

Introduction

WHETHER IT ALL BEGAN WITH FILM OR CRIME, it is impossible for me to say. I grew up in the shadow of Luchino Visconti's *Osessione* (*Obsession*, 1943), the first neorealist film and also the free adaptation of James M. Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1934), and by the age of fifteen I was responding to the frustration of not having a VCR by recording sounds and voices from Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'avventura* (*The Adventure*, 1960). For years I kept a photograph of Anna, the woman who vanishes at the outset of the film and whose disappearance is gradually forgotten, between the pages of my date book. Probably a still from the set, the picture shows Anna, dark hair and dark eyes, dressed in white, leaning against an iron gate. Her look is oblique, directed toward an indeterminate zone beyond the frame, defying a spectator whom she addresses through avoidance—an impossible look, the promise or threat of a double disappearance. Film critic Pascal Bonitzer brilliantly writes of this “disappearance of disappearance,” the mark of a crisis that will gradually dismantle the detective story, undermining its certainties and opening it to ontological interrogation. As if the puzzle in pieces, and not the process of its reassemblage, exercised the strongest attraction, several of Antonioni's films seem to adopt the model of the police investigation only to undo it. What is left is a world of fragmentation and dispersion, which the characters traverse as “detectives without purpose and out of

place,” caught in a web that disconnects them. “Un giallo alla rovescia,” is the director’s own definition of *The Adventure*, a detective story “back to front,” turned upon itself, reversed.¹

The radicalness of Antonioni’s challenge comes into sharper focus as one turns to Ernst Bloch’s essay “A Philosophical View of the Detective Novel.” On the trail of the uncanny as it has appeared in literature and drama from Sophocles to Edgar Allan Poe, Bloch writes of the detective story as a genre devoted to the “search for that remoter ‘something,’ which is already close at hand,”² analyzing its incessant “knitting and knotting” and identifying its fundamental characteristics—the suspense connected with the process of guessing; the conjectural activity that, through a careful evaluation of apparently insignificant details, leads to the act of discovery; and, most notably, the omission of the pivotal event: the detective story opens on a crime that has already been committed. It is this very omission, Bloch emphasizes, that provides the genre with its specific narrative form, namely, “the form of a picture puzzle.”³ Whether relying on induction, like Sherlock Holmes, or on intuition, like Hercule Poirot, the detective looks at the crime scene from a “micrological” perspective, seeking out those unintentional and overlooked signs that will allow him to shed light into an original, prenarrative darkness, that is, to transform the unnarrated event into a narrative sequence. What happens to this form when *The Adventure* unfolds as a story of forgetfulness and decreasing tension—of an investigation that forgets itself, leaving behind a crime which might or might not have taken place—is thus something other than a plot variation. And it can be said to produce an effect well outside the boundaries of the genre proper if, like Bloch, one recognizes that the same process of discovery and reconstruction also characterizes the works of writers such as Ibsen and Freud, structuring the very relation between light and darkness, revelation and disguise, surface and depth around which they revolve.

My fascination with the crisis of the detective genre expresses more than a subjective preference for certain formal and narrative strategies. Numerous critics, from Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer to contemporary film scholars like Tom Gunning, have identified the detective story as the genre in which modernity and its visual regimes are both exposed and defamiliarized. The increasing abstraction of space and time,

the expansion of perceptual experience through technologies as diverse as the railway and the cinematograph, the standardization of techniques for the identification and control of the individual in the crowd of the big city—all these aspects of modern life find expression in a textual universe structured around the figures of the detective and the criminal. If the detective wants to know the truth of the crime, he needs to interpret the traces of what is no longer there, reading clues and symptoms with a passion for conjectural reasoning that, according to Carlo Ginzburg, aligns him with the psychoanalyst and the historian alike. “Reality is opaque,” writes Ginzburg in his famous article on Morelli, Freud, and Holmes, “but there are certain points—clues, symptoms—which allow us to decipher it.”⁴ The fact that the photograph, with its strong indexical and iconic ties to the referent, constitutes the ultimate tool in the process of detection speaks to the visual nature of the investigator’s challenge: the determination to see again what had once occurred, to seize the image of a time now passed. Such a desire to see is so strong that, Gunning reminds us, “the camera recording the very fact of malfeasance appears in drama, literature, and early film before it was really an important process of criminal detection.”⁵ Catching the criminal in the act, then, expresses the desire not only to attach guilt to an identifiable body, but also to “see through” the obscurity of the crime, reconnecting the present of the trace to the past of the deed.⁶ Seeing is at once this movement of translation from opacity to clarity and the guarantee of a reordering of time. “Detective fiction,” we read in a study on the art and ideology of suspense, “is preoccupied with the closing of the logico-temporal gap that separates the present of the discovery of crime from the past that prepared it. It is a genre committed to the act of recovery, moving forward in order to move back.”⁷ What happens, then, when the investigative paradigm deteriorates as it does in *The Adventure*? What happens not only to our desire to see into the past but also to the very possibility of isolating the past from the present and the future, locating the detective and ourselves, the spectators, in a time that is successive to the time of the crime?

The work I am presenting is dedicated to the study of the relationship between time and vision as it emerges in five Italian films, all following the experience of *The Adventure*: Antonioni’s *Blow-up* (1966)

and *Professione: Reporter* (*The Passenger*, 1975), Liliana Cavani's *Il portiere di notte* (*The Night Porter*, 1973), Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Edipo Re* (*Oedipus Rex*, 1967), and Bernardo Bertolucci's *La strategia del ragno* (*The Spider's Stratagem*, 1970). The center around which these films revolve is the image of the crime scene—the spatial and temporal configuration in which a crime is committed, witnessed, and investigated. Uniquely influenced by both neorealism and the tradition of film noir, these films present us with a crime to be “seen,” not once and for all but over and over again, in the folds of the landscape as well as on the faces of people and things. They appear as strange and unsolvable detective stories in which continuous, linear time dissolves, and the privileges of the seeing eye are challenged by the very scene under analysis. In fact, it is by dilating or contracting the detective story to its extreme limits that these films articulate forms of time which defy any clear-cut distinction between past, present, and future, offering us a temporality which cannot be calculated, determined with certainty, but only made visible. “*In detective fiction,*” claims Joan Copjec in her work on film noir, “*to be is not to be perceived, it is to be recorded*”—here, perception overturns the power of counting, of “making up people,” becoming the very texture through which the subject is dispersed, blurred almost to the point of fading or disappearance, and time is released.⁸

Whether a photographer, a journalist, or a mythical solver of riddles, in these films, the investigator who looks back at the crime scene to discover the truth comes to occupy a position of passivity with respect to the object of his quest—he searches, and is found; he looks, and is seen. Yet, the picture of the past by which he is gradually confronted is anything but external to him. What appears in front of the investigator's eyes is not the past as it was, but the past as it will have been in relation to the time of his search. If the detective story proper begins with a murder that has already been committed, a death that has already taken place, the death which seems to count the most in these films is the one that is yet to occur—the investigator's own death. It is in the anticipation of this death, which the investigator is called to face not as a fact but as a possibility, as the assumption of his own finitude, that the search unfolds. Again and again, the crime scene draws the detective into a time that I can describe only by means of a compound tense, the future anterior.

For Jacques Lacan the time of our “being-for-death,” the future anterior interweaves past and future so tightly that the detective can no longer situate himself in relation to any autonomous temporal dimension.

At the end of *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes also writes of this death that is at once already behind and still ahead, a death whose temporality he defines by means of the same compound tense, the future anterior. Until his encounter with Alexander Gardner’s portrait of Lewis Payne, Barthes had defined the *punctum* as the detail that strikes the viewer above and beyond the average affect of the *studium*. Now, in front of the photograph of a young man awaiting his execution, he discovers another *punctum*, more poignant than any formal detail and common to every photograph—time. Irreducible to any single temporal dimension, the time of the *punctum*, the *punctum* as time, is “an anterior future of which death is the stake,”⁹ the simultaneity or intertwining of past and future—“*This will be and this has been*,” “*that is dead and that is going to die*.”¹⁰ Facing a photograph, whether or not its subject is still alive at the time of my viewing, I am pierced by the awareness that he or she will have been dead and that I too am already marked by the “catastrophe” of my own future end. Here a function of the photograph’s indexicality, rather than of a specific formal arrangement, death in the future anterior nonetheless does not belong to the photographic surface alone nor to its peculiar connection to the referent, but emerges in the domain opened by the encounter between the image and the viewer.

Indeed, it is the emphasis which I place upon this encounter that leads me to discuss the vicissitudes of cinematic vision through an intermingling of media. If I begin each chapter by detour, by addressing questions that pertain to cinema from a site apart from the films—photographs, sculptures, paintings—it is not to overwrite mediatic difference (the indexicality of photography versus the iconicity of painting, the movement of film versus the stillness of photography), but to suggest that cinema gives unique resonance or visibility to a temporality that is not of cinema alone. Writing on the still in film, Raymond Bellour observes that “the projection of one image onto the other, of one state of the image onto another,” constitutes a process of temporal displacement that is active, though not identical, in the viewing of both still and moving images—for him, this is the lesson of Holbein’s *The Ambassadors*.¹¹ It is

true, Barthes considers film an “illusion” that mimes life, rather than (like photography) a “hallucination” complicit with death.¹² Yet films like *Blow-up* will show us that, under certain formal conditions, cinema too is able to engage its viewer in the temporality of a death out of joint. Even further—that the difference of cinematic temporality lies in the capacity to reveal not only the work of death but “death at work,” to foreground the performance of time in its impact on the subject (who is internal to it) and make this performance, in its very unfolding, directly available to the viewer’s perception. (Directly but not fully, since the working of death always involves partial blindness and irresolvable obscurity.)

The visibility of this time without ground or now-point, a time of relentless anticipation and retroaction in which both the detective and the spectator are caught, is the subject of my work. Not a history of the transformations undergone by the detective genre, nor a study of the sociocultural factors associated with it, this work is rather the memoir of an encounter. As a writer, I attempt to assume such an experience of time, to repeat in the sphere of language a relationship of vision. If I approach the films indirectly or obliquely, it is to try and partially retrace their complexity, in a gesture of mimetic desire, rather than simply submit them to analysis. In this respect, Vivian Sobchack’s book on the phenomenology of film experience stands as a point of reference. Her conceptualization of cinematic vision as an exchange between “two viewing subjects who also exist as visible objects,”¹³ has allowed me to think the viewing of film from within the abyss of a “relationality” constituted by the undoing of the subject-object distinction. In the world of perception, we learn from Maurice Merleau-Ponty, this relationality takes the form of a paradoxical reflexivity, which our body most impressively exemplifies: the reversibility between the seer and the seen. As the body can touch only because it is also tangible, the body can only see because it is also visible. However, while Sobchack investigates the reversibility of vision in terms of space and what she calls “the embodied and enworlded eye,” I am interested in exploring our enmeshment in the perceptual world as it pertains to time, and to the extent that it involves the (embodied) dissolution of the eye into the world.

In *The Visible and the Invisible*, the phenomenological text that most has informed my work, Maurice Merleau-Ponty invites us to re-

linquish our desire to hold sway over time—partition it, measure it, and reduce it to autonomous dimensions. Quoting Henri Bergson, he writes that instead “time offers itself to him who wishes only to ‘see it,’ and who, precisely because he has given up the attempt to seize it, rejoins, by vision, its internal propulsion.”¹⁴ All the films under consideration, I will attempt to show, engage this time that resists objectification—a time in radical excess of the present and of any single dimension. Being immersed in it, being captivated by it, the subject finds itself at once constituted and dissolved. If, in *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty already identifies “time as the subject and the subject as time,”¹⁵ in his last text he returns to time through the notion of “flesh of the world.” As “the formative medium of the object and the subject,” the flesh is the “stuff” of which all visibles (including our body) are made. Neither mind nor matter, the flesh will allow us to think the time of the films beyond the distinction of subjective, lived time and objective, universal time—Paul Ricoeur’s “time of the soul” and “time of the world.” In turn, by virtue of their thematic and formal arrangements, the films will lead us to interrogate that which, for Merleau-Ponty, seems to be constantly woven in the fabric of the flesh, inserted in its melodic structure—mortality, existential lack. It is in relation to mortality, to our vulnerability to what exceeds and most profoundly constitutes us, time and the other, that nonchronological, heterogeneous time becomes visible.

Throughout the project, the films assert themselves as more than an occasion for philosophical speculation. There is no hierarchy between them and the philosophical texts they might be supposed to exemplify, rather an erosion of boundaries between what reads and what is read, what thinks and what is thought. “Literature, music, the passions, but also the experience of the visible world are . . . the explorations of an invisible and the disclosure of a universe of ideas”¹⁶—this invisible and these ideas constituting the other side, the “lining,” of a sensible world from which they cannot be disengaged. There is also no hierarchy between the different theoretical discourses I mobilize. As I position myself between phenomenology and Lacanian psychoanalysis, or rather at their crossing, I find that they constitute mutually complicating perspectives rather than separate or competing explanatory principles. For example, if Lacan’s split between the eye and the gaze does not coincide with

Merleau-Ponty's distinction between the visible and the invisible, the *Spider's Stratagem* will articulate yet a different phenomenon, weaving a texture in which the chiasm of vision—the intertwining of seeing and being seen—is held by a radical absence or a lack.

The films that guide me through this project are all from the Italian art cinema of the late sixties and early seventies. Some, like Antonioni's *Blow-up* and Pasolini's *Oedipus Rex*, still belong to the so-called golden age of Italian cinema, the period that begins in 1960 with Antonioni's *The Adventure*, Federico Fellini's *La dolce vita* (*The Good Life*), and Visconti's *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* (*Rocco and His Brothers*), and allegedly ends with the changes in Italian culture and society precipitated by 1968. Others, like Antonioni's *The Passenger*, Cavani's *The Night Porter*, and Bertolucci's *The Spider's Stratagem*, appear in a decade, the 1970s, that is already considered of transformation and decline—the period which P. Adam Sitney calls of the second “vital crisis.”¹⁷ Despite the canonical periodization, these films constitute for me a cohesive body of work to the extent that, in all of them, the dissolution of the crime scene emerges as a central organizing trope. Of course, postwar Italian cinema—a cinema which I privilege not only for the weight it has in my unconscious memory but also for its recognized tendency to show rather than narrate, to foster perception rather than action—provides other remarkable examples of this dissolution. “A cinema of the seer and no longer of the agent,” as Gilles Deleuze admirably demonstrates,¹⁸ neorealism is prefigured by the story of a crime (Visconti's *Obsession*) that ends there where it had begun, tracing a line that folds back upon itself, leaving characters and viewers alike under the spell of the protagonist's dazed look. In this respect, *Obsession* constitutes the direct forerunner of Antonioni's *Cronaca di un amore* (*Story of a Love Affair*, 1950)—both presenting us with a time that deceptively runs along a straight line, both only returning us to a future that is the reversed image of the past.¹⁹ It is here, I believe, that the dissolution of the crime scene is inaugurated, in this insurgence of perception and time, and if I attempt to explore its manifestations independently of Deleuze's cinema books it is because my point of departure is the phenomenological engrossment of the spectator, of my eye as it expands and contracts in the encounter with the screen.

Together with the works mentioned above, forming a constellation

rather than a category, I will also remember Bertolucci's *La commare secca* (*The Grim Reaper*, 1962), *Il conformista* (*The Conformist*, 1971), and *Ultimo tango a Parigi* (*The Last Tango in Paris*, 1972); Marco Bellocchio's *I pugni in tasca* (*Fists in the Pocket*, 1965); Elio Petri's *Indagine su un cittadino al di sopra di ogni sospetto* (*Investigation of a Citizen Above Suspicion*, 1970); Francesco Rosi's *Salvatore Giuliano* (1960) and *Cadaveri eccellenti* (*Illustrious Corpses*, 1975); and Visconti's *Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa* (*Sandra*, 1965). In some cases, the opening scenes already represent a defiant homage to the genre. (*Salvatore Giuliano* begins where the story of Giuliano ends, in the courtyard where the bandit's bullet-riddled corpse is found lying face-down, as the police photograph and describe the details of its position, clothing, and personal effects. *Illustrious Corpses* opens with a Sicilian judge visiting the Cappuchin Crypt, the catacomb that preserves the centuries-old mummies of Palermo's prelates and notables, and then returning to the surface only to be shot to death in full daylight. *Investigation of a Citizen Above Suspicion* draws us into a bourgeois apartment where a barely clothed woman asks the suited man who has just stepped in, "How are you going to kill me this time?"—"Today, I'll cut your throat," he replies, and indeed kills her as anticipated, intentionally leaving behind traces—fingerprints, footprints, a thread from his tie—that should in principle secure his incrimination. He is soon to be identified as the chief inspector of Rome's homicide squad.) In other cases, like in *The Last Tango*, the crime scene proper marks the end rather than the beginning (as Maria Schneider shoots to death the familiar stranger she pretends not to know), or rhythmically returns throughout the film, like in *Fists in the Pocket*, where a middle-class, provincial world is shattered by the violent energy of the young protagonist, who systematically kills his mother and siblings and deliberately refuses the burden of guilt.

While all these films problematize the spatio-temporal parameters of the crime scene—exposing the complicity of power and corruption, reflecting on the process of criminalization, reconfiguring the crime as failure to bear witness, confronting the Oedipal legacy—the films that constitute the focus of this work present us with the most distinct strategies for articulating the future anterior as the time of our enmeshment in cinematic perception, a time of tension rather than repose. I return to them today in the context of a mediatic landscape increasingly obsessed

with the image of the crime scene and yet rarely willing to question its conditions of emergence. What defines the contemporary crime scene is often the display of forensic expertise, the demand that everything be made clear and explained in terms of cause and effect, chronological succession, and identifiable agents. Repeatedly, the spectator is faced with scenes that portray (narrativize) the fragility of life and yet is reassured of the fact that, after all, she is still alive—death is what happened to someone else, in a time that is now past. Against this reduction of temporality, I look back at another mode of cinematic engagement and propose a writing of spectatorship that, revolving around description and multiple theoretical infiltrations, attempts to retrace the patterns and rhythms through which each film says or shows that something “will have been.”

Chapter 1, “The Scene of the Crime,” identifies the crime scene as the site where the interweaving of past, present, and future acquires greatest visibility, taking the form of a death in the future anterior, a death that is simultaneously “already behind” and “still ahead.” By drawing upon Lacan’s reflection on the gaze and his analysis of *The Ambassadors*, as well as upon the work of Hubert Damisch and Louis Marin, I question the relationship between Renaissance perspective, anamorphosis, and death. I argue that, through a subversive use of perspective, Michelangelo Antonioni’s *Blow-up* and *The Passenger* lead us to see death not as a fact but as a possibility, indeed the possibility in relation to which our own capacity for vision is defined. In both films, the crime scene is organized according to the rules of perspective, thus apparently assigning the investigator a position of mastery—at the center of the visual field, yet external to it, he is endowed with the power to survey, measure, and evaluate. However, both films meticulously undermine this structure from within, dramatizing the fact that Albertian perspective contains the principle of its own implosion. Because the viewpoint he occupies corresponds, in terms of projection, to the vanishing point, the beholder finds himself inexorably pulled toward this other infinitesimal place, where things disappear and he will not be able to stand in self-reliance. The return to the crime scene here coincides not with the discovery and ultimate possession of evidence, but with the performance of a double disappearance—the sliding away of image and spectator alike.

In *Blow-up*, the crime scene becomes the site of the constantly de-

ferred, never fully realized encounter between the investigator and the crime. As if it were impossible to see death in the present, the photographer blindly records an event whose significance will only later emerge. A corpse begins to appear after he has transformed the photographic surface into a narrative scenario, metonymically linking a series of details and converting them into a sequence of cinematic shots. Yet, as it reaches its apex, this process of narrativization falls apart. After the detail containing the puzzling image has been enlarged over and over again, what remains is a constellation of grainy particles, a form devoid of narrative value. While it is about to become visible, the corpse retreats again into a state of invisibility, as if there were no stable point between the almost visible and the no longer visible, and visibility could be only imminent or already lost. Similarly, in *The Passenger*, the moment of transition from the living to the dead body is concealed, maintained off-screen through a 360-degree pan that traces a hollow space, installs a void in the center of the scene, and empties out the action from within. The camera, and the spectator with it, sees from this groundless position, this invisible space in which somebody is dying. By the end, death has emerged as a process of disappearance accompanying vision itself, a vanishing always already inscribed in the texture of perception—the inexorable undoing of both the seer and the scene.

Chapter 2, “Desiring Death,” explores the intimacy of vision and death as it emerges in Liliana Cavani’s *The Night Porter*, a film that represents the return to the crime scene with respect to both the victim’s and the aggressor’s compulsion to repeat. By reading Leo Bersani’s work on masochism together with Lacan’s reflection on the circular structure of the drive, I claim that the refusal to bind together that characterizes the death drive can be used to reject standard forms of memory and resist the oblivion realized through the assimilation of marginal perspectives. In *The Night Porter*, it is the rhythm of montage—the intermittent appearance of the so-called flashbacks—that induces the spectator to experience a desire that, in its shattering impact, is productive of images which would not otherwise be visible. Seeing from the point of view of death assumes here the force of a demand—that the past be written through the articulation of new visual forms. Thus, when in the gloomy interiors of postwar Vienna, a former Nazi officer and the woman who had been his

favorite prisoner find themselves compelled to resume their sadomasochistic relationship, we witness something other than a simple return of the past. Gradually, as the line separating the active and passive sides of the drive—sadism and masochism, voyeurism and exhibitionism—becomes blurred, a radical contamination of past, present, and future affirms itself. By refusing to let the past be over and done, and choosing to meet their deaths when they still have an alternative, they assume “perverted” positions with respect to the violence of their history, exposing the ambiguous or gray zone they have come to inhabit.

In this chapter, I also question the assumption, laid bare in Cavani’s film but often hidden in contemporary discourse, that the survivor of a violent crime will ultimately fulfill her role as witness by testifying in a court of law. In his work on Auschwitz, Giorgio Agamben has cogently argued against this conflation of ethics and law, and the reduction of truth and justice to judgment. It is only as *auctor*, he claims, as creator of a language that at once implicates and exceeds her, that the survivor can bear witness to the past and those who have not survived. Can we think of analysis as another zone of experimentation, a mode of creation other than poetry but in a relation of intimacy with it, in which testimony can be conceived and performed as that which is in excess of any juridical paradigm? Repeatedly, the figure of the analyst has been aligned with that of the detective. Whether it is Carlo Ginzburg writing on the inferential logic that unites Freud, Morelli, and Holmes, or Slavoj Žižek identifying different styles of detection, what is generated is an isomorphic relation between dream and crime scene, symptom and clue, patient and criminal or juridical witness. After the example of *The Night Porter*, I attempt to displace this analogy by envisioning the analyst not as a detective but as a witness—indeed, as the other witness, the witness to the witness of time that the survivor struggles to be.

Chapter 3, “Seeing Time,” interrogates the relation between time and the subject of perception through Pier Paolo Pasolini’s *Oedipus Rex*, a poetic and eccentric return to what constitutes the archetypal detective story as well as the founding myth of psychoanalysis. By expanding upon the notion of free indirect subjectivity, which Pasolini himself has theorized, and confronting it with the work of Béla Balázs and Merleau-Ponty, I maintain that the film defies the very investigative impetus it

is expected to celebrate. There, in a portion of the visible where the detective sees the traces of an event which has already occurred, a scene which is to be analyzed according to uniform spatio-temporal coordinates, Pasolini and his Oedipus see a depth they cannot manipulate. This depth, I argue, is at once of the visible and of time—belonging to what Merleau-Ponty calls “the flesh of the world”—and is most intensely manifested in the encounter between the human face and the landscape. In the prologue, a row of trees is framed by a traveling, almost handheld camera, as if seen through the eyes of the infant who, lying on the grass next to his mother, looks at the surrounding world for the first time. When it reappears, in the epilogue, this mass of green leaves brushing against the sky is no longer the same. It now leads back to the eyes of a grown man, a blind beggar who has lastly returned to the meadow of his infancy. Between the epilogue and the prologue, set in twentieth-century Italy, there unfolds the mythical Greek tale, which begins when a baby with swollen feet is rescued from death, and ends when a sightless and desperate Oedipus is led away from Thebes. Although literally identical, the shots of the trees are separated by a distance that eludes chronological ordering—a memory in excess of the subject, a visual intertwining of past, present, and future through which Oedipus, not the riddle solver but the wanderer, the one who is going to die, is dispersed to the point of dissolution.

The fourth and last chapter, “Twilight,” inquires into the truth of the crime scene by following the convoluted thread of Bernardo Bertolucci’s *The Spider’s Stratagem*. Freely adapted from “The Theme of the Traitor and the Hero,” the film embraces Borges’s idea of a labyrinth not of space but of time, transferring it from the domain of language to that of perception. Thus, when a man returns to the town where his father, a venerated antifascist hero, was mysteriously assassinated, character and spectator alike are challenged to seek the truth outside the parameters of referential accuracy. But how does one find the truth, and which truth is to be found, in a labyrinth of time and light? As I explore the film’s intricate pattern, I elaborate on Lacan’s notion of full speech, attempting to reformulate it as a capacity of perception. Full speech coincides with the subject’s assumption of a language that refers back to itself, not as it was, but as it “will have been” in the process of producing new significations—a language

inhabiting the temporality of the future anterior. It also coincides with the emergence of truth as revelation, as disclosure that is simultaneously concealment. While Lacan does not address the possibility of articulating full speech in the perceptual domain, I draw on Merleau-Ponty's notion of flesh and argue that twilight—the intermingling of light and darkness for which the film's cinematography has been highly praised—is the light, and time, of perceptual full speech. By virtue of its irreducible ambiguity, the chiasm of past and future which the future anterior manifests eventually emerges as the secret shape of time. Enveloped in this light, indeed made of this light, the labyrinth which character and spectator set out to explore “will have become” through the coiling and coiled lines they patiently trace, not as disembodied or external viewers but as seers made of the same light. In the process, questions that have been haunting this work from the beginning return. What is the responsibility facing those who look back and search for the truth, if the past is not simply transpired but returns in the future as it has been transformed by the future itself? Under which conditions does the future anterior affirm a capacity for transformation, instead of causing what has been to blindly survive?