Dario Argento’s Expressionism

An elaborate exploration and analysis of Dario Argento’s contribution to cinema

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Foreword

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Dario Argento’s Expressionism
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Introduction

Violence:

1. Behaviour involving physical force intended to hurt, damage, or kill someone or something:

violence erupted in protest marches

1.1 Law - The unlawful exercise of physical force or intimidation by the exhibition of such force.

2. Strength of emotion or of a destructive natural force.*

Whether it's on the television, in the newspapers, magazines, or on the Internet: violence is everywhere. Its current presence seems imminent every time ISIS releases another execution video on YouTube or when CNN reports on Boko Haram in Nigeria. Even local violence cannot be avoided considering the amount of kidnappings, school shootings, cases of rape, discrimination, racism and murders occur. Examples are the recent murder on the Irish Karen Buckley; the shooting of 18-year old Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, US followed by the Ferguson protests regarding the unfair treatment of African-Americans by local police officers; the ongoing war on the Gaza strip; the 2010 student protests in London that turned into riots, etc.

The worst part is, however, that violence isn't a new contemporary aspect currently on the rise. It has always been a recurring topic in both reality and fiction: whether this be real life events or films, books, and video games based on such events if they're not completely fictional. How many books have been written on Jeffrey Dahmer? How many films and
documentaries are about Charles Manson? Or maybe even loosely based on this infamous killer? Clint Eastwood’s recently released *American Sniper* (2014) was based on the life of real life sniper Chris Kyle; Bruce Lee’s legend would be nothing if it wasn’t for the violent aspect of his work; Quentin Tarantino is notorious for his depiction of violence; it’s clear the Call Of Duty games draw inspiration from real life war experiences even though their stories are purely fictional; and even though Nicolas Winding Refn’s *Drive* (2013) is purely fictional, it contains a lot of bloody violence that may or may not be essential for the plot. It even inspired the game Hotline Miami, where the characters dress up in masks and violently kill their antagonists.

Violence has always been present in any way, shape or form in the attempt for humanity to survive or purely for the source of entertainment. Ancient examples are the witch trials, where women suspected to be witches were publicly burned or drowned; Roman gladiators who fought for the entertainment of both royalty and common folk or the medieval jousting. In a more contemporary daylight people enjoy watching matches of violent sports such as boxing, the Ultimate Fighting Champions (UFC), rugby, or wrestling, play violent games like Dead Space, Resident Evil or Grand Theft Auto or watch the movies of Robert Rodriguez. If violence is not present in the negative aspect of reality, it is represented in the fictional aspects of art, literature, film, television and video games. Whether the plot involves a police investigation, a superhero franchise or a biopic of survival: violence is key.
Violence in cinema

Violence certainly isn’t an unknown aspect in the world of cinema. It has been an important topic of discussion since the 1930’s. For a while now it has been a controversial topic as to whether or not it influences the ongoing violence in the real world. And even though art can inspire life, it mostly imitates life. Filmmakers usually adapt violence in a certain manner to suit the plot and the message they want to convey. But when real life imitates art, it’s mostly because people expect the consequences to be similar, being unable to distinguish its fictional purposes from reality.

“Real life violence is real life violence. Movies are movies. I can watch a movie about the Hindenberg disaster and get into it as a movie but still feel it’s a horrible real life tragedy. It’s not the same thing at all.” - Quentin Tarantino
It depends on how violence is portrayed: Cooper and Schoedsak’s *King Kong* (1933) depicts the giant gorilla monster fighting a tyrannosaurus rex in order to survive and to save his object of affection before he fights his way through the human world in order to survive. *Casablanca* (1942) initially entails a love story, but is set during the early days of World War II. The violence may not be immediately present as a main topic, it is present in the background and in the backstory of the characters, as it has caused for them to be where they currently are. Legendary Bruce Lee is famous for his martial arts films, where violence is clearly present in the manner in which Lee overcomes his antagonists. This is an example where violence is celebrated: it can be used for the good, for survival, to teach the bad guys a lesson. Akira Kurosawa’s samurai themed films portray violence as a way of living, as is done in the samurai culture just like the *Lone Wolf And Cub* (1972) films. This is similar to the way Scorsese portrays violence as an inevitable “perk” that comes with the life and job of the gangsters in *Goodfellas* (1990). These examples depict violence as means of survival, a way of doing business, caused by negativity or the cause of negative results. The word and meaning carries a negative load to it: people will get hurt, lives will end, but it has to be done.

But despite its negative aspect, there are many filmmakers that have placed violence in a celebratory daylight of cinema, sometimes even as an artistic expression. Up until today Tarantino has been under the microscope for his entire career having to defend his representation of violence. It’s hard to deny violence are the main topics of his films, but as they are substantial to the plot Tarantino approaches the subject of violence from an appreciative, artistic point of view. *Kill Bill: Volume 1* (2003), for instance, Tarantino tells the fictional story of a The Bride who awakens from a coma to discover she was betrayed by a team of assassins whom she used to work with, and is out for revenge. The violence is substantial to the plot as Tarantino celebrates this violence of The Bride’s vengeance, and of
the death of her unborn child, by having her chase after her fellow assassins dressed in a black and yellow suit as an ode to Bruce Lee, carrying a samurai sword. The violence in *Kill Bill* is precisely well-choreographed, like a dance scene, and perfectly shot from angles that capture the fast paced action and the pain it inflicts in the most bloody and graphic way. The bright colours are eye catching, but more importantly they enhance the effect of the spurring blood and the severed limbs. When The Bride overcomes her antagonists it is clear Tarantino was celebrating the violent aspects of his film: violence can be used for the good. And it can be approached as merely a separate topic of a film, not necessarily as a reflection of violence in the real world, in a similar way death is used as a subject in paintings by Vincent Van Gogh and Gustav Klimt or the way misery is key in Shakespeare’s plays.

**Violence in Italian cinema**

*“Violence is Italian Art.”* - Lucio Fulci

Fulci’s quote stems from his opinion on the artistic representation of violence in Italian cinema due to Italy’s history. Every country, culture and religion in the world has taken part in historical violence: the Mayans had human sacrifices and the Egyptians mistreated the slaves while forcing them to build the pyramids. And like the rest of the world Italy had to deal with
its fair share of blood and violence as well. Plagues, diseases, poverty, hunger, wars, fascism, communism, and dictators have put Italy through several layers of violence, just like any other country in the world. However, Italy has managed to take their personal experience of violence as a separate subject matter and turn it into an characteristic aspect of their cultural identity by representing it in their art. Examples are Caravaggio’s paintings *The Crucifixion Of Saint Peter* (1601) or *David With The Head Of Goliath* (1610) or Michelangelo’s sculpture *Battle Of The Centaurs* (1492).

In cinema, however, Italy managed to represent violence through their spaghetti westerns and horror films. During the post-war era after Mussolini’s reign, the import of non-Italian films weren’t prohibited anymore. Hollywood films were allowed for release again, which unfortunately created a difficult challenge for Italian filmmakers to become relevant in the film industry. As they struggled getting the industry back on track after losing many studios, the Italians managed to climb back into the film industry through their spaghetti westerns, which are basically Italian versions of American Westerns directed by Italian film makers. The heroic protagonist comes from an unknown place and is on his way to an unknown place that is ruled by corrupts sheriffs and violent clans. He has no family and his backstory remains unknown. The only difference between the American western hero and the spaghetti western hero is their motivation: the American western hero is usually a fearless knight fighting for justice whereas the spaghetti western hero is driven by personal vengeance and acquisition for money. While the American western hero can be seen as a pure heroic figure, the spaghetti western hero is considered an anti-hero.
The spaghetti westerns paved Italy’s way back into the film industry mostly through Sergio Leone’s *A Fistful Of Dollars* (1967), his subsequent spaghetti westerns and that of other directors. These films remained successful for a while as they were well received by viewers of popular cinema as well as elite cinema. No matter how rich or poor: spaghetti westerns were enjoyed by all.  

While Italy enjoyed its success of the spaghetti western, it noticed that horror films were also a blooming success in Hollywood. Monster movies like *Dracula* (1931), *Frankenstein* (1931) and *The Blob* (1958) proved very successful in the Hollywood industry and Italy decided to take note. However, compared to the United States and other countries such as Germany with *The Golem* (1920) and Japan with *Bake Jizo* (1898), Italy was quite late with investing in horror films. It wasn’t until 1956 when Riccardo Freda and Mario Bava released *I Vampiri* (1956), the first Italian horror film depicting the story of a female vampire who’s secretly responsible for the deaths of many young girls in the village. And despite Freda and Bava’s adaptation of *The Blob* in 1958 with *Caltiki - il moisture immortal*, the film relied more on its eye catching visuals rather than its narrative. Despite the fact the plot was merely an adapted version of the American original, Freda and Bava managed to impress the audience with their stunning visuals and Bava’s cinematography depicting the Italian art, culture, and architecture throughout the film.

Italian horror films slowly became successful due to their artistic visuals combined with gritty narratives. Little did Bava and Freda know they were laying the groundwork for the giallo, a style or subgenre combining elements of Italian crime/horror/thriller - also known as a *filone*, which is used to describe an ongoing trend in Italian. Looking back now, *I Vampiri* contains
several early elements of the giallo - namely the black-gloved killer, the amateur detective, and the visually graphic depiction of violence - which Bava decided to properly utilise seven years later in *The Girl Who Knew Too Much* (1963). The story of a young student who becomes a potential victim after witnessing a murder during her visit to Rome proved to be successful in its ways. The mystery of her investigation, the tension of her life being at risk, the gruesome horror elements of the graphic murders, and the secrecy amongst the perpetrator’s hidden identity sparked an interest in a cult following audience that were as interested in the plot as they were in the sunning visuals of the film.

The giallo became a successful *filone* of Italian cinema and defined its style through its visuals. Following in Bava’s footsteps, Dario Argento decided to take a leap at this filmmaking style with *The Bird With The Crystal Plumage* (1970) after having worked with Sergio Leone on *Once Upon A Time In The West* (1968). Having also been a movie critic, Argento managed to visualise his own style and his own demands for a successful and enthralling giallo. His directorial debut in 1970 with *The Bird With The Crystal Plumage* proved effective, as Argento managed to capture an audience with funky cinematography and simultaneously shocked them with his colourful, graphic approach to violence. This very same approach allowed for Argento to experiment more with his style of filmmaking within the giallo, and in the end caused him to become the most important filmmaker of the *filone* and the horror genre in cinematic history.

However, after having established a stunning and relevant career throughout the 1970’s and 1980’s, Argento became less relevant to the horror genre as much as to the giallo. Due to the
fact that the giallo and the interest in the *filone* decreased, and horror films evolved into completely different styles, Argento unfortunately managed to fail to evolve along with the developing film industry, causing his works throughout the 1990’s and 2000’s to be disappointing. Despite his downfall, though, Argento still upholds an important status as filmmaker to not only his fans and horror cinema, but also to the history of (Italian) cinema. His beautiful and artistic depiction of violence will always remain an inspiration for contemporary directors like Tarantino, Rodriguez and Eli Roth as much as it will always be a part of the controversy around the topics of “violence in cinema” and “violence as art.” Even though he wasn’t able to remain interesting, his approach to the giallo - and the inclusive violence - will always be relevant to cinema. How exactly and why he was able to do so, will be elaborated on in the following chapters.
Argento’s giallo

The colour yellow

Giallo literally translates to ‘yellow’ in Italian. The use of the word as an actual term came from the labelling system used for Italian horror/mystery crime novels, which were translated from English to Italian by publisher Mondadori and altogether wrapped up in a yellow cover during the mid-1920’s. This yellow cover would distinguish the detective/horror genre from the other literary genres.

When the importation and translation of detective fictions were prohibited by Mussolini in the 1940’s due to corruptive influence, it wasn’t long until Italian authors began writing their own giallo under English pseudonyms. The popularity of these novels caused for the trend to make its way into the world of film. So, in film terms ‘giallo’ regarded the Italian style of psycho-killer horror/mystery/thriller films that dominated the Italian horror cinema during the 1970’s. The reason these films were labelled as giallo is because they shared several elements comparable to the ones found in horror/mystery crime novels, such as murder, the witnessing of the murder (also known as testimone oculare), investigation by an amateur detective, a disguised killer, and the exploring of global locations, genders, sexualities, and nationalities.

However, unlike it’s literary version of the genre, giallo is not a genre in cinematic terms. It didn’t develop enough to become a proper genre on its own, but it does adhere to
certain characteristics that separates it from other genres such as horror, thriller, and drama. As it contains elements of different genres, it would be more correct to classify giallo as a filmmaking style, which explains the use of *filone*.\(^8\) And as far as trends go, giallo was also a new territory for Italian directors to explore whilst redefining Europe and mainly its (Italian) cinema in a post-war era.

Giallo films are known for representing fashion throughout the 1960’s and 1970’s, which may have caused for the black raincoat and gloves to become the standard disguise of the giallo killer. But it is also known for representing Europe and specifically Italy in a modern, fashionable, and cultural daylight in reflection upon its colonial past and post-war era. The plot mainly takes place in Italy through the experience of a foreign visitor or the visitation of another European country. Overall, the protagonist is never set in a ‘home’ environment, allowing for directors to capture their location through the eyes of the tourist. The act of looking is important to the plot as it turns characters into eyewitnesses. This has caused for the *testimone oculare* - literal translation: eyewitness - to become an important aspect of the style.\(^9\)

In his book *La Dolce Morte* Michael J. Koven divides the giallo itself amongst three subcategories: classic giallo, suspense thriller giallo, and the giallo fantastico.\(^{10}\) All three categories maintain the same aforementioned characteristics. The difference between them, however, is that the suspense thriller has no assigned killer or detective. During the amateur investigation, the protagonist becomes either an innocent victim or an amateur criminal within a structure that is significantly mediated by a traditional figure of detection. An example of this style is Mario Bava’s *Bay Of Blood* (1971) or Umberto Lenzi’s *Paranoia* (1970), where the murders of innocent visitors lead to corruption of the internal investigators - fellow
visitors or local citizens - and end up murdering each other for their own, personal benefit. Therefore, everybody is a killer.

The giallo fantastico differs from the classic giallo by adding supernatural elements to the plot. Dario Argento’s *Suspiria* (1977), *Inferno* (1980), *Phenomena* (1985) are primary examples, where the killers are of supernatural origins or the protagonists consist of supernatural powers. Therefore, apart from being the first Italian horror film, *I Vampiri* can also be classified as a giallo fantastico, as it maintains the aspects of amateur detectives, *testimone oculare*, and a (supernatural) killer in disguise.

Koven also mentions the *poliziotto*, which is a separate crime/thriller genre similar to that of the giallo, but with a mainly police-led investigation. This is a separate genre that differs greatly from the giallo as the amateur detective aspect is an important element of the giallo that renders the police useless in the investigation, whereas the *poliziotto* does the opposite. Argento’s later works such as *The Stendhal Syndrome* (1996), *Sleepless* (2001) or *The Card Player* (2004) can be classified as more of a *poliziotto* than a giallo, as the investigation is led by a police detective whom, retired or not, still has access to the networking system of the police force. However, the amateur detectives in the giallo are mostly professional artists, such as journalists, photographers or even dance students, who resolve the crime through their exclusive connections without help of the police after having witnessed the crime first-hand.

**Testimone Oculare**

The *testimone oculare* aspect of the giallo is important as it establishes the role of the characters as either amateur detective, helper or potential victim. Having witnessed the crime
motivates the protagonist to pursue an investigation, as their position as eyewitness has transformed them into either a suspect or a potential victim.

An example is the first official giallo: Bava’s *The Girl Who Knew Too Much*, where Nora becomes an eyewitness to a murder on the streets of Rome after the passing of her aunt. Due to her fragile state the police accuse her of hallucinating, but being sure of what happened Nora decides to investigate the issue herself. She becomes acquainted with Laura Torrani, a friend of her aunt’s, whom she confides in. After discovering Laura’s past, Nora realises that she has now become a potential victim of the killer. Even in the giallo fantastico *I Vampiri* the protagonist Pierre decides to investigate the murders after witnessing schoolmates of the last victims being followed, turning him into not only an amateur detective but also the motivation of miss Du Grand’s murders.

Argento himself applies this aspect to his films. In *The Bird With The Crystal Plumage* (1970) Sam witnesses the attack on Monica, making him a suspect, after which he starts his investigation to clear his name. In *The Cat O’Nine Tails* (1971) Franco contacts Carlo to investigate the murder together after having overheard a conversation of blackmail prior to the break-in into the Terzi Institute. In *Four Flies On Grey Velvet* (1971) Roberto becomes a potential victim of the person who witnessed his accidental killing of another stalker, after which he decides to take it upon himself to research the case. Even in his giallo fantastico (*The Mother Trilogy: Suspiria, Inferno, The Mother Of Tears* (2007), which were all based on Thomas de Quincey’s *Suspiria De Profundis*) Argento adheres to the *testimone oculare* by having the students witness the kidnappings and deaths controlled by the Three Mothers, after which they decide to investigate the cause.
As far as the *testimone oculare* goes, it applies to the diegetic characters as much as it does to the audience. Argento uses the *testimone oculare* aspect to enhance the spectatorship of the audience, by providing them of as much information as he does to the characters. There is no suspense as the audience doesn’t contain of more information than the characters: they are almost a part of the investigation too.

Bava has used this method in *The Girl Who Knew Too Much*, where the audience witnesses the murder from Nora’s perspective. Thus, they are more than spectators: not only are they a witness to the crime and to Nora’s witnessing of the crime, but they are a witness to exactly what Nora sees: they are her eyes. However, their perspective gets questioned simultaneously when the police distrusts Nora’s claims. Were the audience shown Nora’s hallucinations or did the crime actually happen? He also applies this method in *Blood and Black Lace* (1964). By providing the audience with the victim’s POV shots of the murders, he’s forcing them to identify with the victim by practically making them witness their “own” death.

However, even though Bava and even Hitchcock beat him to the debut of this method, it’s Argento who turned this into a personal trait. By providing intensely detailed POV shots, drawing inspiration from Hitchcock’s *Psycho* (1960), the audience witnesses the crime through the eyes of the unknown killer, the amateur detective or as a by-standing witness from a secret angle, such as through a window, proving the *testimone oculare* is always present. He has a preference for forcing his audience to identify with the killer as he does himself by always playing the killer’s hands. This method deemed successful as later these shots are used for *Halloween* (1978) and *The Blair Witch Project* (1999).
In *The Cat O’Nine Tails* Argento provides its viewers with perceptions of both its characters: the killer and the witness. At the start of the film the audience is provided with the killer’s POV shots whilst breaking into the Terzi Institute. When a departing doctor spots a dark figure escaping from a distance, his shadow is seen through a fence from the doctor’s perspective, rendering both him and the audience unable to chase the burglar. Further throughout the film the viewer is forced to witness the continuous stalking of Carlo and murdering of other victims, like Bianca. In *Profondo Rosso* (1975) Argento forces his audience to witness the killing of miss Ulmann through the eyes of both miss Ulmann and the killer as well as Marcus’ viewpoint when investigating the murder. Afterwards, the audience are placed in the killer’s perspective when stalking Marcus’. These POV shots forces the viewer into the “key witness” position as much as they are forced to identify with the killer to their dismay. Just like the protagonist, the viewer has now unwillingly become a part of the crimes committed whilst the perpetrator’s identity remains unknown.

**The amateur detective**

As a consequence of the testimone oculare, is the presence of the amateur detective: a seemingly insignificant figure that becomes rather important to the plot due to their witnessing of the crime, that causes them to pursue an investigation of their own. Argento introduces Sam as the amateur detective perfectly in his directorial debut *The Bird With The Crystal Plumage* and continuously does so with his protagonists in *The Cat O’Nine Tails, Four Flies On Grey Velvet, Profondo Rosso, Phenomena, Tenebrae* (1982), *Suspiria* and *Inferno*.

Like Bava does in *The Girl Who Knew Too Much*, Argento assures that there is a subtle but direct tie between the witness protagonist and the killer, after which the protagonist becomes
obsessed with solving the mystery. He plays upon the consequences of trauma, when a person is unable to mentally let go of the events they witnessed. But instead of being frightened, they become intrigued that cause for Argento’s amateur detectives to be courageous - almost careless. Their obsession for solving the crime makes them forget about the risks that come with “the job”. Their obsession for hunting the perpetrator causes their inability to render the life threatening risks, which in turn identifies them with the killer who hunts to threaten their lives.

But in order to put his protagonists in this position, Argento has to force his innocent characters into the witnessing position in the first place: being present at the right place, at the right time. For instance, the glass doors at the entrance of the gallery in *The Bird With The Crystal Plumage* allows for a completely clear view into the building. These same doors force Sam to become a witness of the attack while walking past. Now having been seen by the victim and the killer, he physically cannot walk away from what he might be able to prevent from happening. His good deed causes for the police to take possession of his passport, preventing him from escaping the country. As this would be a obligatory procedure to follow in a realistic police investigation, Argento uses this perfectly to trap Sam into the role of ‘the witness’: he is unable to retrieve his passport unless he proves he was not involved in the attack. And in order to do so, he’ll have to solve the crime.
Helpers

In the giallo amateur detectives are supported by a little ‘sidekick’, also known as a helper. These helpers may come from a similar perspective as the main detective, like Carlo and Franco in *The Cat O’ Nine Tails*. Both amateur detectives rely on each other’s skills, abilities, and connections in order to resolve the crime. Franco requires assistance of Carlo, whose profession allows them to get ahold of information through extensive resources. However Carlo might have never thought to search for the original photograph if it weren’t for Franco nor would Franco have been able to investigate the crime without Carlo’s journalistic connections.

However, both the giallo and Argento are known for plot twists, which can turn fellow helpers into new victims or unveil their real identity as the perpetrator. A helper is never just a filler character: they must have a narrative function within the mystery, like Franco. If a helper loses their beneficial function, such as being unable to provide the amateur detective with new or useful information, they are often assigned to the role of ‘false helper’ instead. Therefore, they die or mislead the detectives.

A false helper is a helper that temporarily provides the protagonist of pivotal information for their investigation until they become a victim themselves or withholds information in the attempt of covering up their real identity. And for every true helper, there will be at least one false helper. For example, in *I Vampiri* Margherite disguises herself as Giselle, her fictional niece, and manages to hide her true identity while misleading Pierre.
In regards to the identity of the amateur detective himself, it’s noteworthy that this protagonist is always an employee of the arts in Argento’s films. If they’re not a journalist like Carlo, they’re a writer (*Tenebrae, The Bird With The Crystal Plumage*), a poet (*Inferno*), a ballet student (*Suspiria*), a musician (*Profundo Rosso*), an opera singer (*Opera, (1987)*), or even an art restorer (*The Mother of Tears*). And if they are not an employee of the arts, the amateur detective is a visiting student or tourist like in *Phenomena*. However, Argento is not the only one who has been representing employees of the arts or students as his protagonist. Sergio Martino has portrayed his amateur detective in *Toro* (1972) as a student and as a photojournalist in *Case Of The Scorpion’s Tail* (1971). Mario Bava is also known for his journalist detective in *I Vampiri* or student investigator in *The Girl Who Knew Too Much*. Even though they are supported by the police, their line of work allows for the protagonists to gather useful information via connections ‘normal’ people - even the police - lack. For example, Franco would not have been able to get ahold of the original photograph if Carlo wasn’t a journalist. And the police never thought to look for an original photograph, which can be both a cause and a reason for why they have been assigned a passive role.

The giallo continuously portrays the police as useless for overlooking valuable, detailed clues and lacking certain resources. They never resolve the crime. Instead, the giallo reverses the roles of the police and the witness: the witness takes on the main detective role while the police functions as a helper, the same way a witnesses usually contributes to a police investigation - separating the giallo from the *poliziotto*.
The killer in disguise

As opposed to the amateur detective, the giallo killers are more experienced in their field. They may not be professionals, but their work is meticulously planned and impossible for the police to solve while it’s merely a recreational puzzle for the amateur detective. Giallo killers are rather disguised as dark figures, covered in a large overcoat, a hat, sometimes even a mask, and most importantly: black leather gloves. This disguise causes for any character to be considered a suspect by both the police and the audience, which can lead to not only disguising the killer’s identity, but also specifically their gender and sexuality.\(^{13}\)

Disguising of the gender and identity

Argento specifically uses the killer’s disguise to blur their gender in order to mislead both the detective and the audience. The clues provided may suggest that the perpetrator is a female while they actually are male. For example, in *The Cat O’Nine Tails* Argento plants the idea that the killer is a female through the mysterious portrayal of Bianca and Anna as not much is revealed about their characters. The emphasised importance of Bianca’s locket unveils she carries a secret and Anna’s position as Terzi’s daughter allows her access to important and confidential company information. When she shows up after the anonymous killer injects Carlo’s milk cartons with a syringe, both Carlo and the audience immediately
identify Anna as the killer. It’s not strange as she continuously appears when the killer has been near. And Carlo’s weakness for her provides enough opportunity for deception, increasing her suspect status.

In this case Argento doesn’t only disguise the killer’s gender by deceptive clues, but also plays with Hollywood’s conservative prejudices and sexism regarding roles of both genders. For instance, Anna’s beautiful appearance, smart personality, and high status within the Terzi Institute would mean she is the antagonist. No woman in that position could seduce the amateur detective without ulterior motives.

Argento isn’t the only one taking advantage of the killer’s disguise and the gender prejudices within the film industry. In I Vampiri Freda and Bava provide the audience with the impression that professor Du Grand is the main antagonist, only to unveil he was merely working for Giselle/Marguerite Du Grand. By having professor Du Grand’s assistant stalking young girls for his experiments, Bava and Freda play upon the sexist prejudice that it must be a man who’s responsible for the deaths of these girls.

Argento manages to perform the same trick in The Bird With The Crystal Plumage, where the attack Sam witnesses was not aimed at Monica, but at her husband who coincidentally wears a raincoat. Argento didn’t only reverse the conventional gender roles, but also the role of disguises. For example, Alberto’s costume coincidentally matches the description of the standard giallo killer during the attack. But through her conservative gender role Monica provided Sam and the audience with a different perspective. Her position as a female and lack of disguise allowed her to trick Sam and the audience into thinking she was the victim.

Despite the usual disguise of the killer in most of his films, Argento shows through The Bird
With The Crystal Plumage that killers do not necessarily have to wear a standard outfit to be verified as one: they can be hidden in plain sight.

Also, the disguise does not have to be physical, it can also be an inner disguise: a personality cloak. Usually the killer is disguised during the murders or disguises himself as a false helper. However, the reversal of conventional roles and perspective between Monica and Alberto proved a different but shocking plot twist that immediately distinguished Argento’s successful debut from his fellow giallo directors.

**Foreign locations and nationalities**

As Europe slowly started recovering from the consequences of World War II, the quality of life started changing over the years. The richer Europe had become, the more the quality of life increased. Even though Europe was still in recovery, the modern lifestyle of its citizens was very well represented in the giallo. Exotic locations, big cities, landscapes, luxury cars, fancy food and beverages, and most importantly: the modern representation of art, owning art, sharing knowledge about art, different cultures, and extravagant architecture that are decorated with lavish furniture on the inside.

Michelangelo Antonioni’s *Blow-Up* (1966) portrays the lavish lifestyle of a successful photographer in London whose apartment contains a unique layout of an upstairs and downstairs floor, with his own studio attached. The apartment is decorated with contemporary paintings and funky furniture. His studio is covered in racks of colourful women’s clothing and panels for his photographs. Being an artist automatically grants Thomas permission to acquire his possessions and live in an exotic European location.
Unfortunately for him it’s not enough to solve the mystery, but in Argento’s films it is.

**Foreign locations in the giallo**

The use of foreign locations is traditional for the giallo, because it’s foreign to the protagonist, not necessarily to the audience. Even though *The Bird With The Crystal Plumage* takes place in Rome, it contains an American protagonist, making Rome a foreign location to Sam. Viewing Rome through his eyes, it becomes foreign to the audience as well.

However, despite being away from home, Sam’s profession allows for him to live in wealth. His apartment is artful and stylishly decorated. Even the crime takes place in an art gallery, allowing Argento to present Rome as a modern city containing of high class art in a functional narrative. Just like in *Blow-Up* Argento uses the same method to promote Europe as an exotic location of wealth and culture in a post-war era.

In *Suspiria* the German location of the dance academy intertwines perfectly with the plot as it is one of the best dance schools in Europe, which Suzy has exclusively been selected to attend as an American student. But it’s secretly a cloak for Helena Markos, who intends to take control of the world. Her two other sisters, on the other hand, can be found in New York City and Rome: two big cities that up until today remain important in the art world. In their own turn, this allows for more representation of the arts and artist protagonists in *Inferno* and *The Mother of Tears*.

By continuously treating Suzy as a visitor in a place that’s foreign to her, the school hopes to keep her in that position. The same rule applies to Jennifer in *Phenomena*, whose telepathic abilities and high status family name makes her more of an outsider, therefore a bigger
suspect or more vulnerable prey. Argento’s use of exotic locations should limit the protagonist in their investigation, but their jobs allow for them to get ahold of pivotal information. The unfamiliar city should limit their independence and ability to perform extensive research, but it doesn’t. Here, the foreign location becomes a beneficial factor rather than a setback for the protagonist.

**The intrusion of outsiders**

Many of Argento’s film take place in Rome - *The Bird With The Crystal Plumage, The Cat O’Nine Tails, TenEBrae, Inferno,* and parts of *The Mother Of Tears.* Even though Rome is mostly used as a main European location to represent to post-war wealth and glamour, it generally isn’t foreign to Italian cinema. But the city is foreign to its American, British, French or German visitors, like in *The Girl Who Knew Too Much* and *Inferno.* The use of characters of other nationalities within any location, allows for their environment to be foreign to them. And if the characters aren’t foreign by nationality, they are foreign by sexuality, religion or being: characters are either gay, of a non-Christian religion or a part of the supernatural force i.e. a witch or a vampire. By portraying characters this way, Argento makes room for ‘outsiders’: people who’re foreign to the location or its conventional stereotypes.

According to Koven, these ‘outsiders’ disrupt the hegemony within the area. This can be the Christian religion, the culture, or the local police investigation. Characters of different sexuality, religion, nationality or even supernatural form as considered as the cause of the gruesome events. As the use of different European cities is used to represent a modern Europe, the aforementioned characteristic differences can be considered an interruption. The presence of these ‘outsiders’ interrupts the ongoing conservative culture and traditions,
as seen in *Tenebrae, Phenomena or Suspiria*. For example, the already ongoing murders were not apparent until Suzy’s arrival, thus increasing her suspect status.

However, the use of outsiders enables Argento to mislead his audience and characters. An example of this is *Tenebrae*, where the crimes didn’t occur until Peter Neal arrived in Italy for his book tour. He’s immediately cleared off the suspects list when the stalker sends him letters. In *The Bird With The Crystal Plumage* Sam is considered a suspect due to his visitor status, but the murderer turns out to be Monica. If the ‘outsiders’ aren’t the killer - which is very rare - they are a victim, a suspect or the amateur detective that solves the crime. Thus proving their presence isn’t an intrusion - hence *Suspiria, Inferno, The Bird With The Crystal Plumage, Phenomena*. 
Argento’s expressionism

“I am in love with the colour red. I dream in red. My nightmares are dominated by red. Red is the colour of passion and the colour of the journey into our subconscious. But above all, red is the colour of fear and violence.”

- Dario Argento

As previously mentioned the testimone oculare aspect is an important feature of the giallo as it plays part in the origins of the amateur detective, the investigation, and the audience’s experience of the film. Through his POV shots Argento turns the audience from spectators into voyeurs of violence, which has caused a lot of criticism.

Argento’s death scenes have been labelled as a “feast” by the director himself as opposed to scary, due to their lack of “real effects”. As stated by Gracey, the death scenes show us Argento’s true colours. They are considered a feast because they are his favourite scenes to shoot as much as they are a representation of his talent and his interpretation of death, instead of embedding a realistic portrayal. Looking closely at Argento’s work, it is clear that a lot of time and choreography is spent on the gruesome murders: they are theatrical instead of realistic. The visual effects of the camera, blood, gore, and colourful backgrounds, make Argento’s murders as disturbing as they are beautiful. The aesthetics of his scenes do not glorify the sinister actions, they simply put them in a different light. Most giallo and horror films emphasise on the scary aspect through the use of dark colours and strong light and dark contrasts and correctly timed eerie music. They usually intend on portraying stalkers at night, as nothing is scarier than being unable to see in the darkness.
Argento, however, does the opposite: he uses bright colours combined with the dark. He places the graphic murders in some sort of a spotlight, increasing the scare factor by proving that the only thing scarier than not seeing, is seeing. Being force fed someone else’s interpretation where every act is visible to the tiniest detail shows to be more unpleasant and scary. The fact that night time, shadows and darkness are automatically assigned to “evil” whereas daylight and colours are a part of the “good” only supports Argento’s case, as portraying a murder in bright lights is like breaking the rules: during at daytime in the light people are safe, whereas at night in the dark is when evil dominates. But by portraying his murders in a bright environment, Argento removes the safety blanket of the light, forcing the audience to face their fears.

**Cinematography of an eyewitness**

In giallo the cinematography revolves around the *testimone oculare* aspect along with the graphic depiction of the violence and the mystery around the killer’s identity. The witnessing of a crime, or the witnessing of the witnessing of a crime is central to the cinematography.

For example, Bava’s *The Girl Who Knew Too Much* is a good example of the cinematography used within the giallo. The audience does not only get to watch the story unfold as a film from a non-diegetic position, they also get to witness what Nora witnesses. As the plot unfolds the audience is left with the same questions taunting Nora: did the murder really happen? Wasn’t it all a part of Nora’s dream? If it’s all true, who is the killer?
The black and white film allows for Bava to enhance the danger that lurks around Nora through the contrast of light and dark. Through the medium shots or wide shots, Bava emphasises Nora’s isolation on a big scale: she is a stranger to the country and a prey to the killer. Whereas the close ups highlight her isolation on a small scale: the danger has surrounded her at a close range. She is literally and figuratively left in the dark: nobody knows she is in danger therefore nobody will be able to rescue her as much as she has no information about the killer’s identity as opposed to the killer, who knows everything about her. The killer is able to see her, but she is unable to. For visual explanation, please refer to appendix 1.0.

Argento is no stranger to the use of stylistic cinematography that comes with the giallo, after having directed twenty-four films that essentially belong to the style. As an artist, he is not afraid to experiment with camera angles, composition, and editing. His artistic approach to violence, death, and sexuality are straightforward but stylish. The events are gruesome whereas their presentation is beautiful.

According to Gracey Argento’s editing comes from such a different approach that it appears as sloppy and disorientating. Even though the intercuts may sometimes cause a short-lived confusion, it soon becomes clear what the chronology of the events are. Gracey exemplifies the introduction to The Cat O’Nine Tails where images of Franco solving a puzzle are intercut by the perpetrators break-in into the Terzi Institute. It’s not wrong to interpret these images as a possible flashback from Franco’s past, but it soon becomes clear these events occur at the same time through different perspectives.

Argento continues using this method of editing to mislead the audience regarding the killer’s
identity by providing the audience with faux clues. In *The Cat O’Nine Tails* the idea is provoked that Anna may be the killer due to her high status, her networking possibilities, and her constant appearance around the same time as the killer’s. The recurrent presentation of the drawing that’s been done by the traumatised child in *Profondo Rosso* shows the same person is now responsible for the ongoing murders, even though the answer is provided in the first thirty minutes of the film. But through his chaotic form of editing, this gets easily overlooked. By strictly allowing the audience to see what he wants them to see when he wants them to see it, Argento manages to create a confusing but successful style of film making that never ceases to surprise. For visual explanation, please refer to appendix 2.0 and appendix 3.0.

The POV shots also increase both the voyeurism and spectatorship of Argento’s films. Providing the audience with these perspectives, unasked, forces them to be a spectator of the ongoing violence which simultaneously puts them in the shoes of the victim. The victim never asked for the act to happen nor did the audience volunteered to be a witness of some sort, but Argento gives them no other options. Watching the knife coming down like in *Profondo Rosso* is almost as scary as if it’s really happening. Providing the audience with a POV shot of the killer’s perspective puts them in a similar, uncomfortable position of being involved more than one would want to. Being a witness to the violence of one’s death is uncomfortable, but being the cause of it may be worse.

But more importantly, Argento’s death scenes are slow and detailed. The sequence is a montage of several shots from many perspectives with close-ups of the bloody knife, the blood
spurting out of the body, and the cries of agony on the victim’s face as the perpetrator continuously keeps stabbing. The murder becomes an extending moment of horror. While the event only lasted for barely a minute, Argento makes it look like it goes on for an hour. A visual example with explanation can be found in appendix 4.0 where Sarah’s razor wire death scene illustrates this method of editing.

A world of colours

Argento’s mise-en-scenes are known for their colourful representation that make the film an artistic exhibition. The most noteworthy being Suspiria, Argento has also embedded this method in Inferno, The Bird With The Crystal Plumage, and Profondo Rosso. Unfortunately, his use of colours has been perceived as and criticised for being an attempted beautification of the misogyny and overall violence. Argento himself has stated this is not the reason for his method of approach and it is clear that his goal was not to excuse the violence through the use of beautiful colour schemes. On the contrary: the multicoloured mise-en-scene functions as a backdrop to the violence rather than as a cloaking device.

Instead of approaching his violent scenes through the usual contrast of light and dark, Argento positions them in a bright, colourful light. As his death scenes are his personal favourites, it’s only logical to think he purposely positions these sequences in a spotlight for everyone to see. An example is the attack on Monica in The Bird With The Crystal Plumage, that occurs at night in an overly lit, glass gallery. When approaching the doors Sam witnesses Monica getting stabbed underneath these “spotlights”, while the disguised man escapes through a backdoor into the night. Monica’s attack in front of a witness in an extremely lit area after sunset is scary, as the exposure the gallery provides is meant to protect her instead
of expose her. Even scarier is that the true killer is hidden in daylight throughout the plot, proving that darkness isn’t exclusively assigned to the bad guys any more than the light protects the innocent. By disguising Monica in plain sight Argento reverses the roles in a slightly disturbing way, reminding that anyone could be a killer. Along with the interchanging camerawork, it keeps the audience on their toes like a constant reminder that anything can happen at any time to anyone.

However, when it comes to colours, Suspiria is best known for its beautiful colour scheme. The dark plot occurs in an environment bathed in bright pinks, reds, greens, and blues that emphasise Argento’s expression of the eerie mood brought forward throughout the film. Simultaneously, this causes for Argento’s work to be similar to German Expressionism combined with a touch of Disney’s Alice In Wonderland (1951), even though it is based on Snow White and The Seven Dwarfs (1937). The colours used to light up the witchcraft that surrounds the school but unfortunately do not function a protective form of their students as much as it is a cover for Helena Markos. The building itself is grotesque: modern looking and colourful but different than from the buildings surrounding it. Being a cover for the evil within it resembles the modernity represented in Fritz Lang’s Metropolis (1927). German Expressionism continuously shifts between light and dark. It is well-known that the use of colour in film has a significant meaning, whether this comes in the form of symbolism, representing different era’s or expressionism. Argento basically does the same as German Expressionism in Suspiria but through the use of different colours, functioning as physical dividers, adding a theatrical appearance to the aesthetics of the film.
Generally, Suzy’s arrival at the Tanz Akademie can be compared to Alice’s fall down the rabbit hole: after that, nothing makes sense anymore. When arriving at the airport, Suzy is surrounded by people and protected by bright pastel colours coming from her clothes, the signs and lights from inside the airport, and the doors. The soft colours represent the real world Suzy is about to exit thus meaning she loses its protection. The minute she steps outside, she steps into darkness and stormy weather as a prelude to what’s coming. From the moment she steps into the taxi Suzy is surrounded by bright, solid pink lights contrasting with bright reds, greens, blues and sometimes yellow. When arriving at the academy, the building appears to be bright red and is lit up through its big golden windows. The golden light reflects off of Suzy’s face in the taxi, as if she’s being welcomed as their saviour or their ultimate victim.

As soon as she enters the academy, Suzy is covered in the same bright colours. The walls exude bright blues, pinks and greens contrasting each other, sometimes with white or black borders. Where one room is blue, the adjoining room will be pink. The contrasting colour scheme is set to clash, but simultaneously forms into one whole connected piece through it’s coordinated use, just like Alice when she’s in Wonderland. Nothing makes sense, still it all fits together. The bright patterns on the walls and floors in the academy highlight Suzy’s confusing state of mind similar to the way the bright colours in Alice’s world emphasise the lack of sanity. The only way to get out is to defeat Helena Markos/The Queen Of Hearts.

The contrasting background colours allow for the foreground to stand out, as if distinguishing sets on a theatre stage. Even items of clothing and furniture are carefully picked out according to a strict colour scheme, glueing all the pieces together. Beds, couches, dresses and
shoes are sure to be recurring colours within the scenery to match either the foreground or the background. For examples, please refer to appendix 5.0 and 6.0.

When it comes to the characters, they are not represented through an extremely lit platform that distinguishes them from their surroundings. Instead of lighting the characters themselves, the light of the building is used to reflect off of them due to which they match the colour scheme of the room they are in. This causes for the actors to be lit enough to distinguish them from the background. When portraying his characters in the dark, the characters stand out due to the light that reflects off of them. This causes for Pat to be lit differently when running through the forest than when Suzy is lit by the golden light while she’s hidden in the dark. Please refer to appendix 7.0 for visuals.

When it comes to the victims, Argento likes to portray them in either black or white garment. This causes for the blood to contrast the colour scheme of the scene that now serves as a backdrop to the brightly lit red colour of the blood itself. Examples are the death scenes of Pat, Daniel, and Sarah, where the blood stands out from the white, black or blue backdrop. For visual examples, please refer to appendix 8.0.

However, the world of *Suspiria* is not completely covered in bright contrasting colours. It is clear this world is separate from the real world when Suzy leaves the academy to meet Frank Mandel. Being away from the academy, Argento portrays Suzy in the pastel colours he uses to illustrate the “real world”. This separating colour scheme also makes the academy appear as one bad dream as much as the soft colours portray the ignorance of the real world. It separates Suzy from her sanity, just like Alice when she’s in Wonderland.
The overall aesthetics of *Suspiria* appear as a fairytale, but turn out to be the complete opposite. Instead of portraying a happy, beautiful tale in bright colours Argento places a nightmarish world in pleasant colours. The contrasting colour scheme expresses the violence of his films and highlights his artistic approach to the subject. It scares because the bright colours capture the graphic details of the violence. But simultaneously it showcases Argento’s talent to make an awful subject appear as beautiful, just the way Caravaggio embellished *Judith Beheading Holofernes* (1598) in the image below. Like *Suspiria*, Caravaggio’s painting is graphic and detailed. The beheading is clearly visible and the blood stands out in the image as it is the only bright colour used in combination with the overall earthy colours of the painting. Even though the action depicted is violent, Caravaggio’s style consists of a realistic, well-lit, beautiful approach to the gruesome subject.

**Goblin**

The scores to Argento's work are another noteworthy aspect of his particular style that set him apart from his fellow directors. During the start of his career he collaborated with Italian musician and composer Ennio Morricone to do the score to his Animal Trilogy (*The Bird With The Crystal Plumage, The Cat O’Nine Tails* and *Four Flies On Grey Velvet*). This successful
collaboration ended when Argento opted for the unknown Italian band Goblin to do the score for *Profondo Rosso*. The band was meant to cooperate with jazz musician and composer Giorgio Gaslini, but a falling out between the director and the composer led to Gaslini’s resignation. However, this did not stop Argento from using the main theme composed by Gaslini and having Goblin provide the rest of the score.²¹

The music in *Profondo Rosso* matches the themes of the film perfectly. Argento brought back the themes of sexuality, voyeurism and spectatorship regarding violence and death from his previous works into this film. *Profondo Rosso* itself presents themes of childhood traumas and possessive mothers, mostly inhabited by the main theme song of the film. The catchy, cheerful tune combined with the child’s voice come across as playful and upbeat. But combined with the gruesome events of the film, the atmosphere of the song immediately turns creepy and inhabits the same effect of John Carpenter’s *Halloween* theme song.

*Profondo Rosso*’s theme song also embodies the trauma of the innocent child, which is why it’s heard every time the killer is near. The music throughout the film severely increases the tension and the suspense, and the adrenaline rush that comes with Argento’s death scenes - the rush of the victims fighting for their life or the rush of killing. For most of the audience the music will embed the empathy of fighting for one’s life, which will bring them even closer to the violent events than they ever wanted.

The tune to *Suspiria* is the most recognisable song of Argento’s films. It’s immediately introduced at the start of the film when Suzy arrives at the airport, setting the eerie ambiance and providing the idea that Helena Markos is already watching her. In this remark, the theme song not only musically portrays the power and the suspense of stalking, but also captures the
paranoia and uncomfortable feeling of being stalked. Throughout the film the main song is played when Helena Markos’ presence is near, not as a warning but as a final goodbye before she takes a final strike.

The rest of Goblin’s soundtrack perfectly illustrates the ambiance of knowing when something isn’t what it seems, the tension of discovering the academy’s big secret, the adrenaline rush of escaping and fighting for your life, and the feeling of knowing when it’s the end. When Suzy is forced to battle Helena Markos, the music is strong and fast-paced. It has a harder rock tune to it than the main theme song, embedding the struggle of both Suzy and Helena Markos fighting for their lives and simultaneously the sound of victory when Suzy overpowers the witch.

After this successful collaboration Argento paired up with Goblin once more for *Sleepless* in 2001. Using the same theme of childhood trauma like in *Profondo Rosso*, the score captures the distress of the character’s trauma. Although, this time Goblin went for a different approach. Instead of using childlike voices, the introduction theme has the usual goth-horror rock sound, however less in a John Carpenter style the way was done for *Suspiria* and *Profondo Rosso*, and more adapted to the 21st century. The introduction theme sounds like the rise of a murderer out of distress. Throughout the film the similar songs capture the gruesome deaths musically for what they are. Unfortunately there aren’t as many POV shots in *Sleepless* as Argento has done in the past, which removes a big part of the voyeurism and spectatorship that comes with the violent scenes, which are usually empowered by its score. This leads to a weaker effect on the viewer, even though Goblin’s soundtrack was successful in scoring the film with the ambiance Argento was going for.
Argento’s Equality

Argento is not an exclusive activist regarding the gender roles represented in his films. However, he has been - and still is - continuously criticised regarding the violence in his films, especially towards women. Having that said, Argento does not exclusively exemplify this subject regarding the female gender nor does he treat his characters differently according to their nationality, gender, or sexual preferences. His equal treatment of characters makes Argento one of the few filmmakers that does not address these issues during an ongoing battle of inequality. On the contrary, by not providing anybody special treatment he shows how characters are meant to be treated: they each have an equal share in the film.

Back in 1975 Laura Mulvey wrote her article *Visual Pleasures And Narrative Cinema*, in which she states that female characters in film only serve as an sexual object for the male gaze - the male desire of both the male characters and the male audience - while the act of looking is treated as voyeurism, all based on theories by Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan. Despite the fact Mulvey rewrote her article in 1985 due to the criticism and the mindset the article was written in, her first article still remains important to feminism in film industry as women are currently still battling for equal roles as their male counterparts instead of as sexual objects.

In 1996 Linda Williams discussed the female position in horror films in *When The Woman Looks*, where the female is treated as a castrated version of the male due to her ‘lack of the phallic symbol’. Therefore, she’s considered equal to the monsters in film - i.e. The Phantom in *The Phantom Of The Opera* (1925) - as they also lack the penis. So, according to
Williams, without the penis, the women is unable to return the gaze and thus express desires of her own - as she would have none, just like the monster. But by attempting to look, she gets punished for even trying through shock, mutilation or death - i.e. removing the mask of The Phantom. This article is still slightly applicable to classical horror films such as *King Kong*, Dracula as much as it is to contemporary horror films such as *Scream* (1996) or *REC* (2007), where women are often being slaughtered for attempting to survive.

This is where horror films are criticised for being misogynist. If women aren’t the cause or object of the killer’s motivation, they are the monster themselves. Female deaths are subscribed to their gender: their attempt to survive or return the gaze would be punished, thus she brought it upon herself. If not, she identifies with the monster because they are both a castrated version of man, therefore being different automatically implies they are unnatural.

However, Mulvey’s and Williams’ articles are disproved by Barbara Creed’s *The Monstrous Feminine* (1993) where the female is considered as ‘monstrous’ not due to her castration, but due to the power she possesses without even being castrated. A woman cannot be castrated if she never had a penis in the first place, therefore Williams’ theory comes from man’s fear of the women’s power while never having possessed a penis. This makes their sexuality threatening as they can overrule the male dominance. But by stripping them of the ability to do so, they are labelled as inhuman or castrated.

Carol Clover’s *Men, Women And Chainsaws* discusses the role of the Final Girl: the one girl who survives the attack, even if the killer’s viewpoint is subjective to his male gender. In the end the audience just wants for her to survive, even the males.
Even though Argento’s films are more in favour of Creed’s article, he does not exclusively partake in the battle of the sexes. His films contain both strong male and female protagonists and antagonists. But they also contain horror elements, such as the blood and gore, the tension, and the violence. Just like certain aspects of giallo can be found in horror films without being classified as giallo, certain aspects of horror films can also be found in Argento’s films. Therefore it would be wrong to label Argento as strictly misogynist or feminist.

Whether the victims are male or female: neither of them will survive if Argento does not want them to. Even their sexuality or supernatural abilities don’t exclusively guarantee their safety or death. Phenomena, Tenebrae, Inferno or Suspiria show several detailed long shots and close ups from different perspectives on the gruesome murders of the victims. Beheadings, severed limbs, stabbings or strangulation, big or small: Argento makes sure to capture every detail from every perspective. Not to mention the colourful aesthetics and camera angles he combines the gruesome scenes with, which slightly glorifies the visual of the act but simultaneously does not remove the cruelty of it.

Then, there are the killers. Just like the victims, their identity isn’t exclusively tied to their gender, sexuality or abilities. Their motivation is as unclear as their persona while the audience and the witnesses are simultaneously being fed subjective perspectives of the crimes to form a false image of the killer’s identity. The fact that gender and the position of the killer aren’t exclusively linked to each other, disproves many theories that Argento should be
considered a misogynist or sexist merely because he simply enjoys having beautiful women in his films.

Argento is no exception to his predecessors when it comes to representing beautiful women in his work, regardless of the fact that his work belongs to giallo or sometimes even horror. Having a beautiful actress represent a role in a film allows for the filmmaker to establish his genre and attract a larger audience. Hitchcock’s female characters, for example, are all known to be blond, beautiful, tormented, and an attractive accessory to the male protagonist. In Bava’s *Bay of Blood* we get to witness graphic slaughtering of the female tourists and Lenzi’s *A Quiet Place To Kill* could be considered a bigger misogynist issue as the plot has three beautiful women fighting for the love of one man, who has not done anything that is remotely worthy of their love.

Argento’s portrayal of both male and female killers are rather unique compared to the classical narrative or even the work of his fellow giallo directors, as they mostly stand alone and the females do not depend on a non-castrated counterpart. Although, it would be hard to deny slaughtering beautiful women is slightly misogynistic, the fact that his films are viewed by women and men and that the male characters are treated as brutally, disproves that viewpoint. By portraying beautiful women as both perpetrators and victims, Argento represents that even the most beautiful women can be killers or victims of dismemberment. Being beautiful does not exclude one from society in every way. So, instead of battling for equality, Argento upholds an equal position for both his male and female characters by
blurring the genders through their roles and abilities.

**Blurring the lines: the blurring of (dis)abilities**

In her article Williams states that, in classical narrative cinema, the female protagonist fails to look or return the gaze of the male who desires her. To see is to desire, and as females were not assigned to have a desire of their own, they were not given the ability to look. Many of the heroines on the silent screen were figuratively or sometimes even literally blind, which signifies a perfect absence of desire.\(^{27}\)

But instead of the female, Argento has blinded his male protagonist in *The Cat O’Nine Tails*. In terms of abilities, Franco is physically and literally unable to see what is happening around him. He is unable to identify the man in the car, during which he relies on the description provided to him by his niece, and he is unable to assist on an active level in their investigation. But he does not remain completely passive, as his love for puzzles, knowledge and experience come in handy. Finally, he manages to come through for Lori, once again proving he is not completely useless.

In terms of desire, one could say that Argento stripped away Franco’s ability to look. He may have the desire to resolve the crime, but he is physically unable to express this desire - just like was done to female protagonists in silent films. By stripping Franco from his full potential, Lori gets kidnapped as a form of punishment. Here, Argento breaks a rule of classical narrative cinema in regards to abilities, which is usually assigned to women for returning the gaze of being the “castrated part of the male”. Even after complying to the classic tradition
through the Three Mothers or by assigning Jennifer her supernatural abilities to connect with insects, he breaks the same rules afterwards.

In her essay Creed mentions Gerard Lenne’s article *Monster And Victim: Women In The Horror Film*, where Lenne states female monsters cannot be considered as actual monsters as they are a part of a dominating male counterpart. Examples can be found in *The Girl Who Knew Too Much* and *Blood and Black Lace*, where the female killers collaborate with their husbands out of protection; the antagonist in Michelangelo Antonioni’s *Blow-Up* works in partnership with a man; and Freda’s *I Vampiri* tells the story of a vampiric woman whose actions are committed our of love for a man. Going into more of a horror direction: Bava’s *Black Sunday* (1960) has a female satanist resurrecting for her male counterpart and Umberto Lenzi’s *Paranoia* turns female characters into killers for the love of one man. All these female antagonists are linked one way or another to a male counterpart, whether this is in form of a victim or a partner - even though not all of these examples are exclusively related to (dis)abilities, they mainly do disregard the aspect of the monstrous feminine itself. However, Argento manages to disprove Lenne’s viewpoint.

In the Three Mothers the witches are the evil, inhuman castrators that Barbara Creed describes in *The Monstrous Feminine*. They lack the phallic and possess inhuman supernatural abilities instead. The witches in *Suspiria, Inferno*, and *The Mother Of Tears* are all capable and responsible for the disasters that have befallen the world. The audience gets to witness detailed visuals of their victims that are both male and female.

In *Suspiria and Inferno* the witches are old, but in *The Mother Of Tears* she is reincarnated as a
beautiful, attractive young woman. Her beauty, her abilities and her lack of penis embodies the monstrous feminine, as her beauty sexualises her as much as she possesses a threat. According to Creed’s theory, this makes the Three Mothers terrifying, as they lack male genitals not because they are castrated but because they are female. Unlike Medusa, whose snakes are considered a symbolism for the lacking penis, the supernatural abilities the Three Mothers possess are not a replacement for the missing phallus, but comes with their being - a witch. Even though they are responsible for the castration of their male victims, they do not represent the castrated version of the man. Instead, they represent the fact that they are not castrated at all, thus allowing them to unleash that very real power the woman beholds that the classical narrative critics are so afraid of.

**Blurring the lines: the blurring of sexualities**

Argento is known for representing characters of any type of sexuality. Whether they are gay or straight, male or female: it does not make a difference, and this is exactly what differs Argento from his predecessors or even some contemporary filmmakers.

Up until today the representation of gay characters is a sensitive issue in cinema - just like the current battle for equality between men and women in Hollywood. However, it shouldn’t be an issue because homosexuality should not be considered as “different”. Just like the thought of women being a castrated version of man, homosexuality castrates the man. Whether it’s between two men or two women, it endangers masculinity of men as these relationships completely rule out the need for a masculine man. For example, gay men are considered to effeminate the masculine qualities of men and lesbian relationships completely rule out the need for “men”.

Even though the representation of a gay character in a film is celebrated as it takes the world as a step closer to the acceptance of same sex relationships, it simultaneously defeats the purpose. Whether this be positive or negative, outlining homosexuality in cinema still positions their love in a different category, whereas it shouldn’t. There are no special responses to the representation of heterosexual couples on-screen because it is deemed as normal. This exact reaction should also be applied to same-sex relationships. Just like women, same sex couples battle for equality, not exclusivity.

This is what Argento does. By presenting a character’s sexuality as merely a side aspect, he portrays no difference, but equality, in an non-provoking way. For example, the gay characters in The Cat O’Nine Tails, Four Flies on Grey Velvet, Tenebrae and The Mother Of Tears face a horrible death apart from the ones in The Bird With The Crystal Plumage and Profondo Rosso, but not because they are gay. In Tenebrae repressed homosexuality turns out to be the cause for the killings, as Berti turns out to be repressing his homosexuality due to his Catholic upbringing. As a result he kills the ones who are guilty of being gay, which is considered aberrant behaviour in his religion. Therefore, their sexuality isn’t the cause: Berti’s religion is.

Argento does not use the sexuality of his characters as an exclusive clue to the identity of the killer as everyone is an equal suspect. Even in Tenebrae it isn’t used to locate the killer - i.e. “he is gay so he must be the killer” - and in Profondo Rosso it would simply make sense to suspect Massimo in regards to the close-up of mascara being applied to the eyelashes. Being a transvestite wouldn’t exclude Massimo from the possible lists of suspects nor would he be an exclusive suspect as it does not shut out the possibility of a female killer. In the end it turns out
that Massimo was simply a minor gay character within the plot whose role was used for misdirecting the amateur detective and the audience.\textsuperscript{32}

By misleading the audience and the amateur detective as Argento does in \textit{Profondo Rosso}, he blurs the lines between sexualities. The applying of the mascara reveals the killer to be female until we get to meet Massimo. Seeing as the killer is dressed in disguise, being a transvestite would portray another form of disguise, causing the audience to suspect Massimo throughout the investigation. But having a certain sexual preference does not automatically entail a bad character as the film portrays. Not only through Massimo, but by portraying Carlo as a supportive character even though he is an alcoholic. However, alcoholism isn’t an characteristic assigned to the gay character of Carlo; he is not an alcoholic because he is gay. Alcoholism occurs with heterosexuals as well, allowing Argento to portray that homosexuality does not define a person.

\textbf{Blurring of the genders: the punishing gaze}

As stated before: in line with Mulvey’s article, being granted the ability to look comes with the freedom and ability to desire, which women were not allowed to do in conventional Hollywood cinema. Out of fear that the woman may overpower the man without having a penis, she would be punished for looking. When a man looks, he establishes his dominance by expressing desire. But when the woman looks, she expresses a desire to be punished for doing so.\textsuperscript{33}

However, throughout his work Argento echoes William’s statement that the woman cannot be considered castrated or mutilated the way the man would be if his penis were taken away
from him, because she never possessed a penis in the first place. And because of that
Argento makes clear that she should be feared. Supernatural abilities aside in the Three
Mothers, the female amateur detectives show a courage and smarts that lead to their victory
over the witches, unlike the male characters whose courage leads to their deaths - with the
exception of Mark in Inferno. Being drugged does not stop Suzy from investigating the events
in her school in Suspiria and the many horrible deaths Sarah has witnessed does not prevent
her from finding the Mother of Tears.

The testimone oculare aspect remains important when it comes to the desire, the gaze,
spectatorship, and voyeurism of the giallo. As the style revolves around the witnessing of the
crime, or the witnessing of the witnessing of the crime, the way Argento forces the audience to
view it includes not only spectatorship, but voyeurism coming from both the protagonist and
audience, as they (are forced to) watch the events unfold. And as punishment for looking, for
being an eyewitness and therefore expressing a form of desire, Argento punishes these
characters by either becoming a potential victim or dying. But as far as the gaze goes, it is
important to remember that Argento does not design his crimes based on who is watching
(male or female). Therefore, the testimone oculare is not necessarily a part of the gaze.

Instead of punishing mainly the woman for looking, Argento punishes the man for doing so.
For example, the covered mirrors in Phenomena prevent Brückner’s son Patua from seeing his
reflection as he despises his deformed face. If he were to look in the mirror, he would be
forced to face his own deformity thus being punished for looking in a similar way Christine
decides to remove the mask from the Phantom’s face in Phantom of the Opera. By removing his
mask without his permission, the sight of his deformity is her punishment for looking.
Argento follows the same guidelines by blinding Franco in The Cat O’Nine Tails, and by almost
having Carlo and Franco killed for “looking” into the case.

_The Bird With The Crystal Plumage_ also portrays a reversal role regarding the gaze and the power of the female. Sam gets punished for looking at the crime. He gets trapped in between the glass doors and becomes a main suspect within the police investigation, that almost gets him and his girlfriend killed. Another penalty for his gaze is that he received the wrong perception of the crime: Monica was not the victim, but the attacker. Because of the male - and rather sexist - gaze, Monica is allowed to roam free and commit more murders. The conservative perception of a (beautiful) woman provided her with an easy way out and shows that the woman should not be underestimated, which is exactly what classical narrative cinema has been suppressing, unlike Argento.

**Blurring of the genders: punishing of the gender differences**

Along with the gaze comes the voyeurism, which according to Mulvey is male dominated and therefore puts a lot of (horror) films in a misogynist perspective. In the past Argento has been heavily criticised for being a misogynist, for admitting to his preference for portraying beautiful women in his films - tortured or not.35

The aforementioned examples portrays that Argento clearly does not treat his characters according to their gender as his films consider both male and female killers, victims, and amateur detectives of every sexuality. Their backgrounds also make for a strong characterisation, as they are all not just artists, but artists who are very successful at what they do. For example, Sam is an American writer living in Rome with his model girlfriend. From the location of his house and the way it has been decorated, it is clear that Sam’s job is going
well for him; Tilda, the journalist from TenEBRae, is a very strong and self-sufficient woman who is known for her fierce character; Suzy (Suspiria) and Jennifer (Phenomena) both come from wealthy families as they attend prestigious academic schools far away from home; Carlos (The Cat O’Nine Tails) is a journalist working for a well-known newspaper as Roberto in Four Flies on Grey Velvets is a successful musician.

The presence of a woman should not be considered different to the presence of a man. Argento may meet certain horror elements of misogyny (slaughtering of women) and feminism (strong female characters equal to the male characters), but this does not necessarily establish a position as one or the other. He is one of the few filmmakers (from his era) that does not exclusively assign strong qualities of a woman to her ‘masculine’ side, but simply represents her as a strong female. The masking of the killer allows for him the blur the genders even further. Throughout the film the amateur detective and the audience are given the idea that the killer is a man when in fact it is a woman and vice versa. Perfect examples of this are The Bird with The Crystal Plumage and The Cat O’Nine Tails: in Bird Sam is provided with the idea that Monica is being attacked. And in Cat all clues lead to Anna.

By portraying killers of both sexes who murder victims regardless of their gender, each with the same graphic visuals, Argento cannot explicitly be labelled. Opera has been criticised for being misogynist as the male character ties up and forces the female character to
view images of a gruesome killing spree. This film was not to provoke the critics, but to reply to their misogynist criticism: by placing the needles on tape underneath Betty’s eyes Argento symbolises him forcing his critics to watch his films without closing their eyes, i.e. without judging by their standards but instead open their eyes to other viewpoints. Because if the roles were reversed, there would not have been a similar discussion.
Argento and the contemporary world

In April 2015 Screen Daily reported that the French production company Atlantique Productions and Italian production company Cattleya confirmed their production agreement, which involved their collaboration in turning Argento’s *Suspiria* into TV series.\(^{37}\)

Unlike Argento’s film, the TV series will be set in London and Rome at the start of the 20th century and the plot will revolve around Thomas de Quincey himself. Categorised as horror, De Quincey will attempt to solve the ongoing mysteries whilst exploring the psychological fantasies of evil. Argento is set to be the artistic supervisor.

This is not the first time *Suspiria* was set for a remake. In 2008 MTV announced that David Gordon Green will be directing the remake of Argento’s most famous piece in collaboration with Italian production company First Sun. This announcement led to many negative response, including Argento himself. After several re-announcements from Green himself in 2010 and 2011, he fortunately decided to abandon the notion in 2012 due to legal and financial issues.\(^{38}\)

It is also not the first time a film is set to be transformed into TV series. It appears nowadays that TV series draw inspiration from films in order to represent an alternate version of the subject, a prequels or a sequel. Examples are: *Bates Motel* (2013) being a prequel to Hitchcock’s *Psycho*, *12 Monkeys* (2015) based on Terry Gilliam’s film and its original *La Jetee*
(1962), *Gotham* (2014) as a prequel to Batman’s original stories, and *Smallville* (2001) being one of the first TV shows to be a prequel to the Superman series and films.

With all the current remakes going on, it’s not strange that *Suspiria* has been considered for a 21st century reboot as well. Argento is a very important director in the history of cinema, even though he has a cult following amongst horror fans. However, due to Argento’s artistic approach, quite a budget would be required to pay an honourable tribute to his talent. Not to mention the style used in *Suspiria* is a very difficult one to reproduce properly that could easily lead to negative results.

This has also caused for the many disappointing sequels or reboots of non-Argento films, such as *Carrie* (2013), *A Nightmare On Elm Street* (2010), *The Fog* (2005), *Land Of The Dead* (2005), *Scream 4* (2001), or *Freddy Vs. Jason* (2003). The reason horror fans were letdown by these sequels or reboots, is due to the recreation of the stylistic approach to the film. During the 1960’s until the 1990’s, filmmakers were able to experience with the growing film industry. Not only did the ever developing technology expand their possibilities, but the mindset of the era was also different.

When Romero’s *Night Of The Living Dead* (1968) first came out, the film proved to be one of the most terrifying films at the time due to its realistic approach to the subject of the living dead combined with the grainy black-and-white images. But when watching the film in the 21st century, it is not deemed as scary. It’s received as a classic by horror fans or rather comical by general moviegoers, who are now used to the computer generated images of Michael Bay.
The same rule applies to Argento: when *The Bird Of The Crystal Plumage* was first released, Argento’s stylistic features were considered as new and different. Even when watching his films now, his approach to the giallo is very distinctive from Bava’s style. His works throughout the 1960’s, 1970’s, and 1980’s are a combination of his blooming career that made Argento relevant to the history of the giallo, Italian cinema, and cinema in general.

During this timeframe the film industry (in Italy) was struggling to pick itself in a post-war era. And even though giallo was a successful trend in literature, nobody had visually approached it in Argento’s style: artistic and colourful with different character perspectives; a continuously winding plot aimed to mislead and surprise its audience packed with prolonging and graphically extensive scenes of violence and death. Argento managed to put the giallo on the cinematic map and established his influence on both the style and contemporary filmmaking.

For example, the POV shots used by Argento were simultaneously very graphic and intriguing as the audience were provided with detailed shots of the stalking and the murder through the eyes of the killer or the victim. However, this type of camerawork was not completely unfamiliar to moviegoers as Hitchcock applied the same POV shots in *Psycho* (1960) ten years before Argento made his debut with *The Bird With The Crystal Plumage*. Argento took inspiration from Hitchcock and applied this method to the more gruesome aspects of the film: the audience is forced to witness several stabbings, dismemberments or torturous deaths via either the eyes of the victim or via the eyes of the killer. Either way, both perceptions have lead to the same things: the increasing of the fear factor, by making it almost a personal experience, and both. In its turn, this has led to the now infamous POV shots that can be found in examples such as *The Blair Witch Project*, *Cloverfield* (2008), *REC*, *REC2* (2009), and *VHS*.
(2012), where the movies are entirely viewed from one or several POV shots. However, instead of simply providing the audience of a character’s viewpoint, these contemporary directors have chosen for the approach of a handycam. This allows for them to incorporate Argento and Hitchcock’s method in a more contemporary style.

However, Gosling’s debut *Lost River* (2015) pays homage to Argento through an approach that is closer to his personal style. For example, when Billy is locked in the Box, her fear and isolation is captured through POV shots. The Box is a transparent isolation box the female performers stand in, while their male clients unleash their aggression on it. While her boss unleashes his physical aggression against the object of his frustration after her rejection, Billy is protected by a transparent but opaque case that functions as some sort of punching bag for her client. The camera is set from behind the box, where Billy stands, and for a few seconds the audience is forced to witness the frightening event from her perspective the way Argento would force feed his audience the perspective of the killer or the victim during a murder scene. The shot is short lived, but frightening. It not only captures Billy’s confinement, but the terrifying notion of providing men the possibility to unleash their aggression on women in a way that would allow for the female performers to make money of it and for the men to get away with. The whole idea is disturbing as the fact that the female performers are protected by a case and make money out of it do not excuse the violent behaviour and do not cure the mental damage these events may cause.
Argento’s artistic features also made its way into several contemporary pieces. The reflection of his beautiful but rather graphic presentation of violence and death can be found in the works of Quentin Tarantino, Robert Rodriguez, and Eli Roth, whom all also have collaborated with each other, just to name a few examples. Their representation of violent in films are similar to that of Argento’s, in which that they do not hold back in graphic details in extended scenes of violence as much as they present it in a beautiful, artistic form with bright colours and good looking actors, emphasis on the females. For example, Planet Terror (2009) tells the ludicrous story of a beautiful go go dancer who replaces her lost leg with a machine gun; Death Proof (2007) shows how a professional stuntman has a fetish for taking women on deadly drives; Hostel (2005) depicts the story of a deadly, abandoned hostel in Slovakia that coincidentally is inhabited by beautiful women; and Machete (2010) is about a Mexican vigilante who often gets the help of beautiful women. Just like Argento, these filmmakers portray a fair share of violence and death against both genders, and have also been under fire for having been labelled “misogynist” or “pro-violence.” This shows that these particular aspects of film will always be scrutinised for its personal interpretation, and that despite this criticism film makers will not hold back in representing these topics. Tarantino, Rodriguez, and Roth are all a part of the same trend as Argento.

As pictured in the images below Argento’s influence on contemporary cinema can be found in Nicolas Winding Refn’s Only God Forgives (2013). Like Argento, Refn creates tension and thrill through the use of bright colours, character perspectives, and the embellishment of violence of death. Like Argento, Winding Refn extends his graphic violent scenes so the audience can capture its full glory. Examples are the introduction scene, where a man’s arm gets cut off, or the violent fighting scenes where people are getting shot or beaten to death.
with frying pan, and the final scene where Julian’s mother gets her throat slit and he uses a sword to cut her open and stick his hands into her abdomen.

Overall, both *Lost River* and *Drive* depict a grim narrative in the form of expressive, colourful aesthetics via stylish cinematography similar to Argento’s *Suspiria* or *The Bird With The Crystal Plumage*, but in a more contemporary daylight.

Unfortunately, despite his many influences on contemporary cinema, Argento’s own works had become uninteresting from 1990 onwards. This led to the end of Argento's prime, just like many other filmmakers such as Wes Craven, George A. Romero, and John Carpenter during the late '90's/early '00's. The film industry went through a rapid development due to technology and changing mindsets and expectations, that caused for the giallo to become obsolete. This filmmaking style failed to remain interesting, even for Argento, whose later works such as *Sleepless*, *The Stendhal Syndrome* (1996), *The Mother of Tears*, *The Card Player* (2004), and *Giallo* (2009) failed to succeed like his predecessors did.

For example, nowadays mainstream cinema requires for editing to be invisible, making it...
easier to watch for the audience. Whereas Argento used editing to extend his death scenes to capture the violence it all its glory, to represent his visual perception, and to oblige the audience to pay attention to the plot. However, his films were never difficult to watch - with the exception of his work from the 1990’s/2000’s. Sleepless is more of a poliziotti synonymous to the general crime thriller genre the became popular in the 1990’s; the “torture porn” The Mother Of Tears had become a mediocre slasher and resulted in a disappointing ending to the Mother Trilogy; and the plot of The Stendhal Syndrome revolved around a police detective who experienced extreme emotions and hallucinations at the sight of paintings, which caused for confusion. Any redundant prolonging of the plot would lead to decreasing interest, as also can be seen in The Stendhal Syndrome. The images of detective Anna Manni’s hallucinations are Argento’s attempted revival of his artistic talents he got recognition for throughout the 1960’s - 1980’s, but unfortunately do not meet the quality of Suspiria or Profondo Rosso. Again, Argento uses his old form of editing, forcing the audience to pay attention, but due to changing mindsets this has the opposite effect.

Generally, giallo had become uninteresting to the film industry, even though it is still an ongoing style on a small scale. The building of the tension, the extended scenes of violence, and lack of suspense worked throughout the 1960’s - 1980’s because it was different. Throughout the 1990’s films had to be fast-paced. Due to this changing world, Argento failed to carry his successful career into the 21st century. Even his attempt to partake in the 3D hype failed with Dracula 3D (2012). However, he’s announced to make a comeback with The Sandman, a collaboration with Iggy Pop in the near future. Hopefully Argento will be able to reboot his talents in a more contemporary daylight, similar to the way other filmmakers have drawn interpretation from his work. However, his influence on cinema shows that even though Argento has not always been interesting, he will always remain relevant.
The following chapters contain end notes of each of the previous chapters. They contain additional information that may be of interest to the subject discussed.
Argento’s giallo
Chapter end notes

1. On another level of witnessing, Argento also manages to enhance the whole aspect by placing the audience in the shoes of the killer or the victim. By providing them with the perspectives of either the killer or the victim, the audience becomes more than an eyewitness to the murder or death of a character. Without their consent Argento turns them into not only voyeurs of violence, but forces them to identify with the victim or the killer.

2. Suspiria shows Daniel’s death through both the killer’s viewpoint as Daniel’s perspective, regardless of his blindness. Daniel’s crossing of the plaza is more than just a wide shot to capture his isolation from safety: he’s seen through the all-seeing eye of Helena Markos, telepathically lurking from afar. Again: forcing the audience into an identifying perspective, beyond the eyewitness element. Daniel’s arrival at the empty monumental square illustrates his solitude and vulnerability while the shot also forces the audience to empathise with his anxiety. As the killer nearly strikes from a birds eye view, Daniel and his guide dog are positioned below the perpetrator, symbolically illustrating his lower, weaker position to the higher power of Helena Markos. It’s when Daniel’s guide dog turns on him, the audience are provided with his brief POV shot, forcing to watch the dog lunge towards him. The attack ends with a silent observing of the murder from a wide angle, placing the viewer back in the shoes of the killer. For visual details, please refer to appendix 9.0

3. His contact with the victim and the killings that follow after the primary incident, are all clues for Sam that the events are connected. Here, Argento plays upon one’s curiosity: the
connecting clues will make the protagonist believe they are close to solving the mystery. For example, in *Suspiria* Suzy continuously witnesses strange events in her new school while being kept drugged on bedrest, providing her teachers the opportunity to suggest her illness has her suffering from hallucinations. Convinced she is not hallucinating, Suzy starts digging deeper beneath the surface of the school. The occurrences of the bizarre events such as maggots falling through the ceiling, the snoring sound coming from the school’s reportedly absent principal, and the multiple disappearances of her classmates continuously keep sparking Suzy’s interest. Argento manages to play upon the same curiosity of Franco in *The Cat O’ Nine Tails* and Peter in *Tenebrae*, whereas in *Phenomena* Jennifer keeps stumbling upon the events in her attempt to escape.

4. In Bava’s *Bay Of Blood* every character turns out to be a false helper, as each of them becomes either another killer or victim. Argento himself complies to these traditions by killing Bianca before she meets Carlo in *The Cat O’ Nine Tails*. Meanwhile, Casoni manages to distract Carlo and Franco from his true identity by continuing his character portrayal of an out-of-luck doctor at the Terzi Institute who just got fired from his job.
1. The soundtracks to most of Argento’s work are similar to that of John Carpenter, in the sense that Goblin’s unique sound always brings a goth-horror rock vibe to the scene that emphasise the eerie ambiance of the film.

2. After the success of Profondo Rosso Argento continued to collaborate with Goblin for Suspiria and even got them to do the score for Romero’s Dawn Of The Dead (1977), which he and Romero collaborated on. The music to Suspiria perfectly captures the eerie atmosphere of the dance academy. It musically illustrates the strange events happening to and around Suzy within the school, while the whispering embodies the presence of Helena Markos: it doesn’t matter where you are, she is everywhere.

3. Even though Suspiria wasn’t received the same way Profondo Rosso was due to Argento’s different style as opposed to his previous work, its success overshadowed that of its predecessor - especially outside of Italy. And now, over the years, Suspiria and its score are one of Argento’s most successful works.

4. After Sleepless Goblin disbanded, ending their careers as Goblin and the collaboration with Argento for good. Music is known to be an important aspect of film, as this will determine the mood the director is going for. Argento has managed to capture the ambiance of his films perfectly through the work of Goblin, no matter how his films were received. The
collaborations proved successful as Goblin’s gothic-horror rock sound perfectly captured and simultaneously emphasised the mysterious and bizarre ambiance that comes with Argento’s giallo.

5. Argento’s collaboration with Goblin carried on to Romero’s *Dawn Of The Dead*, after which the band fell apart due to Italy’s changing environment and the shift to disco music in the 1980’s. Even though they weren’t known as Goblin anymore, Argento insisted on the band to do the soundtrack to *Inferno* - that eventually got done by Keith Emerson - and *Tenebrae*, for which he managed to convince three of the four to do the score. After *Tenebre* the band officially went on a hiatus. It wasn’t until Argento’s *Sleepless*, twenty years later, completely reformed the band for another movie score. The film itself differed from Argento’s works in the ’60’s and the ’70’s and wasn’t as successful due to many developments and grown expectations within the film industry, but the score matched the stressful investigation and the gruesome murders perfectly well.
Argento’s equality

Chapter end notes

1. Between the space of Mulvey’s original article in 1975 and Linda William’s article in 1996, many film theorists explored (the psychoanalysis of/that comes with) feminist film theory after Mulvey revisited her original article in 1985. For instance, in 1989 Lauren Rabinovitz explores the subject in 1920’s American television series as a groundwork for feminism during the rise of early Hollywood in her book *Sitcoms and Single Moms: Representations of Feminism on American TV*. During the same period Karen Hansen and Gaylyn Studlar explored the subject from a different perspective through applying a female gaze and fan base during the rise of Rudolf Valentino. Karen Hansen also compiled a series of articles written on feminist film theory in *Women, Class, and the Feminist Imagination* while exploring the use of psychoanalytic theories that are applied to feminist film theory.

2. Through the examples mentioned it is clear that Argento that does not subscribe disabilities or supernatural powers to the antagonist, as traditionally is done in classical narrative or horror cinema. He has assigned them to both males and females and established a clear position that these features are not exclusively an aspect of the female gender, an aspect of weakness, or an aspect of the killer.

3. In *The Case Of The Bloody Iris* (1972) Giuliano Carnimeo does the opposite of Argento. Instead, Jennifer is being pursued due to her sexuality. Even though Carnimeo attempts to follow Argento’s footsteps of blurring the lines by portraying them as normal people with jobs and emotions, the victims are exclusively under attack for their sexuality. Jennifer is considered as the cause for the events purely for being a lesbian; she never gets the benefit of
the doubt because of it; and men constantly attempt to persuade her to switch sexualities “because it’s a waste of such a beautiful woman”. Even though Carnimeo does not objectify the lesbian aspect of the women, he does objectify Jennifer because of her gender through her past and present persona. She used to be part of an orgy, after which her ex-husband and other men’s constant attempted persuasion to “switch sides” show disrespect to her sexuality. Finally, Andrea forces her to sleep with him to prove his love for her. His infatuation is obviously based on her looks and his constant declarations of love are forceful, guilt tripping Jennifer into being with him.

4. Another noteworthy aspect of Carlo’s character is that he is a pianist, like Marcus. Not only do they meet the artist aspect of the conventional giallo amateur detective, but it continues to blur sexualities. Marcus is a heterosexual pianist whose sexuality continuously gets questioned because of his job whereas Carlo is a homosexual pianist who meets the discriminating stereotype that “all artists are gay”. This is later explained when Marcus tells Gianna that artists are very sensitive people, which causes the stereotypical expectations. However, by having his other amateur detectives (and other characters) portrayed as other forms of artists - journalists, musicians, dance students - without being necessarily gay, Argento continues to blur the lines between homosexuality and heterosexuality. Along with suspecting all the characters equally throughout his films regardless of their sexual preferences - whether they are victims, killers, minor characters or amateur detectives - Argento manages to portray a simple form of equality, not to stand out, but to show how simple the world should be.
5. The italic *The Mother of Tears* is used to signify the title of the film, whereas the non-italic The Mother of Tears is used to define the main antagonist of the same film.

6. Remaining in the amateur detective standpoint, multiple girls get killed in *Phenomena* for looking or doing what they aren’t allowed to, like sneaking out of the window after curfew. Meanwhile, Jennifer gets bullied for being different and when her only friend McGregor or her only saviour, her father’s lawyer Morris Shapiro, both get killed, she does not stop fighting for her life. Meanwhile from the killer’s perspective, Frau Brückner echoes Gerard Lenne’s statement mentioned in William’s article that women should be represented in her natural role in life, thus loving mother and wife. It would be hard to deny that this is exactly the way how Argento has portrayed her, as it turns out that she kills the students to feed her deformed son whom she deeply loves and cares for the way a mother should.

7. Argento once entertained the notion of providing audiences for his films with rows of straight pins attached to pieces of tape, which they would place directly below their eyes as is done in the film. This would force the spectator's eyes to remain open during the goriest portions of his films as the killer does to Betty.

8. However, this should not be mistaken for the previous statement made regarding the fact that Argento embraces the different sexuality of women and the power that comes along with it. The aesthetic of a woman in film was always required to be beautiful if not to make up for her “castrated penis”. Argento goes against the grain by representing the female sexuality exactly as conventional theories feared it to be: a different kind of sexuality exudes from simply not having a penis, that may overrule the male sexuality. Here, Argento represents the
female sexuality as it is instead of stripping it from its power to keep the male dominance intact. Thus, women are not represented as ‘a part of the male’ and Argento makes clear that this, in its own turn, should not be undermined. But, by having male and female killers and victims of any kind, Argento blurs the gender differences but providing them with equal opportunities within the plot. Whatever gender, whatever sexuality, whatever abilities or job they have: the one does not overpower the other. Nobody is safe. The fact that he does not emphasise the difference between genders in his films but instead appreciates them for what they are in their own ways, makes Argento one of the most forward thinking directors of all time.

9. And through the presence of beautiful women in his films, Argento shows that - within the female gender itself - there is no difference between better or worse. If one were to cast a conventionally ugly character in a giallo or horror, they would be the antagonist, a victim or both as opposed to her beautiful counterpart. But by solely using conventionally beautiful women, Argento shows that even they don’t stand a chance.
Appendices

The following appendices contain visual attachments that further explain the previously discussed subjects. The stills provided have been captured and used for visually, educational purposes of this dissertation.
Appendix 1.0
Cinematography and colour
Mario Bava - The Girl Who Knew Too Much

1.1 - Nora has been put in a vulnerable position due to her visibility in the dark.

1.2 - Bava captures the emptiness of the city at night, emphasizing Nora's solitude and the dangers of it.

1.3 - During the murder, Nora peeks from behind a wall. Only her face is visible to us and thus also the killer.

1.4 - However, the killer remains hidden in the dark, unknown to the audience and Nora.

1.5 - Nora's face is starting to gather information about the killer as much as they are about her, without her knowledge.

1.6 - The newspaper clippings are lit up as if to shed some light into the identity of the killer.
1.7 - The emptiness of the house again, captures her solitude, but this time in a “cage”. If something were to happen, Nora wouldn't be able to get out.

1.8 - A POV shot on Nora from the possible stalker, who possesses more knowledge about Nora than she does about them.

1.9 - Nora's solitude has separated her from the world, but not from the killer. If danger strikes, nobody will be able to help her.

1.10 - The bed besides the window places Nora in a more vulnerable situation. The killer is able to get close without her even knowing.

1.11 & 1.12 - When Nora sits up, she discovers she indeed is being watched by an unknown stalker. These images portray how Nora is chasing after her unidentified stalker while they were able to gather more information about her. The stalker is aware of her identity and her accommodation, whereas she is not sure who she is looking for. The perpetrator has turned the walls and windows of the house into Nora's cage, to his advantage.
1.13 & 1.14 - The image again, isolates Nora in the dark while she is also unable to see what the room in front of her hides. This is the ultimate stalking place for the killer while luring his prey into his trap through his play upon curiosity.

1.15 - Bava captures the fear and curiosity in Nora’s eyes by solely lighting up her eyes while she looks into the dark room.

1.16 - This time, Bava swapped roles through light and dark. Nora stands out through her dark clothes in the white house, as if to portray her as an intrusion.

1.17 - 1.18 - Capturing Nora in these surroundings not only represent a beautiful cultured image of Italy, but also illustrates Nora’s isolation from her environment. Bava emphasises on her intrusion as a stranger of this beautiful country where possibly no awful things can happen. Meanwhile, the killer could be hiding anywhere as she has no knowledge of their identity.
Appendix 2.0
Misleading montage
Dario Argento - The Cat O’Nine Tails

2.1 - Anna is introduced as Terzi’s daughter, thus illustrating her high status and power within the case.

2.2 - There is an immediate connection between Anna and Carlo, which could work to her advantage if she were the killer.

2.3 & 2.4 - Franco and Anna obviously flirt with each other, establishing a connection between each other. Carlo hopes to gather more information via her strong position whereas Anna’s beautiful looks and high status are rather conventional for the killer in this situation, as Argento likes his audience to believe so.

2.5 - Anna takes Carlo away from their immediate surroundings, so she can talk to him in private. Argento suggests her hidden identity will mislead Carlo by spending some time alone.

2.6 - Anna’s pictureframe is found in the office Carlo breaks into to gather more information about the killer. Argento suggests Anna is a part of the crime.
2.7 - 2.12 - Prior to Anna’s arrival at Carlo’s apartment, the audience witnesses the killer poisoning his packets of milk that are left at his door. However, combined with her status within the Institute and Carlo’s personal interest in her, Anna’s appearance after this incident is rather convenient. Carlo accuses her of abusing her position and taking advantage of his personal feelings for her. Anna objects but not enough to save her reputation from both Carlo and the audience.

As the perpetrator, Anna would be able to perfectly disguise her real identity simply by just being Terzi’s daughter. Her position would allow her any access into the company or any other trusted information without anyone even noticing it, while she seduces the amateur detective during his investigation to distract him from finding out who she really is.
Appendix 3.0
Misleading montage
Dario Argento - Profondo Rosso

3.1 - Argento captures the spot of blood on the floor leading up to the hallway where the murder has taken place.

3.2 - A fast paced tracking shot follows Marcus down the hallway, decorated by frames of paintings, leading up to the murder.

3.3 - A quick POV shot from Marcus follows, where the audience receives a quick glance of the perpetrator. However, the shot ends abruptly.

3.4 - Continued tracking shot of David’s high speed walk, hoping to rescue the victim.

3.5 - Another glance of the hallway follows in attempt to mislead the audience to possible more clues to the identity of the murderer.

3.6 - The shot ends with a quick POV shot from the ground coming up to the room where miss Ulmann has been murdered.
3.7 & 3.8 - Marcus discovers a newly painted wall and decides to find out what's hidden behind it. He stumbles upon a child-like drawing of a murder that possibly took place in the house previously. The true identity isn't revealed until Marcus has left the house and another piece of wall lets go.

3.9 - Marcus finds a similar drawing in Olga's room. Olga says to have copied her drawing from the one she saw in her school.

3.10 - Argento makes believe that the perpetrator is a child who now has grown into an adult, as he is holding the knife. He still disregards the third figure on the left.

3.11 & 3.12 - Marcus discovers the drawing belongs to his friend Carlo, who drew the picture when he was a child. This traumatic experience clarifies to Marcus why Carlo drinks so much: it's not because he is gay, it's because he is repressing what happened in his childhood. Both the audience and Marcus are led to believe Carlo is the perpetrator.
Appendix 4.0
A neverending death scene
Dario Argento - Suspiria

The following images depict Argento’s editing method that allows for him to prolong a gruesome deathscene whilst focusing on the gorey details of the sequence.

Sarah is aware she’s being followed. Unfortunately, in her attempt to hide, she almost gets caught by a hand holding a razor blade. She has been given one route to escape and when she is finally near, Sarah gets caught in a room full of razor wires that cut through her skin. She gets stuck during her attempt to crawl out towards the open door, allowing for the killer to get to her before she is able to break free. After being chased and struggling intensely with the razor sharp wires, Sarah’s life comes to an end by a slight through her throat with a razor blade. Argento captures the chase and her fear through the extended sequence below.
Appendix 5.0
Composing contrast
Dario Argento - Suspiria

5.1 - The blue walls divide the lobby from the pink hallway that is slightly captured, placing it in the foreground. Miss Tanner’s black suit divides her from the other characters that are dressed in light colours.

5.2 - Suzy and Miss Tanner stand out from the room, however their dresses still match the overall colour scheme due to the black doorframe and Suzy’s creme coloured scarf.

5.3 - The different colour schemes and camera angle divides the characters from the background.

5.4 - Suzy and Madame Blance stand out due to matching dresses as opposed to miss Tanner, who blends with the room.

5.5 - The colour scheme and change of focus separate Suzy from her background, but the colour of her outfit matches the lamp, making the image whole.

5.6 - Clear definition of foreground and background due to colours and composition: reading child is portrayed in grey colours along with the candelabra to define middle ground.
5.7 - Even though the walls are covered in flowers, both characters stand out due to the colour of their dresses. The flowers on the foreground and the plant on the left break up the colour scheme by using bright colours, while the lamp in the middle balances the white and red colours in the image. The light in the room reflects on the skin colours of the characters, giving them a slightly saturated - but still natural looking - glow.

5.8 - The eclectic wallpaper gets broken up by a solid black wall and the white doorframe. The frame reflects the bright colour of Suzy's dress the same way the black bags reflect the solid black walls. The doorframe serves as a frame around the male character, emphasizing his pink shirt. Both characters stand out from their backgrounds and are the main focus of the screen, despite the pink picture frame on the right with the contrasting pink colour scheme.

5.9 - The close-up of the back of Olga's head that is out of focus divides the foreground from the background, where the two characters distinguish two different settings in the image: the doorframe functions as a divider between the two characters, capturing the two different spaces each of them are located at. Suzy is in the room, whereas her male opponent is in the hallway.

His clothes do not match the colour scheme of the room, separating him from Suzy and Olga the way he is actually separated from the school. As Olga says: “he is too poor to live in dorms, so he works to earn a place.” He is different than all the other students, thus Olga and Suzy.
The dance studio consists of brown, earthy colours separated by the solid black and white leotards of the dancers. The symmetrical camera positioning captures the size of the studio, while the light that comes through the windows reflect on the characters. There is no theatrical setting here: all characters are placed in the same setting.

Suzy's bedroom consists of white walls and furniture that are lit up by mostly green coloured lights, while the hallway in the background is separated from the room by the doorframe, that simultaneously forms a canvas for the bright red hallway that contrasts the green light in Suzy's room, but not in an overwhelming way that is distracts the viewer from the foreground. The characters' clothes are either white or black, except for Madame Blanc, whose dress is green. This separates her from the solid colour scheme of the room and make her stand out from the bright red background behind her, but allows for her to still match the image due to the green lighting.
Appendix 6.0
Composing contrast
Dario Argento - Suspiria

6.1 - The beige/grey colours of clothes and walls match while pink furniture stands out, but matches the flowers.

6.2 - Suzy’s out-of-focus head places her in the foreground while the scene focusses on miss Tanner in the mirror. The mirror forms a frame around miss Tanner.

6.3 - The importance lays on miss Tanner in the background, being the only one in focus and shown in contrasting colours.

6.4 - The colour pink forms as a uniting colour scheme with the room due to the pink dresses of the students.

6.5 - While the pink colours stand out and the image contains multiple contrasting colours, Suzy appears as the main focus due to her white dress.

6.6 - The green, white and yellow match the room due to the nature theme on the walls. Hallway breaks up the image due to the bright red walls.
6.7 - The contrasting red and black colour scheme divides Suzy from the room she is about to enter. It separates the backroom from the front room, while placing Suzy in main focus of the image. The doorframe separates Suzy from the blue room and positions her as a part of the room in the background while still remaining as the main focus.

6.8 - The combination of warm colours are separated by the black doors, forming as a frame around Madame Blanc putting her in the center of the frame. Madame Blanc’s black dress matches the black doors. The bright red wall behind her puts her as the main focus as it forms a contrast with the black doors and the yellow and blue light coming through the glass windows.
Appendix 7.0
Argento’s expressionism
Dario Argento - Suspiria

7.1 - 7.6 - The images below depict Argento’s use of colour. All six images show how Suzy isn’t placed in a different light, but how the light of her surroundings shines onto her. This allows for her to stand out from her background while uniting her appearance with her environment. For instance, the light of the lanterns outside shine into the taxi through the car windows. This causes her background to be brightly lit and for Suzy’s face to be “glowing” red.

This opposed to the latter image, where the light of the room forms a frame around Suzy to distinguish her from her dark background.
7.7 - 7.9 - Even though she functions as only a tiny part of the shot, Pat stands out due to the combination of the colour of her clothes and the lighting. As the lighting comes from her front, the colour of her clothes make her stand out from between the light green and red trees.

7.10 - 7.15 - The six images above regarding Pat’s scene shows perfectly how Argento captures his characters in the light coming from their backgrounds. In the first image Pat’s friend is placed in a blue light, similar to that of the room. The white and pink theme of the bathroom in the second image reflects off of Pat’s face. The blue light from outside makes Pat appear in a blue light as well after her head gets smashed through the window, while the bathroom remains pink in the background, separating the inside from the outside.

In the last three images Pat is captured in a pink light going from the lights in the room. The pink light separates her from the background when thrown outside, and her pink bathrobe separates her from the room, making her appear as slightly brighter than the pink walls of the room. In the latter image the lights of the glass stained windows make Pat appear as a distinguishing pink with blue shadows, different from the pink stained glass in the background. This separates her from the glass stained window that also consists of blue and pink and despite the yellow tint remain in the background, even though it only emphasises Pat’s foreground position.
Appendix 8.0
The colour red
Dario Argento - Suspiria

8.1 - 8.4 - The above images show how Argento accentuates the blood in Suspiria. The blood is separated from the black and white background while both Pat and her friend’s clothes consist of whites, positioning them in the foreground. Due to the white of their clothes the red colour of the blood gets accentuated, making it the main focus of the scene.

8.5 - Argento accentuates the colour of the blood in the white sink while Suzy’s sleeves and the colour of the tabs complement each other, making the image a whole.

8.6 - Argento accentuates the blood through the use of dark and light and contrasting colours. Blue and red are both primary colours that contrast each other in the colour wheel, while the blood runs down on the lit up side of Sarah’s face that is the brightest part of the scene.
8.7 - 8.10 - The dark colours embedded in Daniel's death scene allow for the blood to form an eye catching point of the whole image. His suit consists of black and white while he crosses the plaza at night time, causing the red X on his dog's leash to also stand out. The audience is forced to focus on the amount of blood coming from Daniel’s mouth.

8.11 & 8.12 - The blood in the images above are also emphasized through the white colours of the clothes and the black and white contrast of the images, making the red stand out even more. Once again, the audience is forced to focus on the bloody horror of the scene.
Appendix 9.0
Daniel’s death scene
Dario Argento - Suspiria

9.1 - 9.6 - The following images captures the prolonging sequence of Daniel’s death scene. The sequence starts with Daniel leaving the brightly lit road to follow his route through the dark plaza. It's as if he abandons the real world for Helena Markos’ words similar to the way Suzy abandons the real world via the airport. When arriving at the plaza, the sequence consists of poor lighting and shadows: the perfect place for Helena Markos to spy on her future victim as a hidden force. The plaza is captioned in wide shots, capturing the grotesque area whilst isolating Daniel. Both Daniel and his dog sense a disturbance, but neither of them is able to figure out where it’s coming from.

The plaza itself, however, is poorly lit whereas the buildings are the most lit up spots of the area, causing for more shadows that keep Helena Markos hidden.
9.7 - 9.12 - The buildings remain the only lit up areas, standing out from the dark background and separating Daniel from the background. The tracking shot from behind the pillars illustrate the stalking eye of Helena Markos before she strikes. The overhead shots of the plaza are Helena Markos’ POV shots from the top of the building Argento constantly zooms in on.

The constant close ups of Daniel’s face and his dog capture their anxiety of being watched. They can both sense the danger, but are unable to prevent it from striking. Simultaneously, the close ups of Daniel’s dog can portray Helena’s plotting and possessing of the animal until he strikes.
9.13 - 9.18 - The medium shot of the lit up building shows where Helena Markos spies from, while the medium close ups of Daniel capture his isolation. The light of the building reflects off of him in the dark, until the audience gets a POV shot of his dog lunging towards him during the attack.

The wide shots of the plaza after the attack illustrate as Helena Markos’ point of view. She continues keeping an eye on the scene while Daniel’s dog continues eating his deceased owner until the event catches the eyes of two policemen who immediately rush over to end the attack. Meanwhile, Helena Markos remains hidden in the darkness of the night between the architecture of the plaza, unknown to the policemen.
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