

Tamas Nagypal. "Mourning the Loss of a Communist Revolution that Didn't Happen: The Undead Historicity of Italy's *Anni di piombo* in *Zombi 2*, *Year of the Gun*, and *Arrivederci amore, ciao*." *Mediations* 31.1 (Fall 2017) 47-68.
www.mediationsjournal.org/articles/mourning-revolution

Mourning the Loss of a Communist Revolution that Didn't Happen: The Undead Historicity of Italy's *Anni di piombo* in *Zombi 2*, *Year of the Gun*, and *Arrivederci amore, ciao*

Tamas Nagypal

"Rome, January 1978. Italy is in chaos. A group of terrorists calling themselves the Red Brigade has brought a shocked society to a state bordering on revolution. It is the ...
VERLIEBT IN DIE GEHAHR - YEAR OF THE GUN"¹

Introduction

The above quotation is from the opening credits of John Frankenheimer's 1991 film *Year of the Gun*, a partially fictionalized account of the political unrest in Italy during the late 1970s that Franco Berardi called "the last revolt of the communist proletarians of the twentieth century against capitalist rule and against the bourgeois state."² The film's sensational premise glosses over the complexity of the actual situation by identifying a single revolutionary agent in the "Red Brigade" (a simplified rendering of *Brigado Rosso*, Red Brigades), delivering one last jolt of red scare for the western viewer still recovering from cold war paranoia while witnessing the disintegration of the USSR. In reality, Italy's communist Left at the time, while enjoying a historically unprecedented support of the population, was far from being unified. Its parliamentary wing, the Communist Party of Italy (PCI) that had a strong base among union workers, was desperately trying to hold onto its electoral gains in a cold war environment where the victory of the radical left outside the Soviet zone of influence usually triggered a far-right *coup d'état* backed by the United States. While the full extent of the NATO meddling in Italian politics during the period is still unknown, the neo-fascist "strategy of tension" — a series of indiscriminate terrorist acts against the general population that started with the bombing of the Bologna train station on December 12, 1969 — is now generally understood as a far right tactic to provoke a state of emergency, blame communists for the attacks and discredit the PCI.³ It was as a response to this right-wing terror that vanguardist militant groups like the Red Brigades or *Prima Linea* had formed on the far left, aiming to bring about a communist revolution by targeting (kidnapping and/or killing) those they considered to be representatives of the establishment (policemen, lawyers, politicians, oligarchs, etc.). The term *anni di piombo* (years of lead) commonly used to describe this period of right- and left-wing

terrorism (1969-83) covers over these differences, not unlike Frankenheimer's film appropriating the name without referencing the neo-fascist side of political violence.⁴ By revealing every leftist character (a gay university professor among them) as an agent of the Brigades, *Year of the Gun* also conflates red militancy with the nonviolent factions of the extra-parliamentary left, the diffuse network of counter-cultural "Autonomist" movements mainly comprised, as Patrick Cuninghame stresses, of the emerging post-Fordist precariat (students, unemployed and underemployed youth, radical feminists, gays, lesbians, artists, and intellectuals) who were disillusioned with the PCI's orthodox Marxism.⁵

Due to these frictions within the Italian radical left, contrary to *Year of the Gun's* red scare narrative, the historical shock value of 1977-78 was precisely the *lack* of a communist revolution that did not take place despite the seemingly favorable political climate that, if nothing else, had slowly eroded the legitimacy of the post-war bourgeois democracy. As Paul Ginsborg puts it, "the PCI was unable and unwilling to use its considerable powers of mass mobilization to force the DC [Christian Democrats] into making real concessions. Once again, they accepted the internal logic of the capitalist plea to salvage the economy without having an alternative economic strategy of their own."⁶ Instead of using its mass support from union workers to rewrite the social contract, Communist Party leader Enrico Berlinguer rather attempted to engineer a "historic compromise" for the PCI, effectively allying it with the conservative Christian morals and authoritarian values of the DC in the name of "preserving Italy from the moral degradation of late capitalism, from 'unbridled individualism, senseless consumerism, economic disorder and the dissipation of resources'."⁷ This new strategy seemed safe enough to deliver an electoral victory to the PCI in 1976; however, just days before the decisive vote, the Red Brigades killed three government officials, turning the public sentiment against the Communist Party and making it lose at the ballots.⁸ These events showed the deadlock of a parliamentary mobilization of the communist Left during the cold war era only too clearly: on the one hand, Berlinguer's move to the center, justified by the threat of civil war, was successful insofar as Italy avoided the fate of Chile and the party secured temporary electoral gains. However, the tactic of pitting those with a regular job against the unemployed and the precarious in the name of a new, moralized centrist consensus, combined with an unfortunate Stalinist heritage of authoritarianism eventually led to the return of the repressed in the form of strengthened red terrorism on the one hand, and post-political disillusionment among voters on the other.⁹

In the end, the Italian Communist Party fell between two stools under the table and perhaps no other event symbolizes this better than Aldo Moro's 1978 kidnapping and subsequent murder by the Red Brigades, itself already a repetition of the turmoil around the 1976 elections. Moro was the DC's man who had negotiated the compromise with the PCI, offering government positions to the Communists in a Christian Democrat-led administration; he was kidnapped on March 16, 1978, on

the day when the new coalition would have been officially announced, only to be killed 54 days later. Moro's death put an end to the "historic compromise"; by 1979 even Berlinguer himself had admitted its failure.¹⁰ As a result, nothing happened: "the Republic went on in much the same way as before. Democracy survived, but no radical change took place in the relationship between state and society" — wrote Paul Ginsborg in March 1989, not knowing about the imminent collapse of the Soviet bloc, an event that symbolically repeated the local failure of communism in Italy on a global scale. Unlike Ginsborg, Frankenheimer already had this insight while making his film, thus for him the "nothing" that had happened in 1978 gained a more ominous dimension: it marked the emergence of a global capitalist consensus that became official only with the collapse of its last remaining challenger:¹¹ the USSR, the fading shadow of the twentieth-century revolutionary left that has managed to survive its own death by a few decades. As Mario Tronti summarizes, "[o]nce the revolutionary project was defeated, the reformist programme became impossible too. In this sense, the latest form of neoliberal capitalism may prove ironically similar to the final forms of state socialism: incapable of reform."¹²

Yet, this event, despite its extraordinary consequences, should not be confused with the successful mourning of the unrealized and now, supposedly, lost utopian potential inherent even in the unreformable institutions of really existing socialism, the counterproductive vanguardism of red terrorism, or the anti-political exhaustion of Autonomia. As Derrida reminds us in his timely *Specters of Marx*, it is only today that the revolutionary legacy of Marx starts to haunt in a properly undead form, from beyond the horizon of our liberal capitalist status quo after the supposed end of history, destabilizing our post-ideological conceit again and again.¹³ In the Italian context, what continues to haunt is, paradoxically, the very non-event, the lack of a communist revolution, a historical deadlock often mediated in the postmodern cultural imaginary by the returning figure of Aldo Moro. As Nicoletta Marini-Maio puts it, "Moro's body has assumed the residual, ghostly insistence of a murdered corpse that continues to appear and make its presence felt. Moro has become a remnant, returning to haunt Italian society and to search for justice."¹⁴ Similarly, Alan O'Leary sees the continuing fascination of Italian cinema with the Moro affair as an expression of national guilt, with films like *Maledetti vi amerò* (1980), *Il caso Moro* (1986), *Buongiorno, notte* (2003), or *Aldo Moro: il presidente* (2008) playing the role of a "Truth and Reconciliation Commission" about the *anni di piombo* that has been painfully missing from official political discourse.¹⁵ Yet, this also means that the body of Moro is a perfect fetish object for the post-ideological era that "conceals the lack ('castration') around which the symbolic network is articulated,"¹⁶ the fundamental antagonisms of history that give birth to political and ideological struggle. To lay the specter of Italy's twentieth-century radical Left to rest, to truly come to terms with its legacy therefore could not mean the elimination but rather the reactivation of its 1978 political deadlock in the historical present. Not the reconciliation with a past

trauma but the operationalization of the radical historical contingency (lack) it stood for so that another world could be imagined once again.

The key question this paper investigates is therefore not the use-value of various cinematic representations of Italy's Years of Lead for the purposes of national reconciliation, but rather how the "nothing" at the core of politics as such can be rendered visible and audible through their dialectical images that reveal history's radical contingency. Rather than taking the non-occurrence of a communist revolution in the late 1970s merely as a failure, I'm interested in how such non-event can inspire the cinematic representation of historicity in its pure state. Taking a transnational approach, I look at three films depicting the impasse of Italy's red terrorism, one from the time of the Moro murder (*Zombi 2*, 1979), one from the year when the USSR collapsed (*Year of the Gun*, 1991), and one from Italy's Berlusconi-led "post-ideological" Second Republic (*Arrivederci amore, ciao*, 2006) that show the contemporary global capitalist consensus in its nascent, strengthened, and already-crumbling state. I underline the contingency of this consensus by drawing attention to the real of history that returns as a destabilizing force field underneath the films' shifting symbolizations of the *anni di piombo*. Significantly, the trajectory I'm mapping is circular rather than linear. First, *Zombi 2* allegorizes the traumatic deadlock of Italian history, the stalemate between forces of the communist Left and the supporters of a capitalist paradigm through a magical narrative about a colonial zombie uprising. *Year of the Gun* then melancholically displaces this very conflict into the past, signaling the apparently unanimous victory of the second faction. Yet, *Arrivederci* retroactively turns this move into an ineffective temporary repression, exposing the contradictions of the post-Soviet neoliberal consensus by returning to Italy's 1978 impasse once again.

Historicity and the Living Dead

Curiously, we gain access to images of historicity in all three films through the radically atemporal figures of the living dead. In *Zombi 2*, the protagonists are actual zombies; in *Year of the Gun*, the hero is a burned-out former student activist cynically detached from political turmoil around him; finally, *Arrivederci amore, ciao* features a sociopathic ex-terrorist who has survived the loss of his cause as a soulless opportunist. All these characters are stuck in what Slavoj Žižek calls the place between two deaths, the gap that opens up when the body dies but is not given a proper burial, or a social symbolic persona is deactivated while the biological body lingers.¹⁷ In both cases, we are left with a subject outside linear temporality who is *death driven* in the psychoanalytic sense. As Žižek stresses, "'death drive' is, paradoxically, the Freudian name for its very opposite, for the way immortality appears within psychoanalysis: for an uncanny excess of life, an 'undead' urge that persists beyond the (biological) cycle of life and death, generation and corruption."¹⁸ For Lacan, this undead urge that lurks behind every socially constructed subject position is the compulsion to return again and again to the constitutive void (lack) at the core of the symbolic order without assigning

any meaning to it; to enjoy the very dissolution of the social-symbolic status quo and its linear order of time.¹⁹ In Deleuzian terms, the living dead emerge through the deterritorialization of the (normative, Oedipalized, bourgeois) human body, positing, as Jason Wallin argues, “a malevolent life poised to betray the image of the human organism in preparation for a perverse people yet to come.”²⁰ On the one hand, the death driven subject is an isolated monad detached from the social-symbolic community of language users; yet, for this precise reason he is also *potentially* the member of a new, not-yet-actualized political collective. Standing for a rupture in any actualized temporal order, the living dead is therefore the name for the subject expressing the radical contingency of history, that is, the historicity of the human condition.

For this reason, the historicity of the 1978 events in Italy lies in its opening of a gap between the living body (movement) of the radical left and its symbolic place (its name or ideal). While, arguably, the former is defeated at that time, the latter is officially deactivated only in 1991, which is why during this period the people of the communist revolution linger on in the spectral domain of the living dead.²¹ Furthermore, as Simon Clark stresses, paraphrasing Freud, symbolic burying rituals may also not end the persistence of the undead. Exposure to the disturbance caused by the deceased loved one can cause the mourner to melancholically identify with her very undeadness, perpetuating the suspended state between life and death through the endless reimagining of the moment of loss.²² As Derrida argued, the revolutionary Left continues to haunt after it has been symbolically declared dead by its opponents. Along these lines, I propose that *Zombi 2* represents the movement of Italian communism allegorically in a state of disintegration, surviving only as the blind compulsion to repeat fragmented revolutionary gestures in the name of an abstract communist ideal after hitting an unresolvable deadlock with the events of 1978. *Year of the Gun*, on the other hand, is a film about how even this increasingly more empty symbolic fiction of the Left is deactivated when it is turned into a media spectacle that inscribes the trauma of its failure into a forever lost historical past. *Arrivederci amore ciao*, by contrast, suggests that such pathos of symbolic closure may have been premature and tackles the problem of a melancholic attachment to a *failed* revolution that not only remains effective after the fall of the Berlin Wall but emerges only with it, serving as the unacknowledged fantasmatic underside of the new global capitalist order, paralyzing its subjects’ capacity to imagine its alternative in the present.

Significantly, such imaginative blindness pervading even the contemporary global left (a phenomenon termed capitalist realism by Mark Fisher) also recalls a particularly unfortunate heritage of Italy’s idiosyncratic post-unification (1871) history usually referred to as *transformismo*: a combination of the people’s revolutionary expectations and the consecutive governments’ inability to enact political reforms, leading to a resigned ideological conviction about the static nature of Italian society.²³ Along

these lines, Stefano Ciammaroni reads the nihilist turn of the country's postwar extra-parliamentary politics and cinema of the 1960s as a symptom of an excessive attachment to the heroics of anti-fascist resistance between 1943 and 1945, holding on to the myth of an authentic, purely negative revolutionary violence that undercuts pragmatic attempts to build new political institutions after the war, inevitably leading to the return of terrorism.²⁴ For him the *Autonomia Operaia's* refusal of work as such — a stance that undermines any possible alliance with mainstream representatives of the working class (such as the PCI) — is part of the same ahistorical critical decadence of the radical Left as Pasolini's *Accattone* (1961) that fetishizes the death driven idleness of the Roman sub-proletariat.²⁵ Intellectuals like Tronti, Negri, or Pasolini, Ciammaroni suggests, were looking for a pure, uncorrupted form of subjectivity outside the historical institutions of capitalism but ended up with an all too naïve “revolutionary spontaneism” and “third worldism.”²⁶ In other words, they were interested in fantasmatically preserving the radical negativity of those who are “alive while dead”²⁷ by forever staying in a melancholic limbo between life and death, heroically refusing any actualization of the people. Their ideas prefigure Agamben's later concept of *homo sacer*, a subject he identifies as the necessary byproduct of modern sovereign power, someone who is included in the constituted social reality only insofar as he is excluded from it, serving as its continuously abjected shadowy supplement. The fantasy driving the Italian radical Left of the postwar era, Ciammaroni claims, is then the direct politicization of the radically excluded *without* their symbolic integration — a utopia of a “revolution without a revolution” that paralyzes any political struggle aiming to have lasting effects.²⁸

Such contradiction is also well known to contemporary “zombie studies,” just like the term *homo sacer*, which is widely used to designate the biopolitical ambiguity of the living dead.²⁹ As the authors of *A Zombie Manifesto* put it, “the zombie is currently understood as simultaneously powerless and powerful, slave and slave rebellion”³⁰ whose disruptive power lies entirely in a “negative dialectic,” in the anti-cathartic embodiment of an “irreconcilable tension.”³¹ Yet, unlike Ciammaroni, they see an emancipatory potential in this radical post-human negativity insofar as the very existence of the zombie's paradoxical body promises the collapse of the capitalist system that relies on the separation of subject and object, body and soul, producer and consumer, etc., without, however, offering the reconciliation of these antinomies into some higher unity. This position could indeed seem very close to the so called Italian nihilists' discussed above. I nonetheless suggest that Ciammaroni's critique of what could be called zombie politics risks conflating different forms of undeadness into a single ahistorical category, forgetting the dialectical paradox that sometimes what appears as an escape into ahistorical temporal suspension is the expression of very concrete forces of history hitting a deadlock. In these cases the point is not to dismiss abstract negativity but to identify at its core a genuine critique of the present situation, a critique that cannot fully come forward, but also cannot simply disappear.

Following Fredric Jameson, one should make a distinction here between antinomy and contradiction; while the former is an arrested, frozen form of binaries as they appear irresolvable, outside possibilities of historical change, the latter is the dialectical-historical interpretation of an antinomy that brings out the living and progressing antagonism the binary both expresses and obfuscates.³² Along these lines, the aim of this paper is to demonstrate through the dialectical work of interpretation that not all of cinema's living dead are the same in their relation to history; while some are able to capture and mobilize in a contradiction the constitutive negativity (that is, the historicity) of their present constellation, others fail to do so, which is why they fall back into a melancholic fixation on the past where they believe they have *lost* such negativity.³³ It is only this latter configuration that fits Ciammaroni's critique of Italian *decadentismo*, and, as my analysis of *Year of the Gun* will show, the phenomenon he criticizes is far from being limited to the Italian context and could be understood as the symptom of today's all pervasive capitalist realism.

Zombi 2: Historical Trauma as Magical Narrative

Antonio Gramsci's remark "The old world is dying away, and the new world struggles to come forth: now is the time of monsters" can serve as an appropriate summary not only of the terror ridden years of Italy transitioning into a global capitalist consensus in the late 1970s and early 1980s but also of the shifts of focus in Italian genre films around the same time.³⁴ Previously popular, white anthropocentric genres such as the *commedia all'italiana* (Italo-comedy), the *poliziesco* (Italo-crime film), the *giallo*, or the spaghetti western gradually gave way to a cycle of the infamous zombie and cannibal films, supernatural horrors and other subgenres with a distinctive trash aesthetic that, unlike their already viscerally exploitative predecessors, often abandoned the pretense of coherent narrative altogether.³⁵ The cinematic emergence of these undead monsters, I will argue, can be seen as a symptom not only of the increasing international demand for cheap B movies due the rise of video culture, but also of that intermediate stage in the country's history between the two deaths of its communist mass movement when the people's revolutionary body survived only as a living dead. Curiously, the allegorical potential of such films is ignored by academics who discuss the representation of the *anni di piombo* in Italian genre films, either focusing on genres that make explicit references to terrorism (*poliziescos* and italo-comedies),³⁶ or mentioning only the *giallo*'s "hyper-aesthetic" of violence as a "symptom of anxieties about the presence of terrorism in Italian society."³⁷

At first sight, Lucio Fulci's 1979 *Zombi 2* [*Zombie aka Zombie Flesh Eaters*] is just one among many supernatural schlock scenarios from that period with zero references to contemporary Italy, unlike Umberto Lenzi's *Nightmare City* (1980) for instance with its machine gun wielding zombies terrorizing Milan. Critics have often dismissed *Zombi 2* as an incoherent piece of Euro-exploitation trying to break into the international market with ridiculously exaggerated gore effects, third-rate Italian actors pretending

to be Americans, and a supposedly spectacular zombie apocalypse in the middle of Manhattan that doesn't seem to disturb the afternoon traffic in the city even a little.³⁸ Others, such as Patricia MacCormack, rehabilitate Fulci as an auteur of sensual events who is interested in shocking the audience with the delirious intensity of his affection-images and therefore willfully ignores the rules of conventional storytelling.³⁹ While these latter qualities certainly earned him an eternal place in the pantheon of Euro-cult directors and made *Zombi 2* a recurring point of reference in the canon of visceral horror films, I argue that its systematically ignored narrative structure is equally worth looking at as it may supplement the sensual materialist reading of Fulci's surreal imagery with a historical dimension.

The film's plot revolves around the outbreak of a mysterious plague on a small Caribbean island that causes the dead to come back to life and feed on the living. Among the main characters there is a Dr. Moreau-esque white colonial doctor engaged in suspicious activities with the natives, apparently trying to find the cure for the disease; the daughter of a his former colleague investigating her father's death; two tourists; and a journalist from New York looking for cover story material. After the Americans arrive on the island, the situation quickly escalates and centuries-old carcasses of Spanish conquistadors start to climb out of their graves; it becomes obvious that small group of Westerners won't be able to stop the spread of the infection. Although a few of them manage to escape from the island on a boat back to New York, it's already too late: an army of zombies is marching on the Brooklyn Bridge to take over Manhattan.

The finale's carnivalesque overturning of the dominant social order is prepared by Fulci's play with the viewer's narrative expectations earlier insofar as he encourages us, as Ian Olney observes, "to recognize and reject the flawed perspective of the film's nominal white heroes, while at the same time inviting us to performatively adopt the point of view of the living dead."⁴⁰ In one scene we see a white heroine's eyeball being pierced by a zombie in a painfully dragged-out series of close-ups where the editing mirrors the suspended temporality of the monster's body while the camera assumes its perspective. The director also deploys unsutured point-of-view shots throughout the film that are retroactively claimed by the zombie-proletariat in the finale: the living dead emerge from behind the camera, evoking the famous scene from Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963) where the animals suddenly enter a God's-view shot of Bodega Bay from negative diegetic space and, as Žižek insists, de-realize the image by giving body to its constitutive (primordially repressed) outside (the camera's gaze).⁴¹ The zombies' entry triggers a similar visual paradox: while they are marching on the upper boardwalk of the Brooklyn Bridge, the traffic of cars just a few meters below them goes on uninterrupted. This way, *Zombi 2*'s conclusion offers what Fredric Jameson calls a "magical narrative," usually a product of transitional periods "in which two distinct modes of production, or moments of socioeconomic development, coexist. Their antagonism is not yet articulated in terms of the struggle

of social classes, so that its resolution can be projected in the form of a nostalgic (or less often, a Utopian) harmony."⁴² These ideological fantasies, despite their attempt to posit a world that would overcome the contradictions between old and new, are in fact symptomatic of the opposite, of the inability to imagine a social totality that would satisfy the reality principle. Magical narratives are "compromise formations and mediatory combinations in which the two codes are playfully recombined" but in a way that "the narrative must not be allowed to press on to any decisive conclusion."⁴³ Simply put, harmony in the magical universe lays bare the antagonisms of the real world.

Zombi 2's carnivalesque swapping of place and function between the upper and lower social strata of global capitalism (between the accelerated life of its center and the third world masses staggering behind) is therefore a way to magically represent as irresolvable, through their allegorical displacement, the social contradictions of contemporary Italy. An allegorical reading reveals such displacement as the weakening revolutionary Left's compromise formation with the emerging global capitalist order which, for a while at least, was also unable to cast out the haunting spirits of the communist movement. Instead of delivering the closure of the narrative one way or another, the final shots produce *dissensus* in Rancière's sense of the term, putting "two worlds in one and the same world," attesting to their impossible co-presence.⁴⁴ This imaginary antinomy is further enhanced through a gap between the visible and the audible as the soundtrack with noises of the city in chaos and an anxious radio report about a building under siege by zombies in no way corresponds to what we actually see. Finally, what sounds like tribal drums join the pandemonium but only to introduce the mellow synth music score that accompanies the upcoming credit sequence, during which the zombies keep marching and the cars keep running, but noises of their imaginary clash magically disappear.

On the Jamesonian *political* level of its ideological texture the film avoids closure through a decisive symbolic act (other than the paradoxical images at the end, the doctor also fails to find a cure for the zombie plague and we never find out where the disease originates from).⁴⁵ On another level (what Jameson calls the *social*), however, these formal techniques can be seen as ideological insofar as they translate the necessary inconsistency of the social-symbolic order as such into ideologemes, that is, imaginary formations structured by antinomies like the mythical struggle between good and evil, upper and lower social strata, or the dichotomy between a proper (white western) human body and its abjected undead correlate.⁴⁶ The ideological mystification lies here not in the gesture of closure, but in the ahistorical manner in which gaps are introduced into the social fabric. The key to appreciate the properly *historical* spectrality of Fulci's monsters is Jameson's third level of ideology critique which concerns the succession of the modes of production, thus from a Marxist standpoint it is the only historical interpretation proper. He argues that history is the absent cause of social structures, the unrepresentable *real* in the Lacanian sense;

it is “what hurts, it is what refuses desire and sets inexorable limits to individual as well as collective praxis, which its ‘ruses’ turn into grisly and ironic reversals of their overt intention.”⁴⁷ In Lacanian terms, history as *real* is a force field that thwarts and distorts the normal functioning of the *symbolic* (what Jameson called the political) and the *imaginary* (the social), undermining both gestures of closure and the illusion of neatly fixed antagonisms.

A properly historical analysis should thus look for “the active presence within the text of a number of discontinuous and heterogeneous formal processes” through which “the dynamics of sign systems of several distinct modes of production can be registered and apprehended.”⁴⁸ In *Zombi 2* this dimension opens up through the resurrection the Spanish conquistadors, the old feudal colonizers of the New World which later became the center of modern capitalism. They break their gravestones while slowly rising from the dead, undoing the symbolic resolution of a past historical transformation. From this perspective, the finale with the zombies in Manhattan slowly dragging their feet while the cars underneath are running uninterrupted also goes beyond the limits of a mere ideologeme and opens up the wounds of Italy’s own never completed transition/acceleration from feudalism to capitalism, as well as of the country’s disavowed colonial adventures in Africa.

It is through historical analysis that one can understand the film’s enigmatic opening sequence where the doctor, his face covered by a shadow, slowly points a gun at a dead body wrapped in white cloth. The body then slowly starts to rise up on the bed, and the doctor pulls the trigger, putting a bullet in the zombie’s head. Then he utters mysteriously: “the boat can leave now, tell the crew.” It only becomes clear later that the boat he sends back to New York with the dead body of his colleague ends up carrying the zombies responsible for spreading the plague. Instead of dismissing this part of the film as merely an illogical plot device, I suggest to read it as an example of how the real of history distorts the film’s symbolic texture. The doctor’s strange mental split between western scientist and “Indian” sorcerer is a symptomatic torsion produced by history’s force field for which voodoo (itself, as they put it in the film, the “mixture of two religions: Catholicism and African tribal rituals”) serves as the central metaphor. This way, if we take the immediate historical trauma of Italy at the time — that of Aldo Moro’s bullet-ridden body found in the trunk of a car — the doctor’s character can function as a stand-in for both Moro and his murderers: he is both the father figure looking for the symbolic cure for society’s illness *and* the murderer of the father who unleashes the plague that ruins the world.⁴⁹ The merit of Fulci is that he doesn’t try to cover up this historical deadlock inherent, as Jameson argues, in the very form of the “narrative as a socially symbolic act.” Instead, he pushes it to an almost ridiculous extreme in the denouement, ending the film with a rather dysfunctional carnivalesque event, the real magic of which lies in the sheer absurdity of its taking place, accurately capturing how the forces of history undermine not only the simple closure of the symbolic but also the imaginary articulation of any fixed

binary splitting it apart.

Year of the Gun: From the Trauma of the Real to the Melancholy of its Loss

Formally, the exposition of John Frankenheimer's *Year of the Gun*, a Hollywood neo-noir shot in Italy, is the opposite to that of *Zombi 2*, an Italian exploitation film made in America. Instead of drawing its audience into a hallucinatory vortex of history's death drive right away, signaling how Italy's 1978 trauma haunts the popular imaginary even after multiple displacements, *Year of the Gun* allows the viewer an initial distance from this foreign country's complicated history by focusing on its outsider protagonist. David is an ex-leftist journalist who considers his years of youthful college radicalism to be over and seeks a comfortable life in Rome as an American writer working on a "travel book." He is deliberately choosing conformism and commercial opportunism, ignoring the political upheaval happening in front of his eyes ("Americans in Rome don't need politics. They need American Express cards," he quips).

As we soon find out, however, he is not writing a book for tourists at all; he is working on a novel about the Red Brigades, a fictional account that nonetheless uses real events and actual people as points of reference. Yet, he doesn't realize the gravity of the historical real surrounding him until an American war photographer, Alison finds out about his book deal as well as his student activist past, and putting two and two together assumes that David is trying to infiltrate the Red Brigades to write a first-hand report on Italian terrorism. Not buying David's story about a travel book and because of wanting to be in on the project, she manages to get her hands on the manuscript that indeed reads like embedded journalism about the Brigades, involving a fantastic but possible plot to kidnap Aldo Moro. She mentions her discovery to one of David's Italian friends, a gay professor of literature at the local university. This is the moment when what the protagonist intended to be pure fiction finally touches on something real: not only does the professor turn out to be working for the terrorists, informing the headquarters about the book, but as a result David and Alison get kidnapped because the Red Brigades did in fact have a plan to take Moro already in preparation.

This plot twist illustrates Lacan's claim that "the letter always arrives to its destination,"⁵⁰ in the sense that the empty exercise of David's leftist fiction serves in the end to signify a real, traumatic historical event. The film goes even further suggesting a deeper connection between the inevitable return of the hero's repressed past and the action of the terrorists. Earlier in the film we see him following Moro's car to find a plausible location for his fictional kidnapping plot. Later on, the actual kidnapping takes place on the very same street corner, demonstrating that the real is nothing but the torsion of the symbolic, that, as Jameson insists, "history is inaccessible to us except in textual form... that it can be approached only by way of prior (re)textualization."⁵¹ While *Zombi 2* was a film about the real of history as an undead excess preventing the emergence of a coherent symbolic order, *Year of the*

Gun shows how what at first sight might look like a neatly framed symbolic fiction is always already distorted by the real. In this sense David is the postmodern decedent of the existentialist hero in Albert Camus's *The Stranger* who also wanted to be nothing but a pure conformist, to renounce any passion for the real, only to end up shooting an Arab in the face in French occupied Algiers "by accident."⁵² The message of Frankenheimer's film, then, is that one cannot escape his or her complicity in the making of history.

This message, however, only appears after various ideological distortions of the narrative. First of all, to use Jameson's interpretative horizons, David's act of writing a novel could have been a resolution on the political level that would have helped him (and the American viewer) to mourn the failure of the Left in his own country and justify his support of the emerging global capitalist consensus. In the immediate post-cold war context of the film's release, such desire for symbolic resolution through a "neutral" account of Italy's apparently self-induced political chaos by a detached observer also includes, as Alan O'Leary points out, the "retrospective justification for American policy during a period when the Partito Comunista Italiano commanded such a large percentage of the vote," that is, the disavowal of historical responsibility.⁵³ David's inability to simply go through with his project signals the disruptive forces of history (intervening through the undead fiction of communism), causing a series of displacements on the social level. For instance, the poor American trying to marry a rich Italian aristocrat (Lia) is a magical response to the class antagonisms of the neoliberal US (such as the young precarious intellectual David's inability to find a steady job there). Their apparently harmonious relationship, however, is eventually thwarted following the formal conventions of film noir and is channeled into the conflict between gullible male protagonist and *femme fatale* as the fiancée reveals herself to be working for the Brigades. This antinomy is then neutralized through David's choice of the non-threatening Alison over her, a fellow American who turns out to be just as cynical and burned out as him, despite their initial differences. It is through this production of a non-antagonistic couple that the denouement of *Year of the Gun* offers a form of closure, taming the disruptive effects of the historical real. After the successful execution of the Moro kidnapping, the terrorists release the two American journalists taking full advantage of the publicity they can bring to their cause, even executing Lia as a traitor in front of them, proving their ruthlessness to the eyes of the global media. The final scene then shows David years later, giving a TV interview about his new book on the Red Brigades he had put together with Alison; a heroic work of embedded journalists risking their lives to bring the truth to the public. He is joined through live video feed by Alison herself, reporting from the middle of the civil war in Beirut. Both of them do their bit of plugging the book, then Alison formulates the pathetic moral of their story: "I don't think that those of us who simply record events are that important finally. Maybe that's the biggest thing we have to live with." The reporter quickly responds: "Well, what you have to live

with has certainly turned into a huge bestseller...” After the interview, we see David gazing at the monitor showing Allison’s blank stare at the camera on the other side. Then, without exchanging words, they walk away quietly.

In the end, ironically, David’s “novel” does work as a symbolic act suturing together the narrative. Not as mere fiction but not as an account of the real either; rather, as the point of indistinction between the two. It seems that Frankenheimer blames the media for such a transformation of history whereby the events of 1978 are turned into a five-minute talk show segment, part of a continuous flow of mediatized shocks blatantly exploited for commercial purposes. This is certainly one way to understand what the second death of the communist Left could mean: not the elimination of history’s distorting effects from a total and homogenous world of global capitalism but rather the successful imaginary integration of these very ruptures into the status quo. It is for the same reason that Antonio Tricomi accuses the Red Brigades of complicity with the late capitalist establishment, comparing them admen in the society of the spectacle.⁵⁴ As Alan O’Leary puts it, “Terrorist action involves precisely the employment of the spectacle for the ends of political coercion: it is politics as singular impressive event contingent upon the mediatic apparatus of modern society.”⁵⁵ Accordingly, the ideologue offered in the end — the two protagonists looking at each other, one of them standing in the real of history’s rupture, the other, newly denominated as a figure of symbolic authority, watching her from a comfortable distance — doesn’t form an antinomy proper. It is as if they were both looking into a mirror, as if they knew that for the new society of the spectacle channeled by the mass media, their position is ultimately the same.

In this regard, as Gerard Pratley observes, *Year of the Gun* is not really a film about politics in Italy under the Red Brigades but about the cynical media landscape of an emerging globalized world led by the US.⁵⁶ And yet, its Baudrillardian conclusion, which prefigures Italy’s own post-political turn under Berlusconi’s media oligarchy, is not without its particular brand of nostalgia for a time in the past where real ideological struggles still existed, for the strangely Orientalized territory of chaos ridden Italy where a group of passionate non-Americans still believed, almost religiously, in the cause of the radical left (cases in point are the Gregorian soundtrack or the recurring Madonna paintings around terrorists). Through this spatiotemporal (and ethnic) displacement, Frankenheimer’s film can articulate the utopia of a revolutionary alternative to capitalism but only as something already lost — a gesture that effectively places this utopia into a quarantine, as if to make sure it doesn’t disturb the global capitalist consensus of the West anymore. As Agamben points out, such paradoxical performative relation to loss characterizes what could be called the politics of melancholia:

[Melancholy is] the imaginative capacity to make an unobtainable object appear as if lost. If the libido behaves as *if* a loss had occurred although nothing has in fact been lost, this is because the libido stages a simulation where what cannot be lost because it

has never been possessed appears as lost, and what could never be possessed because it had never perhaps existed may be appropriated insofar as it is lost.⁵⁷

In this light, the second death of the Italian Left presented by *Year of the Gun* gains a more suspicious dimension. It doesn't simply mark the end of actually existing socialism as much as it demonstrates how the emergence of nostalgia for an authentic Left coincides with the melancholic *construction* of it as lost, revealed here as the very ideological founding gesture of the so called post-ideological global consensus after 1989, at the supposed "end of history."⁵⁸ Or to put it differently, the film shows that the rise of today's cynical (capitalist realist) consciousness is strictly correlative to the imaginary conjuring up of what Žižek calls the phenomenon of the "subject supposed to believe," a figure of the Other who is presumed to have a direct, organic connection to the lost ideologies of the past without the postmodern ironic distance.⁵⁹ It is symptomatic, for instance, how *Year of the Gun* emphasizes the authentic fanaticism of David's soon-to-be-killed terrorist fiancée through tribal imagery, showing her paint her lips and nipples in deep red with lipstick in allusion to Nastassja Kinski's putting blood on her lips at the moment of her beastly awakening in Paul Schrader's *Cat People* (1982).⁶⁰

Arrivederci amore, ciao: From Melancholy to Mourning

A Jamesonian reading of the melancholic (lost) antinomies in *Year of the Gun*, along the lines of his critique of postmodern "nostalgia films," should emphasize their depoliticizing effect, symptomatic of the contemporary waning of historicity, of our inability to perceive the present as history, as a symbolic totality split by conflict/struggle that we can meaningfully participate in.⁶¹ One way to reactivate the antagonisms of the real in the present, then, is to destroy the fetishistic support of the melancholic-cynic, the nostalgia for a subject who supposedly really believes, and this way clear the space for a new Leftist imaginary not coopted by the status quo. This, I claim, is what Michele Soavi's neo-noir/*giallo* *Arrivederci amore ciao* (2006) accomplishes. While the protagonist of Frankenheimer's film was a cynic who by the end of the film had managed to develop a sentimental-melancholic relationship to the unrealized utopianism of his past, it is precisely such melancholic attachment that Giorgio, the former red terrorist hero of *Arrivederci* tries to cut out of himself. Hiding out somewhere in the jungles of South America, it is the symbolic defeat of the twentieth-century communism, the fall of the Berlin Wall that triggers his drive to betray his cause; he murders his guerilla leader friend and informs on his comrades in exchange of "rehabilitation," the chance of a clean slate and reintegration into the Italian society after a short prison sentence.⁶² He cynically turns into a conformist not because he is a beautiful soul who doesn't have the stomach for political violence like David in *Year of the Gun*, but as a fascistic act of self-determination, the choice of a violent path of mourning that leads through the corrupt *mise-en-scene* of late-capitalist urban Italy, getting him involved in gambling, prostitution, armed robbery,

and murder.

Director Michele Soavi takes his viewer on a roller coaster ride of visual and audial shocks in the tradition of the 1980s Italian exploitation cinema's hallucinatory exuberance that often borders on the ridiculous, much like Fulci's *Zombi 2* did.⁶³ The constantly but slowly moving camera, the excessive use of noir style close-ups, low-key lighting, skewed camera angles and rain showers, the obsessive repetition of the sentimental title song and the traumatic flashback (night)scene from the hero's "dark past" have a cumulative tongue in cheek effect, neutralizing the melancholy about any traumatic loss resisting representation. Soavi takes Guy Debord's critical diagnosis about late capitalism, "that which appears is good, that which is good appears" and makes it, ironically, his *ars poetica*, showing Giorgio's repressed primal scene of terrorism (his inability to prevent a postman from being accidentally killed by his bomb) multiple times in slow motion so that viewers can enjoy it in full detail.⁶⁴ The same goes for the final reenactment and subsequent letting go of this trauma through the cold blooded murder of his fiancée for finding out that he is (still) a killer; he invites her over for dinner, poisons her and then watches her die slowly as she is crawling towards to exit, playfully appropriating the moment of impotent passivity that paralyzed him in the past. On her coffin he puts a wreath that reads "Arrivederci amore ciao" [Farewell my love, goodbye], the title of the song that was playing on the postman's radio before the bomb went off. The next day he is officially rehabilitated into a full member of society, "an honest person like everyone else," as he remarks cynically.

This grotesque parody of a symbolic closure along with the hyperbolic amoralism of *Arrivederci* serves as a bitter satire of the new bourgeoisie of Italy's post-1992 Second Republic that set out to "normalize" the country after decades of political turmoil (i.e. organized crime, terrorism, and institutionalized corruption) by turning yet again to consensus building and conformism — a strategy that ended up legitimating a new system of "post-political" violence and corruption by putting Berlusconi in power.⁶⁵ The film in fact satirizes the very formula of "propa-tainment," the dominant product of Berlusconi's monopolistic media empire build on the "values" of "*intimismo, individualismo, atomismo, qualunquismo*" [intimacy, individualism, atomism, indifference].⁶⁶ For the protagonist, the ideological device uniting these characteristics in support of the new consensus is identity politics pushed to a fascist extreme, where the competitive grieving of one's idiosyncratic loss is presented as the ticket to the newly stabilized multicultural "democratic" community. Against Judith Butler's claim that "the prohibition on certain forms of public grieving itself constitutes the public sphere on the basis of such a prohibition," Soavi depicts a society of the spectacle where everyone's losses can equally appear because they *must* appear.⁶⁷ While for Butler, the public ban on grieving *certain* losses (like that of the same-sex other) is what forces those subjects to disavow their lost objects and turn melancholic, in Soavi's ostensibly post-melancholic universe everyone's

trauma is equally commodified and thus ultimately — politically — meaningless.⁶⁸ There seems to be nothing repressed, nothing lost here anymore; all we have is a series of equivalences, a flat ontology of subjects and their once lost object-causes, everything in full view. For instance, the team that Giorgio assembles for an armed robbery consists of two Ustasha fascists and three Spanish anarchists, former enemies working together now in a tolerant, culturally diverse environment allowing them to reify the loss of their cause which the leader of the operation dutifully names with mock-political correctness. Even one of the more recent historical traumas gets a symbolic representation through the corrupt police captain who promotes beating people to death with a club as the “Rwanda method,” a memento of his (and the justice system’s) instrumental exploitation of Giorgio’s own ex-terrorist body for similar purposes. Despite its dark comedic undertones, one shouldn’t simply dismiss the film’s references to mourning as unserious or fake; their apparent ridiculousness comes rather from Soavi’s effort to present a universal public sphere of grieving subjects that takes no exception, where even terrorists and criminals have a chance to narrate their stories and get recognized provided they don’t question the apparatuses of power they become caught within as a result.⁶⁹

Is *Arrivederci amore, ciao*, then, finally a post-ideological film? Did it accomplish what *Year of the Gun* couldn’t, a cynical act of closure (mourning) that turns former ideological antinomies into an endless series of equivalences by giving up the possibility of even a melancholic (lost) alternative to the global capitalist consensus? Is its fabric a pure simulation that cannot be touched by the real of history anymore? Yes and no: it is because Soavi fully confronts the deadlocks of spectacular identity politics that he is able to show that not all is captured by its logic; that it is merely an ideological apparatus of the new bourgeoisie that, contrary to its own *modus operandi* pushing for the historicizing narration of the self, relies in fact on a fundamental disavowal of historicity. As a result, history proper returns in the film with a vengeance as the real of class struggle. This is the excess that haunts in the form of the Balkans folk music score that persists in the background beyond the brief scenes involving Romanian miners and former Croatian terrorists, detaching itself from distinct subjects to pose as a disruptive sound cloud against Giorgio’s often repeated theme song, his fetish object that is the last vestige of his melancholic self. The soundtrack is then a manifestation of the real of history, a reminder that the economy of contemporary Italy is heavily dependent on cheap migrant labor from the EU’s underdeveloped periphery; a fact that serves as the dark underside of the protagonist’s quest for a bourgeois life. Or better yet, it is a reminder that for the establishment, despite his conformist aspirations, he himself counts as an underclass immigrant, a *sans papier* who is willing to take imprisonment, humiliation, and blackmail by the regime’s corrupt officials in exchange for potential future status and recognition. Another reminder of his class status is the homeless woman who disturbs the setup of the armed robbery he masterminded, for which she almost gets shot by the team’s trigger

happy sharpshooter if it wasn't for Giorgio's intervention. Nonetheless, this latent social conflict appears explicitly only through the suspicious bourgeois fiancée who is reluctant to marry him after she finds out about his current shady dealings, even though she was more than willing to embrace Giorgio's terrorist past as long as he repented for it.⁷⁰ Accordingly, the ideologeme that mediates the real of class struggle in the end is the antinomy of sexual difference that follows both noir and *giallo* conventions. It culminates in the already mentioned theatrical murder scene, a grotesque marriage ceremony where the bride is tortured and executed while the title song is playing as wedding march — a magical answer to an irresolvable antagonism comparable to Fulci's notorious denouement in *Zombi 2*.

If *Year of the Gun* presented the radical left of the late-twentieth century as the melancholic pipe dream, the fundamental (primordially lost) fantasy of the new global capitalist order, the merit of *Arrivederci amore, ciao* is to turn this around, suggesting that this idea of capitalism without an alternative itself is nothing but the hallucination that the old left conjures up on its deathbed to cover up its zombified state, i.e. its historical deadlock. In the end what Giorgio was unable to mourn was not simply his communist past but his dream about an impossible, frictionless bourgeois life, the true fundamental fantasy driving his terrorist and criminal transgressions alike, the melancholic fixation on which had turned him into a living dead in the first place. The symbolic letter of the title thus arrives at its destination (to the wrath on his fiancée's coffin) when it signals the successful reconfiguration of this fantasy by uncovering and problematizing the fetish object that supported it. Giorgio's melancholic attachment to the title song reveals its former ideological function when it becomes the signifier of his fiancée's bourgeois naiveté and ignorance, when she turns out to be his ultimate "subject supposed to believe," a fetish he created to support his cynical journey. The paradoxical final images, then, through a cunning of history akin to the one that brought Fulci's zombies to the Brooklyn Bridge, demonstrate, against the hero's overt intentions, his irreducible separation from the social symbolic order the very moment of his apparent integration to it. This way the film is able to allegorically overcome the contemporary Left's paralyzing attachment to the trauma of the Years of Lead. What Soavi's final symbolic gesture of mourning accomplishes is the undoing of this melancholic fixation on the past through its historicization — not by resolving its deadlock but by reactivating it, blowing up what used to be a nostalgia for a lost antinomy into a contradictory dialectical image of the present that could free political imagination and direct it towards the future.

Conclusion

These three accounts of communism's living dead, then, represent two incompatible positions towards the trauma of the *anni di piombo*: while the two Italian films come to terms with it by bringing forth its historical impact on the present, *Year of the Gun* offers its melancholic disavowal. I have suggested that the critical potential of these

films lies not simply in the content of their narrative but in the particular formal distortions it goes through. A non-dialectical reading of *Zombi 2*, for instance, could easily dismiss its ideological agenda as vulgar “third worldism,” in the same way as *Arrivederci amore, ciao*’s ostensibly fascistic plot makes it an unlikely candidate for a contemporary Leftist text. By contrast, *Year of the Gun* might appear quite progressive for a Hollywood film with its liberal message “that foreigners really have no business getting involved in other countries, especially ones whose internal traumas they do not understand.”⁷¹ Yet, I have shown that a historical analysis of the films’ political unconscious actually turns these initial impressions on their head, helping to distinguish accounts of critical zombie politics from the reactionary politics of melancholia parasitizing the cinematic figure of the living dead. What is at stake in this distinction is the critical understanding of today’s all pervasive ideology of capitalist realism which the historical deadlocks of Italian *transformismo*, amplified by Aldo Moro’s 1978 murder, provide an early model for on the local level. What films like *Zombi 2* and *Arrivederci amore, ciao* demonstrate is that even in these dark times after the *de facto* defeat of twentieth-century communism the cunning of history continues to undermine the reigning post-ideological consensus; that the death-driven insistence of its living dead, easily mistaken for ahistorical nihilism, might in fact help to build a critical consciousness of our present situation, laying bare its fundamental inconsistency, in other words: its historicity.

Notes

1. *Year of the Gun*, directed by John Frankenheimer (1991; Initial Films)
2. Franco Berardi, *Precarious Rhapsody: Semiocapitalism and the Pathologies of the Post-Alpha Generation*, trans. A. Bove et al. (London: Minor Compositions, 2009) 15.
3. For an account of the possible NATO links to neo-fascist terror in Italy see Leopoldo Nuti, "The Italian 'Stay-Behind' Network — The Origins of Operation 'Gladio,'" *Journal of Strategic Studies* 30.6 (2007) 955-80.
4. For an overview of the *anni di piombo*, see Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics 1943-1988* (London: Penguin, 1990) 348-406.
5. As Cuninghame emphasizes, this diffuse network of *Autonomia* should not be confused with the *Autonomia Operaia* movement organized around mostly male intellectuals like Antonio Negri or Oreste Scalzone that attempted, in vain, to hegemonize the extra-parliamentary left through the operaist tradition of worker's autonomy that sought to reinvent working class life beyond its victimist vision promoted by trade unions and the PCI. Patrick Cuninghame, "For an Analysis of *Autonomia*: An Interview with Sergio Bologna," *Left History* 7.2 (2001): 90-91.
6. Cuninghame, "For an Analysis" 390.
7. "For an Analysis" 357.
8. "For an Analysis" 375.
9. "For an Analysis" 381.; As Antonio Tricomi summarizes, "In post-1978 Italy, the youthful revolutionary utopia of the protestors was followed by complete disillusionment; civic commitment was replaced by detachment and ever-increasing retreat into the private." Antonio Tricomi, "Killing the Father: Politics and Intellectuals, Utopia and Disillusion," in *Imagining Terrorism: The Rhetoric and Representation of Political Violence in Italy 1969-2009*, ed. P. Antonello and A. O'Leary (London: Legenda, 2009) 26; on the PCI's exploitation of the antagonism between the traditional working class and the new precariat, see Berardi, *Precarious Rhapsody* 22; on the failure of the PCI's strategy, see Perry Anderson, "An Invertebrate Left," *London Review of Books* 31.5 (2009) 12-18.
10. Ginsborg, *Contemporary Italy* 402.
11. On the historical significance of this year in the emergence of a global neoliberal paradigm see David Harvey, *The Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) 1-5.
12. Mario Tronti, "Our Operaismo," *New Left Review* 73 (2012) 139.
13. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994).
14. Nicoletta Marini-Maio, "A Spectre is Haunting Italy: The Double 'Emplotment' of the Moro Affair," in *Terrorism, Italian Style: Representations of Political Violence in Contemporary Italian Cinema*, ed. Ruth Glynn, Giancarlo Lombardi, and Alan O'Leary (London: Institute of Germanic & Romance Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London, 2012) 159.
15. See Alan O'Leary, "Introduction," in *Terrorism, Italian Style* 14. See also Alan O'Leary, *Tragedia all'italiana: Italian Cinema and Italian Terrorisms, 1970-2010* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011) 48. As sociologists Raimondo Catanzaro and Luigi Manconi argue, Italy's left wing terrorism is "a wound not yet healed, a collective ache that explodes violently and painfully whenever discussion of those years is rekindled." Raimondo Catanzaro and Luigi Manconi quoted in Marini-Maio, "A Spectre is Haunting Italy" 157.
16. Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York: Verso, 2008) 50.
17. Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (New York: Verso, 1997) 89.

18. Slavoj Žižek, *How To Read Lacan* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006) 62-63.
19. See Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis. The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI*, trans. A. Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1981) 174-87.
20. Jason Wallin, "Living...Again: The Revolutionary Cine-Sign of Zombie-Life," in *Psychoanalyzing Cinema: a Productive Encounter with Lacan, Deleuze, and Žižek*, ed. Jan Jagodzinski (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) 250.
21. In 1991, the Italian Communist Party leader Achille Occhetto declared Eurocommunism to be over and renamed his party the Democratic Party of the Left (PDS) where about two thirds of the PCI membership followed him. The minority of dissenting PCI members in turn founded the Communist Refoundation Party (PRC) which, however, remained a fringe party with less than 5% of the popular vote for the most part of the following decades.
22. Simon Clark, "The Happiness of Undeadliness; a Methodology for Melancholic Practice," *Incognitum Hactenus* 3 (2012) 19.
23. Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Hants: Zero Books, 2009). Carlo Celli, *National Identity in Global Cinema: How Movies Explain the World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) 85.
24. Stefano Ciammaroni. *The Way of All Flesh: A History and Historiography of Violence and Death in Italian Cinema (1943-1980)* (PhD Diss., New York University, 2011) 450.
25. Ciammaroni, *The Way of All Flesh* 219-87.
26. *The Way of All Flesh* 287.
27. Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* 89.
28. *The Way of All Flesh* 186-219; Ciammorani reiterates here a version of what Sergio Bologna calls the "Calogero Theorem." As Bologna explains, Pietro Calogero was "a magistrate (investigating judge) in Padua linked to the PCI, arrested and charged Toni Negri and most of the intellectuals and academics associated with Organised Autonomy with terrorism and attempted subversion of the state, on 7 April 1979. His theorem was that Autonomia Organizzata was the 'brains' behind the Red Brigades (BR), that the two organisations were one and the same, and that Negri and others in Autonomia were the 'intellectual authors' of the kidnapping and murder of Aldo Moro, the former DC prime minister, in 1978." "For an Analysis" 102.
29. See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998) 131; Jon Stratton, "Zombie trouble: Zombie Texts, Bare Life and Displaced People," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 14.3 (2011) 265-81; Eugene Thacker, "Nomos, Nosos and Bios Eugene Thacker," *Culture Machine* 7 (2005), accessed May 25, 2014 <http://www.culturemachine.net/index.php/cm/article/view/25/32>
30. Sarah Juliet Lauro and Karen Embry, "A Zombie Manifesto: The Nonhuman Condition in the Era of Advanced Capitalism," *boundary 2* 35.1 (2008) 98.
31. Lauro and Embry, "A Zombie Manifesto" 86-87.
32. There is a "difference between [the] binary opposition, and what ordinarily... would be more properly described as a contradiction. The former is a static antithesis; it does not lead out of itself as does the latter." Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972) 36; "the unmasking of antinomy as contradiction... constitutes truly dialectical thinking as such." Fredric Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*

- (New York: Verso, 2009) 43.
33. I'm following here Žižek's intimations on how the melancholic misinterprets the constitutive lack of the symbolic order as loss. Slavoj Žižek, "Melancholy and the Act," *Critical Inquiry* 26.4 (2000) 659.
 34. Gramsci quoted in Slavoj Žižek, "The Un-Shock Doctrine," *Guernica*, 1 May 2011. http://www.guernicamag.com/features/zizek_5_1_11/ Accessed 25 July 2013.
 35. See Howard Hughes, "Splats Entertainment: Italian Cinema Eats Itself," *Cinema Italiano: The Complete Guide From Classics to Cult* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011).
 36. Alan O'Leary, "Italian cinema and the 'anni di piombo,'" *Journal of European Studies* 40.3 (2010) 243-57 and Giancarlo Lombardi, "Screening Terror: Political Terrorism in Italian Cinema," *Imagining Terrorism: The Rhetoric and Representation of Political Violence in Italy 1969-2009*, eds. P. Antonello and A. O'Leary (London: Legenda, 2009) 88-101.
 37. O'Leary, *Tragedia all'italiana* 18.
 38. Not to mention that *Zombi 2* was distributed as the unofficial "sequel" to George Romero's *Dawn of the Dead*, i.e. the producers tried to exploit the success of the American film (titled *Zombi* in Italy) by calling Fulci's version *Zombi 2*. See Brad O'Brien, "Vita, Amore, e Morte — and Lots of Gore: The Italian Zombie Film," *Zombie Culture: Autopsies of the Living Dead*, ed. S. McIntosh and M. Leverette (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2008) 57; The differences between the two films' politics are, however, significant: while, as Ian Olney argues, in Romero's films the zombie emerges as a "symbol of postmodern angst," in *Zombi 2* (and Italian zombie films in general) the living dead are agents of "postcolonial rage." Ian Olney, *Euro Horror: Classic European Horror Cinema in Contemporary American Culture* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013) 207.
 39. Patricia MacCormack, "Lucio Fulci," *Senses of Cinema* 31 (April 2004). <http://sensesofcinema.com/2004/great-directors/fulci/> Accessed 8 August 2013.
 40. Olney, *Euro Horror* 213. On the political potential of the carnival see Mikhail Bakhtin, "The Grotesque Image of the Body and its Sources," *Rabelais and His World* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998) 303-65.
 41. Slavoj Žižek, "In His Bold Gaze My Ruin Is Writ Large" *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Lacan: (but Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock)*, ed. Slavoj Žižek (New York: Verso, 1992) 237.
 42. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (New York: Routledge, 1983) 135.
 43. Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* 136.
 44. Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, trans. Steven Corcoran (New York: Continuum, 2010) 69.
 45. Rancière, *Dissensus* 64.
 46. *The Political Unconscious* 69.
 47. *The Political Unconscious* 88.
 48. *The Political Unconscious* 85.
 49. This way, Fulci deconstructs what Pierpaolo Antonello and Alan O'Leary see as the dominant form of representing the *anni di piombo* in Italian cinema between 1979 and 1982: Oedipal narratives of sons murdering their fathers. Pierpaolo Antonello and Alan O'Leary, "Introduction," *Imagining Terrorism: The Rhetoric and Representation of Political Violence in Italy 1969-2009*, ed. P. Antonello and A. O'Leary

- (London: Legenda, 2009) 5.
50. Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2005) 30.
 51. *The Political Unconscious* 67.
 52. See Albert Camus, *The Stranger*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (New York: Vintage Books, 1946)
 53. O'Leary, *Tragedia all'italiana* 68.
 54. Tricomi, "Killing the Father" 23.
 55. *Tragedia all'italiana* 104.
 56. Gerard Pratley, *The Films of Frankenheimer : Forty Years in Film* (Cranbury, NJ: Lehigh University Press, 1998) 208-209.
 57. Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*, trans. Roland L. Martinez (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) 20.
 58. See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).
 59. *How To Read Lacan* 31-32.
 60. The scene is also an allusion to a scene in *La battaglia di Algeri* [The Battle of Algiers] (1966) in which female Algerian bombers disguise themselves as Europeans. I owe this point to one of my anonymous readers.
 61. See Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992) 279-96.
 62. This phenomenon is called *pentitismo*. See O'Leary, "Introduction" 20.
 63. Soavi is the former assistant of Dario Argento, and the one responsible for some horror classics in the genre's period of decline in Italy like *Deliria* (1987), *La setta* (1991), or *Dellamorte Dellamore* (1994).
 64. Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black & Red, 1970) 12.
 65. See Perry Anderson, "Land Without Prejudice," *London Review of Books* 24.6 (2002) 6-13.
 66. See Carlo Testa, "Italian Political Cinema: Surveying a Once Glorious Genre in Times of Anguish" (paper presented at the Cornell Entralogos Conference, February 2005) <http://ecommons.library.cornell.edu/handle/1813/2654> Accessed May 30, 2014.
 67. Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2004) 37.
 68. See Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997) 132-50.
 69. Giorgio's coldly pragmatic voiceover accompanies the series of heinous crimes he commits throughout the movie never for a moment showing signs of a guilty conscience but always being eager to share his thoughts about his everyday life, like "exerting power on a woman helped me live," etc.
 70. As O'Leary observes, the Giorgio's real sin in the woman's eyes is his former ideological commitment to communism: "she asks him if it is true he was once a *terrorista*, and then to reassure her that he is no longer a *comunista*." O'Leary, *Tragedia all'italiana* 230.
 71. Scott Murray, "Year of the Gun," *Cinema Papers* (October 1992) 42.