

Mr. Superinvisible's Potion: Science, Scientists, and Technology in Antonio Margheriti's Films¹

STEFANO BIGLIARDI
Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane

Antonio Margheriti (1930-2002), also known by the aliases “Antony Daisies”, “Anthony Dawson”, and “Anthony M. Dawson”, created movies belonging to established genres, including ones that were derivative of major US-American productions. However, he is cherished as a versatile “movie artisan”, who cleverly allocated low budgets; he created special effects, coming up with smart yet simple solutions that, on screen, often made a spectacular impression. Margheriti is also appreciated as a precursor. For instance, Stanley Kubrick (1928-1999) may have been influenced by the ending of *I criminali della galassia* (*Wild, Wild Planet*, 1965)² when he included the blood flood scene in *The Shining* (1980) (Giovannini 40).³ Another example is the reflection created by sunset rays on the camera lens in an intense sequence of *I giganti di Roma* (*Giants of Rome*, 1967); criticized when used by Margheriti, it has been employed as an artistic device by directors including Claude Lelouch (b. 1937) (Giovannini 73). Quentin Tarantino (b. 1963) paid homage to Margheriti through references in *Inglorious Basterds* (2009) and *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* (2019). This study explores Margheriti's production while focusing on how it conceptualizes science, scientists, and technology.⁴ This reading, I contend, not only provides an unexplored path through Margheriti's films, revealing continuity across genres, but also confirms Margheriti's creativity and versatility.

Space Men (*Assignment Outer Space*, 1960) follows reporter Ray Peterson who in 2116 covers the activities in a space station. The story is told from a documentary-like angle, including the illustration of technology such as suspended animation and magnetic boots. The crew comprises Al, the Afro-American pilot, and Lucy, botanist and navigator.⁵ Life on the station is robotic. Commander George specifies that “everything is regulated by machines”. The drama escalates when spaceship Alpha 2, steered by an electronic brain, endangers earth with its photon generators. Al describes it as “one of man's dreams [that] has come true, an indestructible destroyer”. The commander states: “The world of human feelings has been much less explored than the whole of the universe put together. But now it's late. What have we been doing all these thousands of years... We've been congratulating ourselves on our progress in going faster and faster and faster when in reality, we've only been getting further away from ourselves”.

Il pianeta degli uomini spenti (*Battle of the Worlds*, 1961)⁶ represents the struggles of a group of scientists while the earth is threatened by a stray planet.⁷ Their station is located on an island, and they are supervised by irascible Professor Benson, who spends his time in a greenhouse with his dog. Benson despises his colleagues and their technological devices, since he only relies on mathematics: “you need to see and hear before you are able to know; I have an advantage over you: calculation”. He detected the Outsider ahead of his colleagues and predicts that it will not hit the earth. The scientists team comprises Eva and Fred, who intend to get married. Fred has chosen a career in astronomy after serving in the military. Professor Benson loathes the politicians and the

army, who consider him a charlatan but propagate his opinion to limit panic. The other scientists are filled with fear and anxiety, and, looking for reassuring answers, they even organize a séance (although some of them only join it reluctantly). Benson is universally praised when the Outsider does not collide with the earth and starts orbiting around it - however, he hadn't predicted the latter event and understands that he has committed "a mathematically impossible mistake". He states that the most tiresome thing is "having to communicate and explain, but what matters is knowledge"; he holds a virtual meeting with world leaders explaining that the Outsider is steered by "sentient beings". Benson shows his calculations and offers to save humanity if given "absolute command". The politicians express gratitude, yet they turn the command over to the military that prepares to attack the Outsider. Romance is shown between two members of the military: Commander Cole and his wife Cathy, who genuinely love each other although, as she recalls, they got married "based on a cold psycho-technical examination". Benson claims that "human feelings are contradictory, in fact the only contradictory elements that exist, in nature at least". Inspired by Pythagorean concepts, he identifies vibrations through which the planet can be controlled, and he is given the opportunity to join an expedition that has a limited time to explore the Outsider before the military hits it with nuclear warheads. The expedition discovers that the beings who inhabited the Outsider are extinct, and the planet is steered by an automatic system. Benson insists on locating the planet's "brain" in order to "penetrate into the secret of their [the extraterrestrials'] immortal formulae". Warned that time is running out, he responds: "What is the importance of living, if it means living without knowing?" The rest of the crew flees the Outsider. Benson finds a way to order the Outsider to leave, but it's too late: the military's plan is automatic, and the Outsider is destroyed. Commander Cole comments: "Poor Benson—if they'd opened up his chest, they would only find a formula where his heart should have been".

I criminali della galassia (Wild, *Wild Planet*, 1965) is the first film of the "Gamma One Quadrilogy", named after the space station where the action frequently takes place. It features the conflict between Commander Halstead and professor Nurmi, who is conducting experiments aimed at "having humanity mutate, so that we will be able to create a race of perfect humans". When Halstead replies that he is satisfied with humanity as it is, Nurmi responds that "it is an anti-scientific attitude". Said experiments include the extra-corporeal survival of human organs. The Commander states: "Professor, I may be outdated, but I wish to live as I am and to die as I am. I wouldn't get along with superhumans. I am an individual, not a collection of different organs! One cannot rape nature!" The conflict between Nurmi and Halstead is also personal, since the former seduces the latter's girlfriend, Lieutenant Connie Gomez, to whom he addresses an unusual compliment: "You are well built. My specialty is the human body. My task is to explore it. A perfect body enshrines an excellent vital spirit". Gomez and Halstead are going through a crisis, with her insisting that she wants to be considered "a woman, a lady and not a machine [...]. After all, there's still a difference between woman and man". Under the cover of an organization called Chem-Bio-Med, Nurmi is intent on kidnapping and miniaturizing world leaders while conducting eugenic experiments on planet Delphos. He is assisted by a squad of beautiful girls and sinister men in black coats, who are in fact four-armed mutants. Laboratory aides on Delphos include women. Nurmi's headquarters features paintings by Hieronymus Bosch (c. 1450-1516). Once his plan is discovered by Commander Halstead, he explains: "There is no magic, Commander, but experiments, studies, and trials. Twenty long years of trials!" and he adds "how does this miracle occur? Is it perhaps the work of a crazy scientist? Black magic? Conjuring? Or a nightmare? No, not at all. It's just the application of elements that are unknown to common science". Nurmi shows Halstead a chamber hosting deformed beings, stating that they are "mistakes weighing on [his]

heart like stones. [His] personal hell, that reminds [him] of the hell that humanity created”. He explains that he is seeking a perfect synthesis of humanity that can “renew itself millions of times. In constant expansion. Like the universe itself. A race possessing beauty and every other virtue, and indefinitely extends the life of selected individuals”. His ultimate experiment is the fusion of himself and Connie. Additionally, Nurmi explains that he has programmed a perfect computer to steer Delphos. However, his plans are thwarted by the Commander and his crew, who cause the destruction of Nurmi’s base.

In *I diafanoidi vengono da Marte (The War of the Planets, 1966)*,⁸ the terrestrials are threatened by the titular aliens: glowing, green clouds that can control human bodies. Here Connie is a scientist who works with a female colleague and whose work is instrumental in understanding the beings’ nature. The Diaphanoids possess Captain Dubois in order to have access to a nuclear reactor and negotiate with humans. Commander Halstead and his crew are taken to Mars, where the aliens have their outposts. The Diaphanoids, who used to be embodied before a catastrophe hit their planet, explain that if they surrender, “[humans] will have a freedom that no human has known. Human passions, emotions, fear, hate, desire, they will die forever. Only the light of thought will remain. While symbiotically united with the spirit of the universe, [they] will be a part of the whole”. Halstead and the crew escape a ceremony in which humans are possessed by the aliens, and the earth’s United Democracies bomb the alien base.

In *Il pianeta errante (War Between the Planets, 1966)*,⁹ the earth is threatened by a red planet that attracts asteroids and causes cataclysms. A general and a chief scientist disagree over its exact nature; the latter is convinced that the military who reported on the planet’s behavior were hysterical or panicking since what they described “is impossible by any scientific argument”. The general replies: “Or rather something that goes beyond our knowledge”. An expedition manages to place an “antimatter bomb” in the core of the planet, although they lose two crew members. The planet is personified through statements like “this thing is alive”; “[it] wants to devour the entire universe”; “it is cancerous”; “we have to find the embryo from which it grew”; “it is swallowing us”; “the soil is pulsating”.

In *La morte viene dal pianeta Aytin (Snow Devils, 1967)*,¹⁰ the final film of the “Gamma One Quadrilogy”, aliens who established their headquarters on the Himalayas use their technology to bring about cataclysms to make the earth habitable for them. Scientific investigations on behalf of humans detect such anomalies and evaluate their magnitude yet are insufficient to explain their cause; a professor of zoology is baffled by a monstrous footprint that has been found next to a weather station that was attacked by the aliens. Upon discovering sophisticated machinery in underground dungeons inhabited by tall and hairy “snowmen”, humans are confused, assuming that such beings are the minions of the aliens who are threatening the earth. However, they are corrected by their leader: “from the way you look at me”, he states, “I have to infer that that you are amazed at an ape man who is able to speak intelligibly and intelligently”. He explains that his planet is inhabited by a great civilization “led by an elite”. Their scientists and astronomers had realised the impending destruction of their planet and decided to colonise earth, careless about human life. The humans combine chemical elements¹¹ to produce knockout gas, which they diffuse through the ventilation system (the idea occurs to the men) and defeat the aliens. Later, the alien base that is causing catastrophes on earth is located on Jupiter’s moon Callisto. Since it is defended by a shield of energy, it seems impenetrable. However, Rod understands that certain solid bodies can go through it and, despite the skepticism of astrophysicist Dr. Smith, he devises a plan: sending, packed in an asteroid, a bomb that eventually exterminates the aliens.

The spy movie *Operazione Goldman (Lightning Bolt, 1966)*¹² opens with images of rocket launch stations, radio telescopes, and satellites. Governmental technology is sabotaged by megalomaniac millionaire Rether, while professor Rooney warns the State Department of the menace but is accused of sabotage. Rether has built an underwater city that runs on volcanic energy and plans on sending a laser cannon to the Moon to threaten the earth. He kidnaps Rooney and has hibernated prominent scientists in a special chamber where he can either reanimate or execute them at will. The film features technological devices like a vitriol gun, a radar disguised as a beer truck, a pen with poisonous gas, and a watch that functions as a Geiger counter and transmitter. Secret agent Sennett (who has a “license to spend” as much as he wants in lieu of one to kill) thwarts Rether’s plans and destroys the city. Professor Rooney also becomes a man of action fighting Rether’s sinister minions. The agent is ready to sacrifice his life for the professor, but they both save themselves in a capsule that, after initial malfunctioning, is shot from the city to the sea surface.

A 077 - Sfida ai killers (Killers Are Challenged, 1966),¹³ a spy film set in Casablanca and Geneva, includes technological gadgets (e.g., wiretaps) but doesn’t feature technology as extensively as the prior film. However, an important role is played here by Coleman, the last of three scientists who worked on a source of energy “considerably less risky than the nuclear force but more powerful” alternative to fossil fuel (a motif quite ahead of its time in the 1960s). Coleman uses a poison-detecting ring and escapes murder attempts, doing a better job than the spies whose mission is to protect him.

*Joe l’implacabile (Dynamite Joe, 1967)*¹⁴ starts off as a “spaghetti western”, but is rather a comedic spy movie. The titular hero, Joe Ford, is an explosives expert hired by the government, who uses dynamite to perform extraordinary deeds. In one of the movie’s central moments, Joe combines chemical elements that he identifies in a mine in which he has been trapped, creating an explosive that blows up a whole mountain, causing a flood. His name conjures up director John Ford (1894-1973) and industrialist Henry Ford (1863-1947); the latter is mentioned in the final scene in which Joe tells his aide Cigno that he wants to retire from the dynamite business and start a carriage-constructing firm: “There is a Ford carriage in your future”, he states (and the noise of an engine is heard in the background).

The protagonist of *L’inafferrabile invincibile Mister invisibile (Mr. Superinvisible, 1970)*¹⁵ is Peter Denwell, chief biochemist. He is working on a vaccine for the common cold at the Geneva Research Institute, from which a “virus D” is stolen that “contains all of the known types of cold throughout the world”. Peter seems to connect more easily with his dog and a lab chimpanzee than with other human beings, especially his co-worker, chemist Irene. Denwell is mildly skeptical towards science: “Do you know the joke of this century?” he asks his dog “We can put a man on the moon, but we can’t cure the common cold”. He is clumsy, and submissive towards his boss, Dr. Pomerantz. His colleague Dr. Kokofrescovitch is also caricatural: initially dressed in a typical white coat, with unkempt hair and glasses, he is enthusiastic over an explosion he has accidentally caused while experimenting on eggs. However, Denwell and Kokofrescovitch later turn out to be dynamic, clever, and sarcastic. Decisive help comes to the protagonist in the form of a “magic potion” that an Indian colleague has come across while also investigating the common cold; he sends the potion from Bombay in the hopes that Denwell finds an antidote. Denwell drinks it and becomes invisible and hence unseizable for the villains he manages to defeat after multiple vicissitudes. It is finally revealed that the virus was inactive, and the potion is destroyed in a plane crash. Denwell went through the whole adventure just to conquer Irene’s love.

*Il mostro è in tavola barone... Frankenstein (Flesh for Frankenstein, 1973)*¹⁶ is a grotesque and gory adaptation of Mary Shelley's (1797-1851) *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818). Frankenstein is obsessed with creating a superior Serbian race, convinced, as he is, that Serbians descend from ancient Greeks. He is assisted by clumsy aide Otto. The superior race is expected to be the offspring of two creatures, a male and a female, that Frankenstein is cobbling together from body parts. In order to complete his work, he needs the head of a sexually insatiable man with the perfect Serbian *nasum* (nose). Frankenstein is convinced to have spotted one such individual at a brothel and decapitates him. He is elated and only regrets that science cannot speed up gestation. His egotistic tirades are accompanied by the notes of Richard Wagner's (1813-1883) *Tannhäuser* (1845), and he indulges in necrophilia. One of the teachings he shares with Otto is "in order to know Death, you've got to fuck Life in the gall bladder". Frankenstein tries to have his creatures mate, but unsuccessfully so: the young man wished to become a monk and was only meeting prostitutes in order to make a well-informed decision about celibacy. Otto emulates the baron's sexual intercourse with the female creature to the only effect of disemboweling her: Frankenstein strangles him, screaming that the assistant, not having studied, did not know "how to do it". The male creature rebels and impales Frankenstein. The baron dies after a tirade on how he has no regrets: the creature, he claims, is ultimately a success and will testify his genius to the world. The creature, however, disembowels himself, having opted for death over zombie-like existence. The ending is ambiguous, suggesting that Frankenstein's children, who have been spying on his activities, are going to carry on his work.

*Il mondo di Yor (Yor, the Hunter from the Future, 1983)*¹⁷ depicts a primitive world explored by the titular, caveman-like hero during the first half of the film, and a hypertechnological world that is discovered to be Yor's place of origin, represented in the second half. The latter is controlled by a tyrant called Overlord who is developing androids that need genetic material from perfect individuals like Yor and his partner Ka-laa; however, the villain is contrasted by rebels including a female scientist, Ena, and a blind sage, Elder. The latter states: "We are all that is left of a civilization that was wiped out by a great atomic blast. Whenever man discovers something greater than himself, he abuses it and is destroyed. Overlord is leading us along the same path". Overlord says about himself: "I am one of the survivors who came here at the time of the great destruction. But many of us carried the germs of the radioactive fallout that destroyed our cities. By the time we had neutralized the malady, there were few of us left. For generations, I have defended my subjects against the great plague that continues to ravish the outside world. I want my people to procreate and to grow strong. Then, eventually I may conquer the world and exterminate all barbarians". He adds, about the androids: "They will replace all humans. They are part of my military power. I will create technicians, scientists, magnificent minds who will think according to my will". The rebels plant explosives in the Overlord's fortress and force him to engage in a fight. Elder deactivates the androids from a control room. A few moments before the Overlord, mortally wounded by Yor, fails to stop the bomb, Elder tells him: "By feeding your ambition to create a master race, you have kept the world in darkness and hindered progress. It is the man, with all its faults, who represents the future. Not your dream race of hybrid clones, that can be deactivated by the touch of a button". And he adds: "The survivors of this island will return to the mainland. And let us pray that this time our youth will not repeat our mistakes. And that right will win over wrong. May they establish a brave new world based on love and tolerance. And may God forgive us".

L'isola del tesoro (Treasure Island in Outer Space, 1987),¹⁸ a sci-fi version of Robert Louis Stevenson's (1850-1894) *Treasure Island* (1883), takes place against a futuristic background,

including spaceships, laser weapons, and an android (who talks enthusiastically about technological progress and is disparagingly called a “dummy” by some humans). Through one dialogue spectators are informed that, at an indefinite time prior to that of the story, millions of androids were destroyed by humans during a “nuclear war” because they were “too perfect” and replaced humans in everything. Only a few were kept by affluent people for domestic service. Technology, however, is represented as being reminiscent, or incorporating elements, of an older world, and it is humanized. For instance, Margheriti represents a colorful and chaotic procession in honor of St. Januarius in Naples, performed with futuristic vehicles; a burial in space marked by a “cosmic prayer” for the dead; the spaceship *Hispaniola* collecting energy through panels whose shape reminds one of sails; finally, the aforementioned android dies after uttering a human-like last speech. In this world, people still read paper books and embark on leisure cruises (in space), and one of the characters refuses to eat “synthetic food”. Humans are also fond of alcoholic drinks and do drugs.¹⁹

In *Alien degli abissi (Alien from the Deep, 1989)*,²⁰ journalist-activists Lee and Jane (formerly a physics teacher) gather evidence that the Caribbean-based firm E-Chem, instead of decontaminating nuclear waste, is dumping it into a volcano. Radioactivity attracts an alien that wreaks havoc on the plant. Jane is helped by herpetologist Bob who lives alone in the forest but also by a priest, who lives in the forest along locals whom he lectures on the Bible but still preserve tribal rituals for the volcano God: “We are very Christian [...] but good magic also helps a good God” states a child. E-Chem is run by tyrannical Colonel Kovacs who corrupted local authorities and sends false reports to his superiors in Houston. The plant is managed by scientists in white coats including Doctor Geoffrey, who stands up to the Colonel, rebuking him and trying to steer him away from destructive choices. He is, however, elderly, prone to drinking, and ultimately unable to dissuade the villain. Eventually, he teams up with Jane and Bob. When Jane vigorously points out to Geoffrey that he ultimately is one of E-Chem’s criminals, he replies “I am just a scientist” and claims that he had started off his work hoping that plant would be safe for the next twenty years.

*Potenza virtuale (Virtual Weapon, 1997)*²¹ combines a police movie typically set in Miami, and a comedy for children about the friendship between a supernatural being and a girl. The story takes place against a background furnished with iconic technology of the 1990s: home and portable PCs, videogames, floppy disks, fax machines, cellphones, modems, GPS, holograms, and gym machines. Detective Skims struggles to identify criminals that use lethal, ultra-powerful explosives activated through ultrasounds. Once he falls victim of an explosive attack, Skims survives in holographic form through the computer of his young friend, Hispanic computer genius Lily, an experience that he defines as “the result of modern technology and Biblical truth”. In holographic form, Skims defeats the criminal gang led by unscrupulous entrepreneur Van Axel and he re-enters his body upon being defibrillated by a medical team.²²

Multiple scholars focused on the conceptualization of science, scientists, and technology in cinema and literature. In his 2005 monograph, Daniel Dinello scrutinizes how technology is represented in sci-fi movies and literature, identifying those that convey technophobia, i.e., “an aversion to, dislike of, or suspicion of technology rather than an irrational, illogical, or neurotic fear” (8). Such sci-fi, contends Dinello, “helps liberate us from those mythical and deceptive dreams while warning that our technology is not easily controlled” (274). Peter Weingart, Claudia Muhl, and Petra Pansegrau scrutinized two hundred and twenty-two movies, identifying patterns in which science and scientists are represented. According to their analysis, “scientific knowledge

and its technological applications have been associated with both liberation and domination, with the power to control and the threat of being controlled, with human welfare and destruction, since antiquity” (280); additionally, “the typical scientist in Hollywood’s fiction film (more than two-thirds of the films coded are US productions) is white/Caucasian (96%), American (49%), male (82%), and middle aged (40% are roughly between 35 and 49 years old)” (283). Finally, they point out that film scientists conform to three main stereotypes: “benevolent”, that is, naïve, and whose discoveries are put to bad use by superior powers; “ambivalent”, that is, idealistic but easily corrupted, and “mad” ones, marked by ambition and hubris. In her 2017 monograph *From Madman to Crime Fighter - The Scientist in Western Culture*, Roslynn D. Haynes meticulously examines fictional works produced from the Middle Ages to the early 21st century that depict scientists. She points out that fictional scientists are usually male, middle-aged, and Caucasian; furthermore, they are “morally compromised if not outright evil, obsessive, dangerous, mad, and uncaring about and dissociated from society” (207). Haynes groups the stereotypes she identified as follows: (i) “morally suspect alchemists”, trying, and catastrophically failing, to transcend human limits ; (ii) idealists, trying to construct a utopian world; (iii) “stupid virtuosos”, anti-social and out of touch with the real world; (iv) “unemotional scientists” suppressing human affections; (v) “heroic adventurers”, almost superman-like; (vi) “mad, bad and dangerous” scientists; (vii) “helpless scientists”, who lose control of their discovery (possibly as a result of the fact that it was usurped by superior political powers or by a corporation, 212-246).

Margheriti’s movies cover multiple types identified by the aforementioned scholars and occasionally even *challenge* their taxonomies. *Space Men* represents technology as allowing terrestrials to reach spectacular achievements, but at the same time depriving them of humanity; the movie also represents (and in fact anticipates) the technophobic motif of “humans battling machines” (identified in Dinello 97); a cold, implacable automatic system is beaten through human intuition and courage. All astronauts, except journalist Peterson, blend the traits of military and technicians (engineers) including an Afro-American one, a young female in a key role (who is in fact a professional scientist), and an initially cold Commander who, as we have seen, ends up uttering the most philosophical lines of the film. *Il pianeta degli uomini spenti* represents the frictions between a team of scientists and an egocentric mathematician with philosophical inclinations who despises his colleagues and prioritizes abstract knowledge over his own survival. The team (that at some point even resorts to the paranormal) includes a woman, and a young man who was formerly in the military, who are in love with each other. However, two members of the military have a similar love story. The movie cannot qualify as entirely technophobic since human technology is decisive to defeat aliens. Additionally, towards the end professor Benson, who up until then had embodied Haynes’ third and fourth category, takes on the role of adventurer (fifth category). *I criminali della galassia* features a Frankenstein-like “mad doctor” who plans on transcending humanity also by merging genders; Nurmi, however, although cold-hearted towards the humans he manipulates and murders, feels remorse for the maimed beings that resulted from his botched experiments. *I diafanoidi vengono da Marte* includes a young female scientist. Here, technology in the form of a nuclear plant is a resource craved for by aliens as leverage in their negotiation with the humans; the Diaphanoids are sinister in that they represent the negation of humanity, i.e., life in a purely mental, emotionless form. In *Il pianeta errante*, the scientific community is clueless while the military not only is right in its observations about the titular planet, but also manages to defeat it with a mixture of intuition, weaponry, and audacity. In *La morte viene dal pianeta Aytin*, scientists are initially clueless as well, and sophisticated technology characterizes aliens whose physical appearance may otherwise be mistaken for a sign of

backwardness; like in the previous movie, humans triumph over them through a mixture of intuition, courage, and military technology. *Operazione Goldman* features both a mad scientist and a good one, who in fact at some point becomes as much involved in action as the protagonist secret agent. Technology here is both deadly and salvific, in the form of the gadgets used by the agent as well as of the capsule used to escape the underwater city. Additionally, the protagonists defend military-governmental technology. Similarly, *A 077 - Sfida ai killers* includes a scientist who is also a man of action. In *Joe l'implacabile*, technology plays an essential part in the titular protagonist's action and identity. His usage of explosives makes for spectacular as well as comical effects. In *L'inafferrabile, invincibile Mister superinvisibile*, scientists comprise ill-intentioned males (Denwell's corrupt superiors) and three good ones: two males and one (young) female. The two good scientists are initially helpless; however, they become heroic adventurers through a potion - an odd item midway between science and magic (more on this anon). *Il mostro è in tavola barone ... Frankenstein* represents once again a mad scientist trying to transcend human limits and with racist inclinations (incidentally, some of Frankenstein's experiments recall those of professor Nurmi). Although the baron is murdered by his creature, it is not ultimately suggested that his failure is due to flaws in his theory but rather to overconfidence in his means (perhaps, if he had chosen the right male subject, his creatures would have mated). Furthermore, the finale is far from being reassuring since the baron's role and ideas may be taken over by his son and daughter. *Il mondo di Yor* features a bad scientist who is also a political leader and whose plans conflate the "dehumanizing threat" seen in *I diafanoidi* and the eugenics of professor Nurmi and Frankenstein. The Overlord is defeated both through audacity and brute force represented by Yor and through technology represented by Ena and Elder, who aim at ushering in a utopian world. The film, however, also hints at a past nuclear catastrophe, thus encapsulating a technophobic motif. *L'isola del tesoro* represents hypertechnological humanity after a war between humans and robots; however, the android in the film behaves as courageously, altruistically, and emotionally as humans. Furthermore, several humans are represented as suffering from damage due to radiation: one as a result of an accident on work, others because of their carelessness in space travels (they failed to use decontaminating devices); the first scenario conjures up increased danger connected to hypertechnological jobs, the second one overconfidence in human possibilities and neglect of technological ones. In sum, technology is both an opportunity and a menace. In *Alien degli abissi*, an extraterrestrial (but still natural) creature punishes irresponsible, anti-ecological behavior. Scientists working at E-Chem are, with the exception of Doctor Geoffrey, remissive and subordinate to the Colonel (who, however, cannot be completely identified with the military and industry, since it is suggested that he is fooling his very superiors in Houston). Jane and Bob conflate the traits of scientists, both of the idealistic and the adventurer type. Technology here isn't just a threat but it also plays a salvific role since Jane gets rid of the monster's venom in a decontamination chamber and the alien is defeated using caterpillars. Finally, *Potenza virtuale* features a Hispanic girl who is a computer genius. Explosives technology is the villains' strongest weapon, but computer technology ensures the survival and the empowerment of the male protagonist in a form that he himself conceptualizes with religious undertones; medical technology, finally, allows his "resurrection". In sum, Margheriti's production taken as whole, and most of his movies taken individually, can hardly be said to convey a monolithic representation of science, scientists, and technology. In some cases, they outright defy stereotypes.

Margheriti described himself as "a director who doesn't enjoy thinking; I prefer doing with my hands" (Giovannini 124). He also stated that he avidly read comics that highly inspired him, and he identified with comic artists who create freely (120-121). To be sure, I am not contending

that Margheriti *planned* to convey such a diverse representation of science, scientists, and technology. I do contend, however, that Margheriti's cinema is more sophisticated than it may be captured by usual formulas employed to express appreciation for his films, which are mainly praised for the cleverness of certain technical solutions and for the entertainment they provided. In other words, the conceptualization of science, scientists, and technology in Margheriti's films reveals a variety of ideas. Additionally, it provides us with a powerful interpretive key that unifies his different movies, thus confirming, on a deep level, that the director was a creative "hybridizer" of genres.

Finally, the appreciation of the way in which science, scientists, and technology are conceptualized in Margheriti's films also shows a connection between his *stories* and his *vision of cinema*. To Margheriti, science fiction was one of the "highest ways of creative expression". He was so fond of it that he would have gladly created movies exclusively in that genre; however, it required plenty of funding and it had no affinity with "Italian mentality" (119). He also thought that science fiction is not limited to "an adventure with aliens, rockets, and flying saucers" although he "had nothing against them"; he explained that "science fiction is also what can happen to us, here and now, anywhere" and that it "is not quite about science and machines. It is folly, it is imagination totally liberated. Respect for technology inevitably results into a limitation for science fiction. Science fiction allows one to make imagination-based movies, to break completely free" (*Ibidem*). He emphasized that all his movies, regardless of the specific genre, were based on imagination [*fantasia*], and that "purely fantastic cinema was what interested him most at the beginning and still interested [him]" (121). Artistic creation was also linked, in Margheriti's conception, with the supernatural, as well as with levity. He stated: "I have always been attracted towards the paranormal. This fantastic world has always fascinated me; I believe in [supernatural] beings and in other dimensions" (*Ibidem*). To this he added: "Whenever I narrate these things, I do it with a smile, but I do believe in them. My philosophy obviously flows into my production, and it perhaps explains all the fantasy works I made" (*Ibidem*). Margheriti, who had a humble personality, stated that sometimes he was so absorbed in the realization of his special effects that people looking for him on the set would not see him, mistaking him for one of the technicians (Cipri and Maresco 1999).

In sum, in Margheriti's vision, science fiction goes hand in hand with imagination; it requires solid technology to be created; it includes the representation of technology but also transcends it; imagination, however, also described by Margheriti as the basis of all of his movies, is strongly related to, and inspired by, the supernatural, that can be represented with some humor; finally, the director immerses himself in his work and disappears behind it. All such concepts are symbolically conjured up by *Mr. Superinvisible's* potion, which is both the product of *science* and *wizardry*: the mysterious liquid was sold at a *pharmacy* but it is an occult brew that works *magic* whose unexpected consequences are as wonderful as they are comical, allowing the protagonist to win love upon disappearing. According to the label on the bottle, that Denwell has translated from Nepalese by a colleague engaged in a *séance*, if used foolishly, the potion leads to danger, but wisely to "transubstantiation". "What if there is no antidote?" wonders Denwell, but he immediately adds: "What does it matter... I have been invisible most of my life anyway". One may be puzzled at the ambiguity in the characterization of the potion: did Peter's Indian colleague *create* it or *discover* it? What was, precisely, the role of the pharmacy? Were the scriptwriters intentionally vague, or simply sloppy? Be it as it may, the way in which the potion is represented in *Mr. Superinvisible* strikes me as the metaphoric epitome of science and technology's role *in and for* Margheriti's movies. In Margheriti's plots, technology can both be a *threat* or a *problem-solver*.

The technology behind special effects in Margheriti's movies, that he was so fond of creating by himself, is likewise the source of opposite reactions on behalf of his audience. For some spectators, who appreciate innovation and creativity and are mindful of the times in which Margheriti shot his movies (as well as of the limits of his budgets), his technology is an object of admiration. For others, perhaps too jaded by the technical perfection of CGI, it is irremediably naive and outdated. In either case, it powerfully characterizes a director who otherwise remained hidden behind his creation.

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² Literally: *The Criminals of the Galaxy*. When a film was released for the US-American market with a title that differed from a literal translation from Italian, the official English one is indicated in the text together with the release year for Italy while a note offers a literal translation. When a film is only mentioned in a note, the literal translation of the title is followed by the title for the US-American market.

³ The rotating space station in *Space Men (Assignment Outer Space)*, (1960) and in the Gamma One films (1965-1967) is sometimes cited as anticipating Kubrick's in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1969). However, it followed a suggestion of aerospace engineer Wernher von Braun (1912-1977) and it features in Byron Haskin's (1899-1984) *Conquest of Space* (1955). *Space Men*, however, does anticipate some motifs of Kubrick's *2001* (cf. Westfahl, *The Spacesuit Film*, 4862 and 4899).

⁴ "Science" refers to experimental investigation joint with theorizing while "technology" refers to *applied* science and/or to devices that extend/amplify human capacities. I am aware that both terms are nuanced, and that the complexity of technology is relative (a catapult would have been high technology in the ancient world but is considered a simple device in the context of a space station).

⁵ Lucy has a line, notable for its scientific inaccuracy, explaining that plants are "changing hydrogen into breathable oxygen".

⁶ *The Planet of Extinct Men*.

⁷ *Lo Straniero*, i.e., "the Stranger" in Italian, the Outsider in the English version. This narrative device may stem from *Flash Gordon* comics, of which Margheriti was fond (Giovannini 2003: 120). Edoardo Margheriti (b. 1959) stated that his father was indeed "crazy" for the comic and wanted so badly to create a cinematic version thereof that he felt sorely disappointed when he was informed that Dino De Laurentiis (1919-2010) was producing a version directed by Mike Hodges (1980).

⁸ *The Diaphanoids Come from Mars*. It is speculated that the term *diaphanoidi* was adopted by Beat Generation poet Allen Ginsberg (1926-1997) in his 1967 poem "Pentagon Exorcism" after seeing the movie's poster (Giovannini 2003: 41-42).

⁹ *The Errant Planet*.

¹⁰ *Death Comes from Planet Aytin*.

¹¹ The procedure is described as dehydrating ethyl alcohol by using sulphuric acid.

¹² *Operation Goldman*.

¹³ *A 077 - Challenge to the Killers*.

¹⁴ *Joe the Implacable*.

¹⁵ *The Unseizable, Invincible Mr. Superinvisible*.

¹⁶ *The Monster is on the Table, Baron Frankenstein*. The attribution of the movie to Margheriti (likely, co-director with Paul Morrissey, b. 1938) is contested. However, expert Fabio Giovannini includes it in his monograph (2003 57-60; 215-218).

¹⁷ *The World of Yor*.

¹⁸ *Treasure Island*.

¹⁹ In spite of his own insistence that he was only realising a project of director Renato Castellani (1913-1985), Margheriti's artistic mark can be perceived throughout the movie; for instance, he cites himself visually including in the film a modern shuttle whose engines release a fire blaze in space like the spaceships of his earliest movies. While their naivety was justified in the 1960s, it seems safe to assume that, by 1987, space shuttles had entered collective imagination (the one represented in the film is in fact realistic rather than futuristic, with the only exception of said blaze).

²⁰ *Alien of the Abysses*.

²¹ *Virtual Might*.

²² Science and technology feature in other films if less evidently. In *I giganti di Roma* (1964) Roman soldiers need to destroy a secret weapon of the Druids, a giant catapult that hurls flaming pitch. In *Apocalypse domani* (i.e. *Apocalypse tomorrow*, *Cannibals in the Streets*, 1980), hospital personnel struggle to contain a virus that causes cannibalism, but fall prey either to the virus or to the cannibals. In the adventure movies, *I cacciatori del cobra d'oro* (*Raiders of the Golden Cobra*, 1982), *I sopravvissuti della città morta* (i.e., *The Survivors of the Dead City*, *The Ark of the Sun God*, 1984), and *La leggenda del rubino malese* (i.e. *The Legend of the Malaysian Ruby*, *Jungle Raiders*, 1985), technology features in the form of booby traps used by ancient peoples to protect sacred objects. In the 1985 movie, such devices are *faked* by the protagonists, who sell adventures to millionaires, but end up in a real ancient temple. The film has references to Emilio Salgari's (1862-1911) literature that viewers unfamiliar with Italian popular culture may not detect (Malaysia, a pirate called "Tigre", and a Mrs. Yanez, are reminiscent of Salgari's settings and characters). It has been panned as a spinoff of Indiana Jones movies. However, it can be seen as an *ironic reversal* of such films (including the scene in which the "damsel in distress" ends up reckless driving for the hero that was supposed to rescue her), as well as a subtle meta-parody of the *consumption* of such cinema (suggesting that spectators buying into Indiana-Jones like adventures are being fooled through a scheme that relies on impressive technological means but is nothing but a hackneyed plot), or even as a self-deprecatory parable (like the protagonist, a movie director may start off cynically selling clichéd adventures but ends up being involved in one – his own passion for movie making).

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