as a series of films. As explained in the opening of this study Koven discusses the *giallo* in terms of a *filone*, which he reads as films in a particular tradition. What this analysis tend to disregard is that when a film follows in tradition of another it is in fact a way to serialize.

The fact that many of the films in the era of the *classical giallo*, as noted earlier, adopted zoological names is not simply to convince audiences that they are in a “tradition” of Dario Argento’s successful animal trilogy, this notion that is far too vague. Rather in it is a conspicuous way to appeal to audiences desire for seriality. Beyond that it is also a conscious way to signal the serial content and style of these films. Titles like *La Morte negli occhi del gatto* (Seven Deaths in the Cat’s Eye, Antonio Margheriti, 1973), *Gatti rossi in un labirinto di vetro* (Eyeball, Umberto Lenzi, 1975) and *Il Gatto dagli occhi di giada* imply that these films strive to be more than in the tradition of *Il Gatto a nove code* (The Cat of Nine Tails, Dario

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117 Koven, p. 107
118 Ibid. p. 126
Argento, 1971), they want to be part of a specific ongoing cultural cycle – thus creating a series.

Interestingly the director, and Argento collaborator, Luigi Cozzi “has said, ‘In Italy, when you bring a script to a producer, the first question he asks is not “what is your film like?” but “what film is your film like?” That’s the way it is.’” Hunt refers to this statement in regards to whether these films are marginalized art films or exotic exploitation, subsequently reading Cozzi’s account as proof of Italian horror as a rip-off genre. In doing so Hunt misses the opportunity of exploring what Cozzi is actually saying. Furthermore Hunt complicates matters by quoting Kim Newman: “While it is undoubtedly true that many Italian genre films are simply worthless carbon copies with a few baroque trimmings, the best examples of most cycles are surprisingly sophisticated mixes of imitation, pastiche, parody, deconstruction, reinterpretation and operatic inflation.” A statement that seems to add little more than confusion on how to critically value or even differentiate copying from imitating within a given cycle of films. The notion being that originality is art cinema and generic cinema is worthless. Obviously this is a huge simplification, but it also misses the point about the giallo’s relationship with seriality.

What both Koven and Hunt fail to address and as Guidotti explain in his colourful way, is that we are dealing with an expression of interdisciplinary serial culture, from the Montadori serials to fumetti neri serials, from cineromanzo serials to cinema serials. In Kill and kill again (2000) Richard Dyer describes the basics of serial pleasure:

It’s clear that humans have always loved seriality. Bards, jongleurs, griots and yarn-spinners (not to mention parents and nurses) have all long known the value of leaving their listeners wanting more, of playing on the mix of repetition and anticipation, and indeed of the anticipation of repetition that underpins serial pleasure. However, it is only under capitalism, that seriality became the principle of cultural production, starting with the serialisation of novels and cartoons, then spreading to news and movie programming. Its value as a selling device for papers and broadcasts is obvious.

It is in the light of this that Koven’s view of the giallo set piece falls short. He writes that in-between the sequences of sex and violence “the mundane and almost prosaic stories are rarely worth paying any kind of close attention to.” But the suggestion that a giallo is not to be seen as integrated whole totally disregards the very thing that makes the narration of serial set

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119 Hunt, p. 325
120 Ibid.
121 Dyer, p. 145-146
122 Koven, p. 137
pieces work, namely the anticipation of repetition. Dyer writes that “[s]eriality emphasises anticipation, suspense, what will happen next?”\textsuperscript{123} While I will agree with Koven that the \textit{giallo} film “for all its artistic pretensions ultimately belong [to shock cinema]”\textsuperscript{124}, the \textit{giallo} set piece is shocking because of the way it is embedded into the film rather than because it stands out from it.

This is not to say that the \textit{giallo} is not a cinema of spectacle and thrills or that these films do not build on serial set pieces on the contrary, I have shown that they do, but precisely because they do they need to integrate anticipation of that seriality. So to paraphrase Koven’s statement: the complexity of the \textit{giallo} narrative, always present in these films, is relevant. In other words the \textit{giallo} is a cinema of serial thrills but also it is a cinema of anticipation of serial thrills. As we have seen Dyer calls this a mix of repetition and anticipation, and indeed of the anticipation of repetition. I would suggest that it is actually the success of this mix that determines the thrill of it. André De Lorde of the Grand Guignol even said, “Murder, suicide and torment seen on stage are less frightening than the anticipation of that torture, suicide, or murder.”\textsuperscript{125} Obviously when forming a narrative upon seriality, you simply cannot have one without the other. Therefore the set pieces are dependent on the rest of the film and the rest of the film is dependent on the set pieces.

\textsuperscript{124} Koven, p. 137
\textsuperscript{125} Hand and Wilson, p. 51
The giallo hero

In conclusion of this study I would like to return to Antonioni’s * Blow Up and use it to explore the role of the giallo hero to find the drive of the giallo hero’s personal mission. Hunt confirms that *Blow Up*, is “the major art movie link to Italian horror”\(^\text{126}\). Tellingly *Blow Up* it is listed in both *Spaghetti Nightmares* and *Blood and Black Lace* alongside the other films of the giallo series. Hunt describes how gialli repeatedly return to *Blow Up*’s device of the ambiguous scene that needs to be decoded. How the giallo represent an “[e]nigma of narration [that] violates the classical form, and [is] organized around art cinema’s characteristic fascination with ambiguity, perception, and memory”.\(^\text{127}\) But I would go further than that; I would argue that the giallo builds not only on the narrative device of Antonioni’s film but on its essential theme. In line with Mathew Coniam’s views on *Blow Up*, I’m prepared to say that the giallo is posing existential questions. Coiniam dub *Blow Up* an existential horror film\(^\text{128}\) - A description that easily could be used for any given giallo.

As stated earlier I am suggesting that in the giallo any solution is of subordinate importance at best. Paul decree *Sei donne per la assassino* an “invaluable reference source” to the giallo filmography and goes on to explain that; “the reasons for the shocking murders revealed at the film’s Grand Guignol finale are secondary.”\(^\text{129}\) Hunt on his part, confirm that in the giallo the solution to the mystery is “negligible but has to be gone into”\(^\text{130}\). And certainly he is right in as so far that most gialli actually go into the solution of the mystery, but the important thing here is that he determine this is negligible. Conclusively, this drives the point home about the giallo being more suspense orientated than proper whodunits. For as Leffler points out: “the answer to the question is less important for the suspense than whether the character will manage to answer it.”\(^\text{131}\)

Had Hunt explored his idea that the solution is not essential to the giallo he would, no doubt, soon have put this up as yet another similarity to *Blow Up* which obviously does not just suppress the logic of the solution within a convoluted or ambiguous narrative structure, but omits it altogether. For in earnest, the difference between negligibility and absence in regards to the solution of a mystery is merely technical. Coinam to his side does explore the idea of an absent solution and explains it as a manifest of its existential thematic:

\(^{126}\) Hunt, p. 329  
\(^{127}\) Ibid.  
\(^{128}\) Coniam, p. 7  
\(^{129}\) Paul, p. 92  
\(^{130}\) Hunt, p. 329  
\(^{131}\) Leffler, p. 105
There are two kinds of existential fiction. One applies existential scrutiny to any nominal ‘subject’, either realistic (Camus’ *L’Etranger*, for example) or allegorical (as in the work of Beckett or Kafka or Camus’ *La Peste*). The other is the work which announces itself as existentialist even within its narrative, and is concerned with characters consciously grappling with existential questions, these invariably taking precedence over plot.132

He goes on to explain how even the denial of internal focalization and first person narration can be seen as an cinematic expression of existentialism and writes that “*Blow Up* is an existential character study like Sartre’s *Nausea*, but the simple fact that it is a film makes a major difference – because we are denied the first person narrative voice, and we get instead ‘total mystery’; the blank face.”133

But what then is the mission of the *giallo* hero if it is not finding the solution to a whodunit mystery? – To explore that we need to determine his/her position within the narrative world. In *Anna with a Devil Inside – Klein, Argento & “The Stendhal Syndrome”*, Julia Hoxter goes a long way in defining the *giallo* hero as in the midst of an obvious existential dilemma, she writes:

Dario Argento’s films typically play themselves out as hesitant, impeded detective narratives in which the heroes and heroines are marked by an often terminal inability successfully to discriminate between the truth and falsehood of the evidence they encounter. All that should be good in the world reveals itself as corrupt as icons of normality, authority and care turn out rather to represent perversion, impotence and aggression. Social, cultural and, particularly, familial relationships are prone to inversion as the (biblical) universe of moral order – of distinction, hierarchy and what Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel refers to as the Universal Law – gives way to be replaced for the films’ protagonists by the killer’s perverse universe in which new and perverse relationships, new and perverse hierarchies and new and perverse meanings and interpretations take hold.134

The corrupt society that Julia Hoxter describes as the *giallo* world is the same world that Diabolik battles. A world that echoes of Joseph Conrad’s seminal existentialist statement comparing society to a criminal conspiracy: “Crime is a necessary condition for all types of organizations. Society is essentially criminal – or it would not exist”.135

This in turn connects with Coniam’s article on *Blow Up* as well where the hero is described as; “lost and trapped and wandering, he is a man with the rug pulled from under

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132 Ibid. p. 14
133 Coniam, p. 14
his feet. [...] It is the psychological dosirientation [sic] of what Wilson termed the Outsider, it is the existential picture of man.”

Having established that, we can consider the possible mission of the existential hero. Foremost he/she needs to distance him/her self from the corrupt rules of a criminal society. On the background of this, the anti-hero culture of the *fumetti neri* is almost symptomatic and suddenly Franco Nero’s highly apart character in *The Giornata nera per l’ariete* is starting to make real sense. His seemingly planless obsession of seeking the truth, his borderline manic rebellious defiance to any social rigidity at the cost of anything and everything, including his job and health, possibly his life – All adds up to the fact that the *giallo* hero is standing at a crossroad, disillusioned, faced with the randomness and violent absurdity of the world and the injustice of his fate.

In essence his predicament actually presents the ultimate existentialist crossroad, like Robert G Porfirio describes it in *No Way Out: Existential Motifs in the Film Noir* (1996):

> Existentialism is an outlook which begins with a disoriented individual facing a confused world that he cannot accept. It places its emphasis on man’s contingency in a world devoid of any meaning but the one man himself creates. Its more positive aspects is captured in such key phrases as ‘freedom,’ ‘authenticity,’ ‘responsibility’ and ‘the leap into faith (or the absurd).’ Its negative side, the side which its literary exponents are most closely drawn, emphasizes life’s meaningless and man’s alienation; its catchwords include ‘nothingness,’ ‘sickness,’ ‘loneliness,’ ‘dread,’ ‘nausea.’

This definition could be used for the hero of any given *giallo*, and it closes my argument throughout the study about *Giornata nera per l’ariete*: Franco Nero’s character is fully representative of the *giallo* hero in that he is alienated from any of society’s definitions of absolute certainty and thus existentially alone. It is in this very fact he finds individual liberation and is empowered to make choices apart from the corrupt society. These choices, in the words of Sartre are either, as earlier noted “‘authentic’ (or in ‘good faith’; informed appropriately by no considerations other than one’s own moral system and the limits of one’s potential to act in the given situation) or ‘inauthentic’ (or in ‘bad faith’; conforming to illogical or illusory restrictions, especially social codes and conventions, unquestioned tradition, or with regard to one’s public image)”

In the case of *Giornata nera per l’ariete*, or indeed any number of *gialli* the apartness of the hero and the problem of communicating in a world of denial breeds a hero who act authentic rather than inauthentic. Of course this choice, and the alienation and individual liberation that come with it are among the main

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136 Coniam, p. 28
138 Coniam p 12.
themes of existentialism – along with anxiety and an obsessive responsibility to the truth and justice.

Thus in conclusion the giallo hero is at heart a rebellious existentialist, not unlike the hardboiled detective. And as such carries “a passion for the past and present, but also a fear for the future.” Just as film noir heroes the giallo hero dread to look ahead and instead “try to survive by the day.” Or indeed even struggle to maintain sane in the midst of the violently absurd. Numerous are the gialli that feature a hero who is the victim of a plot to drive him/her insane. Lenzi’s Orgasmo, Martino’s Lo Strano vizio della Signora Ward, Emilio P. Miragilia’s La Notte che Evelyn usci dalla tomba (The Night That Evelyn Came Out of the Grave, 1971) and Gastaldi’s Libido to name but a few.

So finally the mission of the giallo hero as such, rather than simply perform an intellectual, distanced act of detection and subsequent deduction, is actually persevering in a perverse universe. And faced with a world of denial see justice done whilst struggling to come to term with his/her own existential reality. In particular his/her own sense of good and evil and ultimately of truth and falsehood.

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139 James Naremore, More Than Night - Film Noir in its context, (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1998), p. 34
140 Naremore, p. 34
Chi l'ha vista morire?

Director Aldo Lado himself claims that the giallo uses mystery as a vehicle to communicate emotion\textsuperscript{141}. Possibly one could argue Chi l'ha vista morire? (Who saw her Die? 1972) is a film about loss, but more to the point, it is a film about feelings in the realm of ambiguity and facing up to the absurd.

George Lazenby portrays Franco Serpieri, an artist living in Venice whose whole world collapse as his daughter falls victim of a serial killer victimizing little girls with red hair. And even though Franco embarks on a mission to find the killer, he is no detective in the traditional sense. Apart from the fact that he seems propelled by equal measures of anger, tragedy and irrationality rather than puzzle solving, there is no proper deduction. Franco never really investigates – he opens his eyes. The difference being that an intellectual detective uses whatever clues there are to add them together and thus draw a conclusion. What Lazenby’s character does is learning the truth about the actual environment he occupies. In essence he frees his vision to see the world as it really is: corrupt, perverted and brutal.

It is established early in the film that this is no whodunit as even the pre-credit sequence is wildly confusing and ambiguous. The film opens with a shot of the French Alps where the views of the spreading landscape signal us to take control over vision and open up to wide possibilities with regard to what we are to see. The camera then cuts to a little red haired girl playing in the snow with her nanny. The girl suddenly races down hill on her toboggan, and as the open expanses of the slopes change for bushy forests we become aware of a darkly clad female figure in a black veil stalking the hillside woods. As the girl falls of her toboggan, we get a point-of-view shot through the veil as the mysterious figure approaches the girl. Suddenly black-gloved hands strike out at the girl from our point of view, grabbing the girl, bashing her over the head with a rock. As the nanny approaches, calling out the girl’s name, the figure tries feverishly to cover the body with snow. And we watch the nanny come closer seemingly frozen in the point of view through the veil, slowly the nanny realizes what has happened and suddenly she looks right in to the veil covered camera and the image freezes, and the title appears, in block letters asking, “who saw her die?” The end of the credits montage, made up of crime scene photographs, shows the file being closed with the statement “Homicide unresolved” stamped upon it.

This ambiguous opening seemingly reeks with unreliable plot information and yet by dramatic convention we are led to accept it at face value as the past story. The very

next shot tells us it is a mistake to trust anything at face value, especially vision. The location is an airport outside Venice; Franco Serpieri awaits the arrival of a flight. He smiles as a young woman walks towards the gate, she smiles back reaching out her arms. He suddenly reaches down, and we hear a voice of a child outside the frame calling out to him as the woman embraces a man just next to him. Serpieri hugs what we now see is his daughter arriving through the gate. This scene is instrumental in understanding the film and its main focus on duality and the failure of vision and immediately tells us there is much more to the pre-credit sequence than we thought at first. From this moment on it is obvious that, as pointed out by the title, we never can be sure of who is actually seeing what, we can never trust what seems obvious. This is what Lazenby’s character learns, and the film is about his journey rather than about conclusion and motives which ultimately elude Franco and the viewer.

Of course the past story is actualized by the black-veiled figure appearing in Venice, now stalking Serpieri’s daughter thus placing narrative importance on serial crime and the world of crime which turns out to be found in every corner of the city. Upon the discovery of her murder he sets out, or rather opens up to his imminent world, in an effort to find the murderer. For it is of key importance that he is learning very little that is actually new, rather he is coming to terms with the reality of the life he lives, and the people and society he thought he knew and never questioned.

As the film progresses, the idyllic image of the artist’s vision of beautiful Venice metamorphoses into a fog-enshrouded maze of dark alleyways populated by sexual deviants and cynicism. Through losing his child to the randomness of the violently absurd, his very milieu and image of reality shatters and he leaves his craft, even smashing one of his sculptures, realizing it means nothing in the absurdity of life. His one cause becomes the unmasking of his very own world, a sordid world, corrupt to the point of perverting the authority of the church.

In a key scene, Anita Strindberg, playing Lazenby’s neglected wife, seeks shelter in the local church and finds it dark and unwelcoming, filled with images of the grotesque, even the very image of the Virgin Mary frightening rather than comforting. It is also here that the veiled, perverted killer actually turns out to be the local priest, involved in drugs, sadomasochism and possibly paedophilia. Louis Paul also points out “the film’s coda even extends to distrust for authority figures as the police inspector takes the credit for solving
the crimes.”¹⁴² Thus, in existential terms, it is a film concerned with a character that is faced with the world as random and absurd, suddenly alone when comprehending society’s moral and authoritative framework as utterly corrupt.

¹⁴² Paul, p. 289
Filmography

4 mosche di velluto grigio (4 Flies on Grey Velvet, Dario Argento, 1971)
Baba Yaga (Corrado Farina, 1973)
Blow Up (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1966)
Chi l'ha vista morire? (Who saw her Die? Aldo Lado, 1972)
La Coda dello scorpione (The Case of the Scorpions Tail, Sergio Martino, 1971)
Il Coltello di ghiaccio (Knife of Ice, Umberto Lenzi, 1972)
Diabolik (Danger: Diabolik, Mario Bava, 1968)
Il Diavolo a sette facce, (The Devil with Seven Faces, Osvaldo Civirani, 1971)
Follia Omicida (Murder Obsession, Riccardo Freda, 1981)
Il Mostro di Venezia (The Monster of Venice, Dino Tavella, 1965)
La Ragazza che sapeva troppo (The Girl Who Knew Too Much, Mario Bava, 1962)
Deliria (Stage Fright, Michele Soavi, 1987)
Delirio caldo (Delirium, Renato Polselli, 1972)
Les Diaboliques (Diabolique, Henri-George Clozot, 1954)
Follia Omicida (Murder Obsession, Riccardo Freda, 1981)
Gatti rossi in un labirinto di vetro (Eyeball, Umberto Lenzi, 1975)
Il Gatto dagli occhi di giada, (The Cat’s Victims, Antonio Bido, 1977)
Giornata nera per l'ariete (The Fifth Cord, Luigi Bazzoni, 1971)
I Corpi presentano tracce di violenza carnale (Torso, Sergio Martino, 1973)
Kriminal (Umberto Lenzi, 1966)
The Lady of the Lake (Robert Montgomery, 1947)
Libido (Ernesto Gastaldi, 1965)
L'Iguana dalla lingua di fuoco (The Iguana with the Tongue of Fire, Riccardo Freda, 1971)
Macchie solari (Autopsy, Armando Crispino, 1974)
Marchio di Kriminal (Fernando Cerchio, 1967)
La Morte accarezza a mezzanotte, (Death Walks at Midnight, Luciano Ercoli, 1972)
La Morte negli occhi del gatto (Seven Deaths in the Cat’s Eye, Antonio Margheriti, 1973)
La Notte che Evelyn uscì dalla tomba (The Night That Evelyn Came Out of the Grave, Emilio P. Miragilia, 1971)
Non ho sonno (Sleepless, Dario Argento, 2001)
Nude per l'assassino, (Strip Nude For Your Killer, Andrea Bianchi, 1975)
Orgasmo (Paranoia, Umberto Lenzi, 1969)
Ossessione (Obsession, Luchino Visconti, 1942)

Passi di danza su una lama di rasoio (Death Carries a Cane, Maurizio Pradeaux, 1972)

Perché quelle strane gocce di sangue sul corpo di Jennifer? (The Case of the Bloody Iris, Giuliano Carnimeo, 1972)

Profondo rosso, (Deep Red, Dario Argento, 1975)

Ragazza tutta nuda assassinata nel parco (Naked Girl Killed in Park, Alfonso Brescia, 1972)

Rivelazioni di un maniaco sessuale al capo della squadra mobile (So Sweet, So Dead, Roberto Bianchi Montero, 1972)

Rosemary’s Baby (Roman Polanski, 1968)

Satanik (Piero Vivarelli, 1968)

Sei donne per l’assassino (Blood and Black Lace, Mario Bava, 1964)

Spasmo (Umberto Lenzi, 1973)

Lo Strano vizio della Signora Wardh (Blade of the Ripper, Sergio Martino, 1970)

La Tarantola dal ventre nero, (The Black Belly of the Tarantula, Paolo Cavara, 1971)

Tenebre (Tenebrae, Dario Argento, 1982)

Tutti colore nel buio (All the colours of the dark, Sergio Martino, 1972)

L’Uccello dalle piume di cristallo (The Bird With the Crystal Plumage, Dario Argento, 1969)

Una Lucertola con la pelle di donna (A Lizard in a Woman’s Skin, Lucio Fulci, 1971)

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**Video**
