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Violent Cities:
Umberto Lenzi's Polizieschi and B-Movie Fascism

by Timothy C. Campbell

Luigi Cozzi, director of such paracinema classics as Contamination: Aliens arrive on Earth and Nosferatu in Venice, once remarked that "In Italy, when you bring a certain script to a producer, the first question he asks is not 'what is your film like?' but 'what film is your film like?'" (qtd. in Newman: 626).[1] Cozzi's experience offers a kind of critical shorthand for the reception afforded many Italian exploitation films made over the last forty years in the genres and subgenres of peplum, the spaghetti western, the cop film or poliziesco, and the horror film. In the case of the poliziesco, the subject of the present study, much that continues to be written about Italian cop films of the 1970s highlights its debts to Hollywood action cinema, marking these films as mere derivatives of Dirty Harry, The French Connection, Death Wish and The Seven-Ups. This is especially true of the cultural reception Italian critics afford these films, who continue to ignore them and their 'trash' brethren in accounts of Italian postwar cinema.[2]

The failure to treat the poliziesco as anything other than a poor cousin of the American crime film has prevented examinations of the cop film's intervention in larger cultural narratives of postwar Italy, making urgent a discussion of the ways the Italian genre departs from the Hollywood prototype. More recent studies of Italian paracinema have noted the generic schizophrenia of Italian trash, the blurred boundaries among all the favored genres of Bruno Mattei, Umberto Lenzi, Sergio Martino, and Ruggiero Deodato.[3] Yet for all the current interest awarded the practitioners of paracinema, little attention is paid to the cultural and critical worries

that the polizieschi embody or to their relation with the theoretical and historical elaborations of gender that occurred in the same period in Italy. A study of the Italian cop film and one of its signature directors provide a number of access points to a more wide-ranging examination of trash cinema and its place within Italian cultural formations of the postwar period, in particular with regard to the discourse of virility.

As a means of drawing out the cultural significance of the poliziesco, I will be asking how a number of Italian cop films deploy a grammar of virility in their portrayals of cops and criminals. Much critical work on American cinema and gender over the past twenty years focuses on the eroticization of violence, and I draw on it here in order to reflect on the form of Italian masculinity that these films construct.[4] However, by introducing the conception of virility into a larger mix of cultural indebtedness, I hope to show how these films appropriate a rhetoric of masculinity, whose chief model will have been fascist. Underscoring the debt of the poliziesco's sexual politics to Italian fascism will allow me to sketch a narrative of fascism, trash cinema, and gender relations in postwar Italy.

The choice of director Umberto Lenzi for study grows out of his long association with trash cinema in Italy from the 1960s to the present and his work in the genres of paracinema, most importantly the series of cop films he made between 1974 and 1978. No other Italian filmmaker of the period -- save Ferdinando de Leo perhaps -- may be said to provide the stylistic unity that Lenzi does to his treatment of urban crime, which is to say he is no mere hack. Moreover, for all their lack of

aesthetic flair, the films under examination here -- Milano odia: la polizia non può sparare/Almost Human (1974), Roma a mano armata/Rome Armed to the Teeth (1976), Napoli violenta/Violent Protection (1976), and Da Corleone A Brooklyn/From Corleone to Brooklyn (1978) -- stand out for their imaginative elaboration of the category of virility in modern Italy, in a moment of crises for masculinity brought on by greater differentiation of gender roles in the 1970s. Thus, an analysis of Lenzi's contribution to the poliziesco genre will give us not only another perspective -- one hitherto ignored -- on Italian cinema's fascination with fascism in the 1970s, but will also help identify those elements of "fascist" discourse that continue to circulate in the lower realms of postwar Italian cinema.

The Poliziesco and Fascism

There is of course long precedent for linking the police film genre with fascism. As Paul Smith points out in his study of the fantasized narratives surrounding Clint Eastwood's Dirty Harry sequence of films, many viewers believed them to be an apologia for fascism.

> Even bearing in mind that the word *fascist* enjoyed a peculiar and even excessive usage of its own in the sixties and seventies (being used popularly not so much to describe social phenomena that were the same as Germany's National Socialism, but rather as shorthand for excoriating the everyday workings of the repressive state apparatuses of capitalist America), it is hard not to sympathize with various critics

> who recognized in the movie encouragement for reactionary politics in this country (90).[5]

Smith's conflation of National Socialism with Italian fascism is unfortunate, but he does capture well the critical reaction Dirty Harry elicited in the United States and abroad. With its by now classic narrative of bureaucratic roadblocks to effective law enforcement, the films have served to justify extremist police methods ever since, conflating civic discourses with those produced by Hollywood. Not surprisingly, critical reaction to the poliziesco and in particular to Lenzi's police films, mimics that described by Smith. For Sandro Scandolara, what remains despite the innate ingenuousness of these films, "is the exaltation of the violent gesture, seen as a necessary operation, the corollaries of which fascism and intolerance, sadly known, provide" (492). When the films aren't explicitly linked to the first half of Scandolara's formula, then critical reception highlights their hyperviolence. Reviewing Rome: Armed to the Teeth, S. Amfitheatrol sees "little idealism and much violence for the sake of violence" (27). The result, as the liner notes to the recently re-released Milano odia on video in Italy explain, was a twenty-year delay in making available many of these films, as well as a popular amnesia about their cultural importance (Gomarasca and Pulci).

Yet given the shift in rhetorical and ideological analyses of Italian fascism over the last decade to one more sensitive to cultural studies, one wonders if the Italian cop film of the 1970s might not more profitably be seen as modeling some of the most distinctive traits of fascist discourse. These include a rhetoric of virility as

well as the psychic fantasy of body and ego armoring that subjects prone to fascism often manifest. Most of the now classic films from Cavani, Visconti, and Bertolucci that take Italian fascism and National Socialism as their object (along with the considerable critical response they elicit) indulge in what Barbara Spackman calls "the social fantasy that links homosexuality and fascism," while participating in the opposition of a "pathological fascist virility to model of healthy virility usually to be found in Marxism" (4). Her work, in particular the introduction of social and sexual proximity via a reading a futurist F.T. Marinetti's manifestos, along with Hal Foster's elaboration of bodies prone to fascism, provide two approaches that better register the oscillations virility undergoes when rapid transformations linked to modernization threaten stable gender boundaries, be they in 1920s or 1970s Italy.

My investigation follows directly on these considerations. I begin by briefly summarizing the optic of virility for understanding fascism, and then examine the Italian political and cultural climate of the 1970s, asking how it conditions the cultural evolution of the term. Finally I turn to a number of Lenzi's cop films that stage masculinity as a succession of virile moments in ways that are typical of fascist practices. I argue that the poliziesco's portrayal of masculinity hinges on a rhetoric of virility indebted to fascism, and that such a recognition demands a fuller accounting in any examination of its lingering traces in postwar Italian cinema and culture.

Gendering the Virile Body

Two recent approaches to fascism focus on the notion of virility. In the first, Barbara Spackman argues that virility is one of the distinctive traits of fascist

discourse, this despite (or on account of) the historical difficulty of pinning down the term's signifiers: it moves fitfully between virility and femininity depending upon the particular context in which it is deployed.[6] There is little need to rehearse how the binary plays out across the texts Spackman examines, and so instead I want to direct our attention to the genealogy she proposes as crucial for virility's elaboration within fascist symbolic practices. Such a perspective moves through futurist F.T. Marinetti's manifestos, and in particular the notion of proximity to women that ultimately conditions a patriarchal double bind for the budding fascist.

> What is the correct proximity of man to man? This double bind manifests itself in Marinetti's texts not in terms of proximity of man to man but in terms of man to woman. Divorce, free love, and destruction of the bourgeois family are all tactics that will enforce intermittent proximity of men to women, as if to draw new boundaries that would protect virility from the 'effeminization' that results from cohabitation, and at the same time refuel virility through sporadic contact with women (13).

According to Spackman, two kinds of proximity to women undergird the staging of virility, since "dispensing with women entirely would leave the male without means to prove his masculinity" (10). In the first, "intermittent proximity" risks feminizing the virile subject, and so must be limited, while in the second, proximity to women is required if the subject is to prove his virility. As both Spackman and Blum argue, the answer for Marinetti and by association the fascist to the double bind is war, as only

war “entails man’s liberation from woman’s enfeebling, enthralling influence and from obsessions with lust” (Blum 36). War becomes the principal means by which the borders of virility are defended from the enfeebling and castrating elements bent on canceling differences “between nations, classes, intellects, and sexes" (Spackman 14). In other words, the boundaries that encompass virility are not strictly limited to interactions between men and women, but are contingent in fascist culture on a series of national and international borders. Thus, the necessity of defending those political and cultural elements that could guarantee the continuation of war.

Hal Foster’s reading of Marinetti and the fascist subject echoes Spackman’s, while providing details on the zoning of the fascist body at war. Drawing on Freud’s hypothesis that organisms construct shields out of stimuli, Foster argues that Marinetti and by extension the fascist suffer from a sort of technological addiction to shock in the modern period. Where Freud in Beyond the Pleasure Principle emphasizes the shield "that functions as a special envelope or membrane resistant to stimuli" (21), in Foster’s analysis the fascist subject replaces the shield with a technological organ that “needs more of the shield because it needs more of the stimulus-shock” (13). Moreover, Foster deanchors displays of virility from the never-ending addiction loop to shocks via a Lacanian reading of "display"; masculinity “being no less a display than femininity is a masquerade since men cannot possess the phallus to the degree its maintains its status as signifier” (13). Indeed, any display of virility may well feminize men further. The resulting picture Foster draws is enigmatic -- the fascist subject seeks out the shocks of modern life, both real and

imaginary, and yet the displays of virility that accompany his attempts belie a structuring impossibility of exhibiting virility. Foster neatly captures the fascist bind as one of extreme volatility: "Just as binding is doubled by unbinding, so is the fascist will to absolute order countervailed by the fascist desire for sublime transgression on the level of the individual body and body politic alike" (8). We will want to return to this formulation in greater detail when examining the peculiar features of the villains that populate Lenzi's films.

Although they elaborate virility differently, both Spackman and Foster agree that for the fascist, significant features of the modern period help reinforce proximity both between the sexes or decrease distance as part of a modern machine logic. In the first instance, Spackman notes that after World War One the "virile soldier returned from the segregated barracks and trenches to find the familial, patriarchal hierarchy inverted" (24), made possible by the vast participation of Italian women in the national work force during the war. The result was an upheaval in gender relations: free love and divorce become symptomatic of a larger crises of patriarchy, which will revamp the borders of the virile. In the second instance, Foster suggests that the greater interaction between machines of all types (the motor, the automobile, the wireless, the plane) and their human operators in the period immediately before and including the First World War, both extended the body prosthetically as well as constricted it: one could apparently "only resist technology in the name of a natural body or accelerate it in search of a postnatural body on the other side" (9). Haunting both acceleration and resistance is the image of the "damaged body of the worker-

soldier," disfigured by greater coupling with modern machines. Virility emerges paradoxically as the ecstatic psychic relation the fascist subject enjoys with just such a mutilated image; the shocks of war or modernity functioning as the impetus for the imaginative armoring of the body image. Shifts in gender relations and the changing image of postnatural bodies will become the conditions for later fascist symbolic practices.

The Contexts of B-Movie Fascism

This quick sketch of two recent approaches to fascist subjectivity and altered gender regimes provides a useful frame for those interested in returning to the buried question of fascist discourse and the emergence of the poliziesco in Italy in the mid-1970s. Here an overview of the political and cultural context in which Lenzi's films and others appeared is central if we are to draw parallels between two similar instances of crises in patriarchy and body image. The crises in patriarchy is linked both to events associated with 1968 in Italy, as well as to the series of reforms approved in the first half of the 1970s that significantly increased formal legal parity between men and women.

Although space does not permit a full accounting of gender relations and the tumultuous events of the 1970s, one of the decade's most distinctive features concerns the cultural critique of Italian society and Western culture that emerged with the women's movement, and concurrently "the changes in family, in couples, and in relationships between generations," as well as the historical "redefinitions of 'male' and 'female'" (Passerini, "Women's Movement" 177). At the same time,

thousands of "modernized women" began to appear in Italian society by the late 1960s and particularly through the 1970s (Meyer 40). The result was a considerable change in the outlook, attitudes, and behavior of women in the 1970s and a concomitant rise in masculine anxieties. In terms of legal reforms, the decade saw the divorce law of 1970 approved, along with the lifting of the ban on the advertising of contraception the following year, the reform of the family law in 1975, and alterations to the law on working mothers (the referendum to repeal the law on the protection of maternity and the termination of pregnancy occurred in 1981). The reform of the family law is of particular importance since the Italian state recognized the premise of judicial and moral equality between marriage partners, "abolishing or amending provisions that had enshrined the husband's dominance (such as those which asserted his ultimate authority, and his wife's obligation to make her home with him wherever he might choose to reside)" (Passerini, "Gender Relations" 147). This is not to say of course that Italy shed its patriarchal traditions, but instead to argue along with many that in the 1970s "there was a marked differentiation or pluralization in gender relations, towards a greater recognition of difference in the gender system and in sexual identities" (Passerini, "Gender Relations" 145).

Many observers have rightly pointed to a concomitant reconfiguration in symbolic practices in the period, and in particular the great flowering of Italian's women's writing in the decade as indexing crucial shifts in gender boundaries within the larger cultural context of postwar Italy. Less attention, however, has been given to the responses of men to the same events, simply because there exist

precious few studies of masculine subjectivity and the crises of patriarchy in the 1970s and beyond. Drawing upon readings of what is available, we find not surprisingly that "beneath the perhaps authentic recognition and admiration the Italian man has for the independent and emancipated woman, he is in crises, confused, still oscillating between the persistent illusion of being irresistible and the difficult adaptation to a new partnership role within the couple or family" (Jeffries xvi).

The question we will want to pose is how a fantasized narrative such as the Italian cop film, explicates a position in relation to these developments as well as to the filmic genre from which it proceeds. Spackman's analysis suggests that when considering shifting gender borders we ought to associate them not simply to definitions of gender, but to the dimensions of social space, and the organized relationships not only between men and women, but also between men and men. Seen in these terms, representations of altered proximity in the Italian cop film will mark a shifting ecology of gender relations in a tumultuous decade.

Foster's analysis of the fascist subject as a prosthetic god who seeks out a daily dosage of shocks to toughen his technological organs points us in the direction of what I call metropolitan traumas: trauma produced in urban settings linked primarily to the dromological imperatives of modern life.[7] In the period in which Lenzi's films appeared, Italy continued to suffer from the effects of ever greater urbanization, assisted by the continued migration from the countryside to the city as well as the dizzying expansion of the automobile into city life. A number of

consequences resulted, one of the most significant the ever greater numbers of subjects put in motion.[8] The kinetic nature of their activities undergird the traumas that toughen the psychic shells of so many in Lenzi's films. In addition, the period's social tensions growing out of the events of 1968 and later further conditioned the underlying societal trauma of the decade. The emergence of terrorism and the Red Brigade gave birth to what Italians refer to as "gli anni di piombo," or the years of lead, bringing with it the epoch of terrorism and its corresponding militarization of the city. The result was an "acclimatization to violence," which followed the greater circulation of weapons across the metropolitan centers of Italy, assisted by the growing phenomenon of microcriminality in some of the peninsula's largest cities (Bianconi 249).

The Polizieschi and Virility

Lenzi's polizieschi elaborate a rhetoric of virility deeply analogous to fascist gender practices outlined above. First, each film assumes the same critical worry throughout: that with the greater economic and political autonomy of women, the conditions necessary for virile displays become less available for their male protagonists. Thus in Lenzi's first police film, Almost Human, the film's chief protagonist, Giulio, finds himself unemployed and humiliated, having lost his nerve during a bank heist. We quickly learn of the relation he has with Joan, whose symbolic presence -- she owns a car and works - contrasts dramatically with Giulio's own position, which, in the words of a city boss, is that of a "cagasotto" or coward

(FIGURE 1). It is precisely Joan's proximity to Giulio and yet her unavailability that obsesses the film in its claustrophobic composition of her apartment, and the ease with which she unknowingly assists Giulio in his future murders. In From Corleone to Brooklyn, the anxiety is expressed most forcefully in the relation between Inspector Berni and his ex-wife Paola. With end of their marriage, Berni seeks outlets for virile displays in his crime fighting. The film goes out of its way to inform us that she too is employed and has her own social space independent of him. In Violent Naples, Lenzi draws the necessary conclusions from this state of affairs, with women becoming the film's primary discursive target for their failure to provide men with adequate occasions for virile displays. Indeed, every male protagonist within proximity of a woman in the film is shown as somehow feminized by the experience, the film's wealthy industrialist who fails to name his assailants to the police, assuring his wife's rape, the most important. Rome Armed to the Teeth extends masculine anxieties to more wide-ranging societal fears that equate a woman's withering presence with the state's recent reforms on criminal rights; the chief of police's fiancé is held to be ultimately responsible for releasing two criminals who soon kill and are killed in turn. The fundamental problematic for each film is how to defend a notion of virility when proximity to women no longer guarantees adequate means to prove masculinity.

Following Spackman and Foster, we shouldn't be surprised then to find these films putting forward a mis-en-scène of urban warfare, as war both defends the borders of virility, guaranteeing those elements that continue fighting, while also

providing its male protagonists with sufficient stimuli to harden their bodily and ego images. Lenzi confirms this reading in a recent interview. Discussing Rome Armed to the Teeth, he says:

> In sostanza m'interessava la violenza metropolitana. Volevo mostrare un tipo di società in continuo sviluppo, trasformazione. E questo comportava ovviamente dei disagi di carattere sociale e delle esplosioni di malavita che trovavano le istituzioni impreparate. Oggi, una rapina in banca è molto difficile ... Prima bastava scendere dalla macchina, entrare e sparare. Questo mancanza di trasformazione dell'apparato sociale alle nuove tecnologie della malavita, faceva sì che le forze dell'ordine si trovassero spesso costrette ad intervenire in modo pesante (qtd. in Lacantonio: 76).
>
> [Substantially I was interested in metropolitan violence. I wanted to show a kind of society in continuous development and transformation. And this obviously meant dealing with problems of a social nature and explosions of crime that found institutions unprepared. Today a bankrobbery is difficult ... whereas before all one needed was to get out of a car, go in, and shoot. The social apparatus' inability to transform itself to meet the new technologies of the criminal underworld meant that the police often were forced to intervene in a heavy-handed way.]

The "heavy hand" employed by the state and the sheer number of robberies that occurred in the period put the films on a war-footing; every street corner becomes an

opportunity for a bank robbery, while every couple is a target for violence. Yet, two points ought to be made immediately. First, the mis-en-scène of metropolitan violence -- while intended to be yet another sign of the verisimilitude of the aesthetic Lenzi champions -- also serves narrative and discursive functions. With the almost complete absence of women, the virility of the various policemen and criminals that inhabit these films comes to depend upon the continuation of violence across the city. Staging virility in a context of metropolitan violence allows the films' protagonists never-ending occasions for proving their manhood, what Spackman calls a scorn among fascists for a "vita comoda [easy life] and peacefulness in general" (138).

Second, Lenzi's comments make no mention of the primary site of war in these films; not simply the metropolitan setting of weak state power, but especially on women's bodies. Thus, in Almost Human the daughter of an industrialist is kidnapped, tortured, and ultimately killed, becoming the principal means by which the main protagonist fails to transform himself into a virile subject. In Rome Armed to the Teeth, the chief of police's fiancé is kidnapped and then nearly crushed in an attempt to intimidate him into lessening the force of the investigation. From Corleone to Brooklyn is nothing less than a battle waged over the mafia-style execution of the sister of a rival mafia lieutenant, while Violent Naples in more complicated fashion substitutes a young boy symbolically for the ever missing (and ever present) young woman. What this all adds up to is a more refined judgment of what I noted earlier when discussing contemporary reviews of Lenzi's films. These

films do not simply proffer violence for the sake of violence, but instead repeat violence so as to guarantee conditions in which virility may be defended when women are no longer sufficiently proximate to warrant their defense. The subtext of these films is the unavailability of women, which conditions both masculine anxiety and an obsession with those cultural elements, especially deviant and transgressive, which can be used in their stead.

Trauma, Armoring and the Inorganic Criminal

Yet Lenzi does not merely deploy the backdrop of metropolitan violence in order to justify and condition a reactionary critique of transformations in gender relations in the 1970s in Italy. If that were so, scores of Italian critics might have more of a case when dismissing Lenzi's polizieschi as forgettable examples of paracinema. Where Lenzi's films part ways with the Hollywood action cinema of the same period is primarily in the point of view they adopt vis-à-vis masculine bodies that no longer have the usual means at their disposal for demonstrating virility. How do these films imagine the bodies of cops and criminals under conditions of increasing violence, and how do they narrate visually the alterations effected on bodies subject to ever increasing stimuli and shock?

Principally, the films imagine the body of the criminal as inorganic and impregnable, notable for its capacity to withstand the shock of violence. In this they feature images of hardening linked to a fear of non-differentiation: the underlying anxiety being that Italian society was feminizing men in great numbers throughout

the 1970s. What sets apart masculine subjects from their feminized male counterparts (masculinized women are nowhere to be found in Lenzi's films) is precisely their ability to withstand the shocks of violence as they move towards greater bodily differentiation. Almost Human and Rome Armed to the Teeth are especially of interest for the trajectory they trace from ego armoring to body armoring in the figure of the transgressive criminal. In the former, the process begins with a traumatized ego forced to repeat the trauma, leading consequently to its differentiation from demasculinzed males. Giulio, a small-time hood suffers a trauma in the film's opening scene: frightened by the presence of a traffic cop, he "loses his cool" and kills him. Judged a coward by the boss, the film portrays Giulio initially as feminized; his histrionics and tears save him from certain death at the hands of the gang, but only at the cost of marking him initially as feminine: thus the close-ups of his trembling face and the high angle shots that frame his successive beating (FIGURE 2).

Yet, paradoxically during the robbery and for much of the film he is also shown with heavy sunglasses in extreme close-up, suggesting not only that access to interior motivations is impossible (hence his separation from the human), but also visually shielding him from the effects of his own actions. Thereafter, the film links the hardening of Giulio's ego with the repetition of the initial trauma -- despite his attempts to overcome his marking as feminine, the film shows Giulio as continually overpowered by the same trauma, repeating it, hoping that by so doing he might resolve it. It is of course a classic Freudian trajectory, in which violent events

instigated by Giulio set in motion the repetition of the earlier trauma, despite the fact that the actions are undertaken initially as a way of overcoming the primary trauma. Rather than instigating simple defensive measures as those outlined by Freud, however, the film depicts Giulio as converting energy into aggression, using the stimuli in order to further harden his ego, paving the way for the series of brutal murders to follow.

In a crucial scene after the attempted kidnapping, Giulio and his gang torture and eventually murder four guests at a nearby villa, along with a child. The scene depicts Giulio as killing them not for anything they have done, but rather because of his inability to withstand the power of the scene to breach his psychic shield: he hears in their cries the echo of his murder and the boss's ensuing insult, as he does when he eventually kills the hostage. We need not add that this is precisely what Giulio unconsciously desires: he kills in order to protect his body ego against the shock of the primary trauma. Thus, the film adopts a point of view throughout the scene that highlights the hardening effects of the violence on Giulio. Via a combination of contrast lighting, the effeminate features of the victims, including an accountant residing at the villa who will at gun point sodomize Giulio, and numerous high angle shots of the victims that serve to monumentalize him, the film provides a series of images that directly contrast with Giulio's own, who is represented not only as towering above the others, but as untouchable (FIGURE 3). Thus, Lenzi is not content to focus merely on ego armoring and the visual cues that index it; rather he juxtaposes one body with multiple others that are incapable of

such alteration. These bodies are marked in no uncertain terms as feminine, which the film obsessively returns to in its images of bloody and bullet-ridden bodies.

In Rome Armed to the Teeth, Lenzi draws the necessary conclusions from the first film, portraying a figure, er gobbo [the hunchback], whose successful ego armoring is mirrored in an inorganic body image radically differentiated from the films' cops. Beginning as almost all of Lenzi's polizieschi do, with establishing shots of the city shot from inside an automobile, Lenzi's second cop film displays Rome in the hands of criminals and the lone cop, Tanzi, who battles them outside the strictures of the law. A series of crimes lead Tanzi and his partner to the hunchback, er gobbo, who is literally both a butcher (we see him in the first scene cleaning the entrails of a recently butchered cow) and the head of the most important band of criminals operating in the city (FIGURE 4). Before Tanzi kills him after holing up in an abandoned used clothes warehouse, er gobbo goes on a killing spree, wounding and murdering scores of innocent victims, along with Tanzi's partner.

Where Almost Human is content to signal the moments of trauma linked to criminal pathology in an individual case, foregoing the virile figure of the inspector, Rome Armed to the Teeth offers a paranoid reading of the cause of metropolitan violence: one man alone, certainly inhuman, is responsible for the waves of shootings, armed robbery, and rape that plague the city. A mis-en-scène that dresses up the hunchback and his minions in the same orange and black colors throughout confirms the film's obsession with univocal explanations of metropolitan crime.

Along the same lines, the film abbreviates the struggle against crime as one principally fought between the inorganic and organic. On one side, there is the hunchback, who not only heads the city's criminal organization, but indiscriminately kills large numbers of pedestrians as he attempts to escape the police at film's end (FIGURE 5). Rome Armed to the Teeth visually joins the same kind of ego armoring that takes place in Almost Human with a body armoring, or better with an inorganic body constructed out of the stimuli of metropolitan traumas; the hunchback's hump comes to signal both the body's deformed and dead characteristics, as well as its ability to withstand shocks associated with urban violence, the hump exteriorizing the armoring of the ego that has already taken place.

On the other side, there is the figure of Inspector Tanzi, who one expects, ought to be represented as the virile cop on a mission to end er gobbo's reign of terror (FIGURE 6). And indeed, the components for virile construction are all there: the beatings he doles out to criminals from beginning to end would make even Dirty Harry or Popeye Boyle blush. Yet, the film is uncertain about Tanzi's virility: he is tainted by his association with a woman: the presence of the fiancé and with it the effeminization of social institutions -- she is a counselor for juveniles -- undercut his repeated demonstrations of power, physicality, and foresight. And here we note that the film not only invests in the hunchback's hump, but of course in his sexual prowess as well. Thus er gobbo's repeated references to his own masculinity in the film mark out a space unavailable to the police. Virility, the film seems to say, is assisted not by women, but rather by the shocks that harden a body. The body that

emerges here is a motor of destruction, hardened to what it sets in motion and able to withstand the effects.

In this the film posits a resistance to trauma in the name of a disfigured body that Lenzi's later La banda del gobbo/Brothers till we die (1978) will take up. What is noteworthy is the social fantasy assumed throughout: criminals, to the degree they approach the inorganic, are better equipped than cops to face the effects of metropolitan traumas. On this note, rarely does Lenzi juxtapose a positive virility on the part of the police with a pathological one associated with the criminal (or following many Italian filmmakers a healthy Marxist and a pathological fascist); instead he sharply differentiates the bodily characteristics of the two so as to make clear what kind of body is needed under conditions of increasing non-differentiation. Thus Lenzi's films do not ratify a "natural" body, but rather celebrate a transgressive, often disfigured one that enacts traumas across social and urban space, using the stimuli of the violence it sets in motion to make possible further trauma. An addiction loop to violence is often the result, one that runs throughout much of Lenzi's future work, and which is especially prominent in his zombie productions from the mid-1980s, in for example Incubo sulla città contaminata/City of the Walking Dead (1980) and Mangiati vivi/Doomed to Die (1980).

Paracinematic Fascism

In his classic reading of fascism from 1979, Paul Virilio anticipated the trajectory that studies of fascist culture would take over the next two decades. For

him, fascism is not simply to be ghettoized temporally and spatially in a twenty-year parenthesis, but rather to be seen as a piece with kinetic imperatives of the century: since fascism never died, it didn't need to be reborn.[9] Virilio assumes something like a perpetual struggle to become modern across the last century: the temptation to revert consciously or unconsciously to fascism is an ever-present occupational hazard for culture. In Italy occasions were not lacking for a reappropriation and re-elaboration of fascist symbolic practices given the degree to which the country was struggling with a grave crises in the social and paternal order in the 1970s. But to find such examples we must look beyond the higher circles of Italian culture and those cinematic treatments in which fascists archly play the inevitable foil for a non-fascist, heroic masculinity. Inhabiting the lower, paracinematic circles is the work of Umberto Lenzi, whose deployment of a virile rhetoric is strongly indebted to fascist stagings of masculinity. We see this in the films' absorption with transgressed bodies and the visual changes they undergo when forced to substitute virile displays with repetitions of trauma and in their celebration of inorganic body images that seek to attain virile status.

The discursive elements of Lenzi's films and the many other filmmakers working in the poliziesco genre reinforce the sense that a rhetoric of fascism is unconsciously being drawn upon to counter a particularly intense moment of instability in gender relations. Other films come to mind: Ruggiero Deodato's Uomini si nasce poliziotti si muore/Live Like a Cop Die Like a Man (1976), which imagines its two masculine protagonists as egos compulsively repeating situations of

trauma in a spiral of violent one-upsmanship, and Sergio Martino's Milano trema/Violent Professionals (1973), which traffics in fantasies of speed and moral indifference. But no one works their side of the gender divide with greater aplomb or greater debt to a fascist rhetoric of masculinity than Lenzi. A recognition of his visual and narrative appropriation of fascist virile practices (and with it Italian paracinema more generally) is, it seems to me, the first step in coming to terms with structures within Italian culture that have too often been marginalized when not ignored outright, for their proximity to earlier models of fascist masculinity. The continued resistance on the part of academic film culture and Italian cultural historians in apprehending the importance of the genre, makes more urgent than ever an fuller accounting of Italian paracinema and its potential to produce a space in which to consider the cultural, aesthetic and historical reach of fascism.

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[1] For my use of the term, paracinema, see Sconce: "Paracinema is thus less a distinct group of films than a particular reading protocol, a counter-aesthetic turned subcultural sensibility devoted to all manner of cultural detritus" (372).

[2] For the traditional accounts, see Peter Bondanella, Italian Cinema: From Neorealism to the Present (New York: Continuum, 2001); Gian Piero Brunetta, Storia del cinema dal 1945 agli anni ottanta (Roma: Editore Riuniti, 1982); Carlo Lizzani, ll cinema italiano: dalle origini agli anni ottanta (Roma: Editore Riuniti, 1992); and Pierre Salin, Italian National Cinema 1896-1996 (London: Routledge, 1996). Recent studies of the trash genre such as Città violente suggest a revaluation is slowly taking place: "... è altrettanto vero che i lavori italiani si dimostrano da subito opere del tutto autonome e originali per situazioni, personaggi e vicende strettamente collegate alla realtà italiana. Mai come in un poliziesco, infatti, si ha la precisa immagine della quotidianità, della cronoca e del costume degli anni settanta visualizzati, in una sorta di instant movie, attraverso, le città italiane." ["It's quite true that Italian works show themselves from the outset to be autonomous and original for situations, characters and events strictly tied to an Italian reality. Nowhere else than a poliziesco does one have a precise image of daily life, of news and the customs of the 1970s, in a kind of instant movie through Italian cities.]" (Bruschini 8). Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.

[3] "While it is undoubtedly true that many Italian genre films are simply worthless carbon copies with a few baroque trimmings, the best examples of most cycles are surprisingly sophisticated mixes of imitation, pastiche, parody, deconstruction, reinterpretation and operatic influence" (Newman, "Thirty Years" 20). Cf. any of the entries for Umberto Lenzi in Dizionario del film. Roma a mano armata becomes simply a site of "luoghi comuni a iosa e poco impegno sia da parte del regista sia da parte degli attori" ["abbundant clichés and little engagement both on the part of the director and the actors"] (1626).

[4] I am particularly indebted to Tasker 73-90; 91-108, Willis 1-24; 27-59, and Wagstaff.

[5] Smith goes on to cite Pauline Kael's injunction against the film: "Dirty Harry is obviously just a genre movie, but this action genre has always had a fascist potential, and it has finally surfaced" (90).

[6] The OED defines virility as "of, belonging to, or characteristic of a man; manly, masculine." Given the frequency with which Italian fascists appropriated the imagery and symbolism of ancient Rome, it isn't surprising to find them deploying virility to justify what they believed theirs by nature, i.e. those qualities inherently belonging to the male. Cf. Spackman's comment on naturalized gender. "But such a gendering is ridiculous only if one assumes a naturalized relation between gender and sex, in which masculinity is the natural property of the male and femininity the natural property of the female, and only if one assumes that virility can be detached neither from masculinity nor from the male" (1).

[7] "All greatness is assault!- an inaccurate translation of Plato or a paraphrasing of American forcing? Fascism was totalitarian only insofar as it intended to be totally dromocratic" (Virilio 115). Cf. as well Adorno's "tough guy" type: "These individuals are the most 'infantile' of all: they have thoroughly failed to 'develop,' have not been molded by civilization. They are asocial. Bodily strength and toughness -- also in the sense of being able to take it -- are decisive. The borderline between them and the criminal is fluid. Their indulgence in persecution is sadistic, directed against any helpless victim; it is unspecific and hardly colored by 'prejudice.' Here go the hoodlums and rowdies, plug-uglies, torturers, and all those who do the 'dirty work' of a fascist movement" (Authoritarian 763).

[8] "The city has not been recognized as first and foremost a human dwelling place penetrated by channels of rapid communication (river, road, coastline, railway). It seems we've forgotten that the street is only a road passing through an agglomeration, whereas every day laws on the 'speed limit' within the city walls remind us of the continuity of displacement, of movement, that only the speed laws modulate" (Virilio 5). Adorno captures well some of the effects of mechanized movement on the psyche: "And which driver is not tempted, merely, by the power of the engine, to wipe out the vermin

of the street, pedestrians, children and cyclists?" (Minima Moralia 40). For cultural histories of the automobile in Italy, see Annibaldi 7-36 and Berta 56-73.

[9] "I'm not talking about little sadico-museographic or commercial trifles, but quite simply the fact that it represented one of the most accomplished cultural, political and social revolutions of the dromocratic West" (Virilio 117).