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That *noir* passage between Europe and America.

The representation of criminals, law and social order

in western cinema.

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Abstract

A group of American and European films in the forties and fifties are characterised by a dark atmosphere and morbid fascination with crime and violent death. Normally populated by rootless characters who live as though suspended in an existential limbo, their narratives are pervaded by a sense of loss and displacement. Though these films were made mostly during the world war and its aftermath, they have left a permanent visual and cultural legacy, both in western and global cinema, related as they were to the transitory nature of metropolitan experience. Moreover, by breaking with previous national traditions of public representation of crime and sexual desire, they established cinema as a privileged locus for cultural criticism and debate about some of the moral and psychological consequences of modernity. Taking this as my point of departure, I analyse the relationship between Europe and America through the films' construction of an intercultural visual dialogue, making the case that this gathers and condenses contradictions and ambivalences in the modern human development project. In particular I focus on two aspects of this dialogue: on the one hand - since almost every country struggles with America's economic and cultural supremacy - the ambivalent image that America has in twentieth-century European debate about popular culture. On the other hand, I consider the importance of (visual) language in the relationship between enquiry, in films, into historical transformation, and the wider processes of social and cultural change. Finally, I claim that the lesson learned from this analysis should be used in contemporary sociological debate about the renewal of conceptual tools used to investigate the role of crime in our society.

Keywords: film noir, crime, culture, criminology, America

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Introduction

This dissertation has two central concerns. The first is the representation of crime in popular culture, the second is the necessity of integrating different disciplines in order to investigate the subject area effectively. By developing these two concerns, my aim is to show how the resulting dialogue between different fields of study can be used for a better understanding of the relationship between crime and contemporary culture, and between criminology and cultural/media studies. More precisely, this dissertation is about the analysis of a group of films, European and American, called noir, made predominantly during the forties and fifties. These visual stories are based on such themes as crime, desire, loss and displacement and are usually better described as revealing the dark side of the human soul. The analysis of such films has been instrumental in leading to a project about the struggle over cultural supremacy between the two continents most technologically advanced in the world, at least up to the end of the last century. The aim of my research is to show how the representation of crime and social order in such films is the result of some historical developments in the rituals of penal punishment, and of the media's struggle to structure the experience of its audiences. The extent to which film noir can help us unravel the terms of this complex issues is certainly the main challenge my dissertation has to face, within the processes of crossing several boundaries (cultural and methodological) and of coming to terms with certain social and political struggles embodied in these films.

The critical representation of crime in noir stories

This project has been developed in the firm belief that it can contribute significantly to the current debate, in social science and criminology, about the interconnections of such subjects as economy, culture, hegemony, social justice and punishment. The reason for choosing films over other kinds of cultural products has to do with the fact that cinema is the medium primarily

responsible for the creation of the visual culture, of central importance in the development of our contemporary society based on images and spectacles (Jay, 1994; Levin, 1993; Sturken and Cartwright, 2001). Moreover, the experience of watching (especially foreign) movies has developed a new definition of community, visibility and re-organisation of the self, as a consequence of living in a mass communication society where most interactions are mediated (Bourdieu, 1992; Elliott and Lemert, 2006; Thompson, 1995). Particularly during the first half of the twentieth century, western capitalist societies were competing for financial and social supremacy over the rest of world, partly by expanding the visual dimension of their cultural goods in order to promote their cultural and economic assets on an international scale. Like the novel in the previous century (Bakhtin, 1981, 3), film has been a privileged locus for cultural criticism and debate about the state of the social and moral progress of our society. Moreover, cinema as a social institution has been largely accountable for the emergence of the visual hegemony, or dominance, of the western countries over the rest of the world, by setting the agenda for the future developments of popular visual culture and its potential appeal to an international audience. Finally, the role of Hollywood, within the social process of 'Americanisation', is crucial in understanding the globalisation and interconnectedness of contemporary communication systems, and the problems this domination brings in terms both of democratic participation and the o the development of some forms of resistance to this prevailing development (Tunstall, 1977). In regard to film noir in particular, it has to be noted that this group of films came out during a period (forties and fifties) when America was acknowledged to be a major success, and superior as a nation - both financially and diplomatically - to any other country. Yet among so many achievements, certain anxieties within that society found expression through different forms of media narratives, film noir being one of them (Dimendberg, 2004).

Some authors would argue that the United States at that time developed a dual collective representation of themselves (Susman and Griffin, 1989, 26). On the one hand there was the optimistic, problem-solving attitude of a community always confident in the mix of self-reliance and drive that is so much part of a certain myth about America. On the other hand, more urgent social problems started enter into national mass media stories. Societal traumas such as the horrors

of two world wars, the unease of permanent segregation within society, and forms of social hypocrisy inherent in modern society became popular sources for stories in the press, in literature and in cinema. Narratives that go under the name of noir (novels, hardboiled stories, comic stories, films) allow what is repressed in the American psyche to surface, revealing the seamy, violent, lustful universe of a society that, in other respects, is one of the most advanced civilisations in human history.

Films noir are not the only kind of films about crime and violence, of course. What makes them special is the way they have come to occupy a special category of politically alternative visual stories among the communities of filmmakers, critics and audiences alike. The success and popularity of this narrative trend in fiction grew internationally, appealing both to audiences from unsophisticated backgrounds and to left-leaning and politically involved circles (Davis, 1998; Krutnik et al., 2007). A few other nations especially from the second half of the forties onwards, followed the American example by producing their own version of the anxieties and hypocrisies that tormented their countries, or by directing their social critique to a far away country (such as America) in order to bypass local censorship (Gorrara, 2003). This tendency in international popular culture expresses a re-articulation of the public discourse about crime, sex and violence, as a part of an ongoing social struggle between political, cultural and generational factions, while refashioning the development of a love-hate relationship between the European and American continent (Fay and Nieland, 2010; Truffaut, 2000).

I will introduce the history of film noir in the second section of chapter 1 (paragraphs 1.2.1, 1.2.2, 1.2.3), in which I will articulate the stages through which separate visual narratives became a homogeneous group of films. In this regard, film noir can be used as a practical example of the valorisation of symbolic forms by their audiences (Thompson, J.B., 1990, 12), sometimes re-articulating the 'meanings' of certain representations, even in contradiction to the producers' intentions and expectations. The term 'symbolic form' refers to a form that the mass communication system has to frame certain events in a particular way, to give them a particular definition, which might exert some influence on the actions of others (Bourdieu, 1992, 163-170). However, it is the use that audiences *make* of media products that somehow reduces the extent of this influence and

establishes its limits. Films noir were originally made simply as a variant of the American gangster films, a category very popular in the thirties. But as a result of their favourable reception, these dark crime stories have become an ex post facto category, a few years after their reception - an after the fact international cultural phenomenon with a new name - and new found reputation for social criticism and an alternative technique of storytelling. To explain how all this happened, and why it is important academic investigation of the representation of crime, is the scope of my research.

An interdisciplinary approach for a cultural criminology

The dialogue between criminology and mass media has always been erratic and mostly limited to certain issues, such as the effect on audiences of the violent depiction of crime, or the waves of moral panic propagated by media campaigns about law and order (Carrabine, 2008, 1; Cohen, 2002). For a long time, epistemological barriers and different methodological tools have prevented the two communities of researchers (criminologists and media scholars) from exchanging analytical tools and concepts in order to produce findings that can shed light on both disciplines. However the study of the representation of punishment and crime in mass media (Sparks, 1992) has gradually made some progress in the direction of contributing to a dialogue with other disciplines. Following this perspective, the importance of a criminological foundation to the study of crime fiction is found in the way certain issues of public representation of penal ritual in the past have been replaced by mass media narratives.

In the first section of chapter 1, I will address the criminological attempts towards an interdisciplinary dialogue, by reviewing some pieces of classic criminological literature on crime and media. In doing so, while introducing preliminary definitions of culture (Bauman, 1999) and representations (Hall, 1997b), my aim is to show how the progressive engagement of several criminological works with the notions of culture and mass communication has brought the two disciplines closer, making reciprocal contribution more likely and effective. For example,

Melossi's theory of social control (Melossi, 1990; 2008), in European and American societies, becomes the theoretical step for putting forward a theory of representation of the criminal in society related to change of political power and technical knowledge (Foucault, 1997; Leps, 1992). For example, Rafter (Rafter, 2000; 2006) reads her history of crime films through the criminological theories developed to classify criminal behaviour, contextualising her effort within the development of a popular criminology, as a source of information for viewers about crime and criminals. Other similar efforts in criminology will be reviewed, in order to find out how they engage with the issue of the representation of crime in mass media and to which extent their approach is still significant today for my research. In particular, my work is positioned within a new tendency in criminological studies, cultural criminology (Ferrell, 2001; Ferrell et al., 2004; Yar, 2010; Young, 2011), which addresses the issue of the role of crime in popular culture and the consequences of its representation in a media-saturated society. It is important, in this respect, that representation of crime is not taken for granted, but questioned in the light of global social development, which make audiences more reliant on shared sources of information and orientation. In particular, I find that the difficult task for cultural criminologists providing effective explanations of complex social issues requires a certain degree of reflexivity (Giddens, 1990) and sociological imagination (Mills, 2000) in order to bypass certain difficulties implicit in an interdisciplinary effort.

Given the high degree of reflexivity of the film noir mode of narration in the context of the dominant narrative paradigm in Hollywood, I put forward a parallel between this narrative mode and cultural criminology's attempt to challenge a more traditional orientation within criminology that is suspicious of drastic changes in research paradigm and political agenda. The development of a new programme of action in social research and of a more flexible analytical toolbox becomes one of the main priorities for a new generation of researchers, who believe popular culture has become the place where people negotiate some of the central political issues of the day, such as the contested notions of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity and social order (Elliott and Lemert, 2006, 65).

I have developed the study of my research material along three reflective stages of social critical theory (Honneth, 1991). The first stage is an ideological account of the development of culture industries, as developed by the group of scholars known as the 'Frankfurt School', about the consequences of the domination of one society over others, in terms of social conformism and moral autonomy (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997; Adorno et al, 2002). The second stage provides a historical account of the rules of discourse in western practices of punishment in terms of power and knowledge (Foucault, 1997). The third concerns the political dimension of psychoanalysis, questioning the value of rationalisation (Craib, 2001, 5) and 'tracing the imprint of the social, cultural network upon unconscious passion' (Elliott, 2002, 176) in cultural practices such as films.

In the second section of chapter 1 (paragraphs 1.2.4-1.2.10) I retrace the stages of the development of my research project, within a general awareness of the implicit limitations of a comparative perspective and the lack of an audience study to support my initial hypotheses. To counteract these structural limitations, I use a multi-perspectival approach based on narrative and semiotic analysis of the film samples, selected after one pilot study and previous comparisons between different punishment systems in western societies and between the systems of representation in American and European cinema. I have called this critical procedure, following J.B. Thompson, a piecemeal approach, since, instead of searching for a general criterion which will magically solve all the disputes, this approach allows the analyse of the issue, by breaking down the problem and trying to define some of the conditions under which conflicting interpretations and conflicting views can be compared and debated (Thompson, J.B., 1990, 26).

The samples selected are the American film *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1946) directed by Tay Garnett for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, based on a 1934 James M. Cain novel, and the Italian *Ossessione* (1943) directed by Luchino Visconti, made under fascism, and unofficially inspired by the same novel. As far as the American case is concerned, Garnett's noir film is very different from the MGM standard lavish production, but very instructive in the way the actresses and actors performances contribute to turning the political criticism of the novel into a showcase piece for film stars. It thus becomes a rare case of a conservative approach to narration being very critical of social institutions and authorities. On the other hand, *Ossessione* is a visual experiment,

incorporating some aspects of French lyrical cinema of the thirties with realist depiction of everyday life. The combination of its social criticism and use of real locations made it the forerunner of Italian Neorealism, which started a few years later.

The spectacle of crime and punishment

One of the points of convergence between the different topics in my work is the way mass media replaced old rituals of public display of criminals in the definition of legal and illegal activities, of what is punishable and what is tolerated, of what is visible and what is hidden, within the general process of the secularisation of penal law (Durkheim, 1899-1900; Erikson, 1966) and the democratisation of society (Elias, 2000; Melossi, 1990; Weber, 2001). Chapter 2 addresses these issues, starting with the dramaturgy of the scaffold, the form of entertainment provided by public executions in the past; emphasising how old forms of punishment were focussed on the condemned's body, whereas modern forms of retribution are individualised in the daily routines of prison cells. This social invisibility of the condemned in modern society overlaps historically with an over-representation of fictional crime stories in popular culture, in which the gradual emergence of a mass media system becomes central in mediating cultural and moral tales for a growing audience, while emerging as a new mechanism of social control (Thompson, J.B., 1990, 3). Within the same chapter is included a study of melodrama as the new narrative mode parallel to the general process of secularisation and rationalisation in modern society. Defined as the poetic of excess for its display of intense human emotions (Brook, 2004; Gledhill, 1991a; Singer, 2001), melodramatic stories articulated the psychological and moral conflicts of people adapting to a new way of life. Its flexible set of dramatic conventions was soon exploited by both American and European cinema, transposing written stories to visual ones. Alfred Hitchcock is the film director who distils in his work the way in which melodramatic narratives of guilt, along with some elements of European art cinema, migrated to the American big screen. He was able to convey, within Hollywood conventions, some remarkable visual articulations of gothic literature and

melodrama: the two main sources of inspiration for popular culture and film noir in particular. Furthermore, Hitchcock's films give the opportunity to explore the psychological dimension of melodramatic stories. An analytical framework from psychology (the cinematic excess) can disentangle the complex interplay between unconscious desire and repression through the analysis of film texts. It can tap into that tradition of critical theory which has found in the Unconscious Freud's most subversive discovery, in revealing the contradictions between civilisation and instincts, pleasure and repression (Freud, 1964; 2005; Marcuse, 1969; Jameson, 2002; Whitebook, 1995, 7).

The notion of culture

Since the development of a film analysis requires a proper articulation of a theory of culture to which ultimately the concept of representation is related, chapter 3 introduces a tripartite theory of culture, emphasising how the advent of modernity, Americanisation and popular culture disrupted the unity and coherence of (especially) European culture. Each section in this chapter deals with a different dimension of this disruption, as much as with a different sphere of operation . The first relates to the notion of culture as it was developed within the culturalist tradition, formed by and Matthew Arnold (1963) F.R. and Q.D. Leavis (1930) and by a group of scholars leading to the establishment of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in the sixties (Hoggart, 1957; Thompson, E.P., 1968; Williams, R., 1971; 1973). The elitist and aesthetic conceptions of the first contributions are progressively replaced by Williams's 'structure of feeling' (1973) as a dual conception of culture, which relates its definition to tradition and conservation (the structural side) on the one hand and creativity and change (as articulation of new emotions) on the other. This is the micro-sphere of culture, the microsocial context within which culture is structured and experienced. In this way, a film can be analysed as incorporating a certain structure of feeling, with regard to its sources of inspiration and condition of production and distributions: feelings to which a viewer might relate, or not, according to the circumstances. Section II develops the macro

dimension of culture, as resulting from the multinational development of mass media organisations and its consequences in terms of globalisation of communication and Americanisation of popular culture (Tomlison, 1999; Thompson, J.B., 1995, 78; Tunstall, 1977). Cinema can be seen as a typical example of the merging of the economic sphere with the cultural one (Du Gay, 1997), with a resulting separation of production and consumption of visual stories (Thompson, J.B., 1995, 29), and the emerging ambivalent attitude towards this displacement, oscillating between imperialism and the widening of horizons in a parochial and oppressive environment (Billington et al., 1991; Hebdige, 1988; Tomlison, 1999).

The third part of this exploration involves more the theoretical dimensions of culture, as it develops an ideological theory of culture and cultural criticism, exploring the moral and social consequences of the transformation of culture in language of domination and social exploitation, as a result of an increasing rationalisation of western society and its cultural practices. Within each of these conceptions, however, there is a combination of negative critique of current culture with the possibility of its overthrow, which are going to be developed in the course of the research.

Film analysis and social context

Chapter 4 will develop the analysis of the Italian film *Ossessione*, with regard to the artistic movements and political climate behind it. Chapter 5 will deal with the film *The Postman Rings Twice*, analysed in the context of the studio system and its censorship, and in relation to the novel which is its inspiration. More importantly, it is the role of cultural policing (McGuigan, 1996, 6), proper to media institutions, which needs to be articulated at this stage, in order to emphasise those representational practices which favour certain subjects to the exclusion of others, while presenting this process of selection as natural, or taken for granted.

Finally, chapter 6 develops those psychological issues which have been introduced throughout the dissertation, in order to stress that representation does not end in a sociological, historical or economic reductionism. In culture, there is a psychological dimension, too, an

imaginary state (Elliott, 1992, 172), so hard to pin down with a perfect methodology but extremely fascinating and creative to investigate. For indeed, crime films, and noir in particular, are about loss, which can involve mourning a lost time of innocence in childhood (as in most noir films), or about the loss of a position of supremacy (as in gangster films), or the loss of reality in the process of representation and symbolisation, proper to a creative work. Whichever interpretation is closer to the truth, I see this dissertation as first and foremost a journey in different spheres of imaginations - sociological, historical, cinematic, psychological and criminological.

The question with which I start this journey is: how can we connect the issue of punishment to one of entertainment?

Chapter 1 A review of the literature and some methodological notes

In the first section of this chapter, I shall review some approaches in criminological theory to mass media and their products, and deal with the way such perspectives have influenced certain trends in the academic agenda. Starting from the famous notion of 'moral panic' developed in the early seventies, criminology studies have become increasingly concerned with the supposed snowballing effects on audiences' behaviour of certain media representations of social disorder and crime. The aim of these studies was mostly to disclose the process of deviancy amplification engendered by the media in their coverage of youth subcultures and collective actions. Relatively few such studies have dealt directly with crime films and cinema - and still fewer with film noir - as impacting on popular culture by making visible certain 'new' aspects of crime and violence previously neglected in visual narratives and public debate. My aim is to fill this theoretical gap by tapping into cultural criminology's interest in the increasing spread of fictional crime stories in our daily lives as sources of information, identity and styles for media consumers and moral commentators alike.

I will start by giving a definition of moral panic and by examining the legacy for most criminological studies resulting from the publicizing of this idea. Then my analysis will turn to some preliminary definitions of culture and representation and the way they play a big part within some criminological debates on media practices and social control, especially within a comparative perspective. The assessment of criminology's contribution to cinema studies will be considered in the light of recent publications on the subject and their limitations in dealing with visual narratives. The concept of cultural criminology will be introduced, with its attempts to bridge the gap between study of crime and study of its symbolic representation. My aim here is to show how, by pursuing the example of film noir and its reflexivity, it is possible to introduce an alternative research practice that reveals the hidden component - what one might call the return of the repressed - in much criminological work undertaken so far, thus broadening future possibilities of social analysis and criminological investigation.

Part I The study of fictional crime and criminals according to criminologists

1.1.1 The youth problem and amplification of deviancy: the case of moral panic

In 1972, the publication of Stanley Cohen's *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (Cohen, 2002) sparked a series of works on moral panic, amplification of deviancy, youth sub-cultures, and the style and role of the media in labelling[1] new emerging social phenomena in terms of social problems and public anxieties (Cohen and Young, 1973; Hall and Jefferson, 1976; Hall et al., 1978; Hebdidge, 1987; McRobbie and Garber, 1977). The case study in this work analyses social reactions to fights between juvenile groups, Mods and Rockers, in the seaside resort of Brighton during the sixties, which provoked police intervention, wide media coverage and subsequent public debate. These two groups, of the same working-class origins, were initially based on a loose antagonism and unclear identity structure - until their first fights and ensuing media publicity changed the nature of the opposition. Cohen noticed how, from that point on media attention provoked a widening gap between the groups, a clearer definition of their divergent styles and sources of inspiration, and the connotation of the two groups as rival gangs (Cohen, 2002, 139). This polarisation reminded Cohen of the two rival gangs, the Sharks and Jets, in the Hollywood musical *West Side Story* (1957), elaborated as the media tapped into previous collective imagery to construct a recognisable polarity for their audience.

In theoretical terms, this work shows how a certain degree of public expectation, accompanied by diffuse feelings of anxiety about some societal situations, 'allows' the media to act as agents of moral indignation, or as 'moral entrepreneurs' (Becker, 1963, 147). In this sense, the

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[1] Labelling refers to the social processes through which certain individuals and groups classify and categorise the behaviour of others as deviant or criminal (Muncie, 2001, 159). Deviancy itself has to be regarded as difference in behaviour and culture from a dominant social system, resulting from different interpretations of experience (Thomas quoted in Sumner, 1994, 82). If the difference is tolerated, it becomes part of the *subculture* of a social group. Otherwise, if censured by the criminal system, it is defined as crime. Between these two extremes, of course, there are grey areas that can become the terrain of struggle and negotiation about one definition or the other.

media provide interpretative frameworks, for instance by characterising young people as troublemakers and ultimately criminals, to make sense of otherwise complex social phenomena. Cohen's analysis is inspired by symbolic interactionism and the labelling approach, which draws on a set of theoretical assumptions emphasising deviancy as being determined by people's reaction to others' behaviour, rather than focusing on properties intrinsic to deviant personalities themselves (Becker, 1963, 8; Muncie, 2001, 159-160). According to this perspective, the media play a strategic role in creating a gallery of folk types (with saints and heroes on the one side, and fools, villain, and devils on the other) in order to polarise and dramatise these events and to trigger a spiral of social reaction (Cohen, 2002, 8). At the same time, they provide new products to be sold in the parallel news market. As a result of this dual role, the mass media enact an ambivalent role, contributing on the one hand to 'a new construction of the social reality of crime' (Hall et al., 1978, 29), while on the other 'they operate according to certain definitions of what is newsworthy' (Cohen and Young, 1973a, 15). In this connection, analysis of how the media package unusual social events in stereotypical fashion overlaps with analysis of the way a community experiences a 'boundary crisis' (Erikson, 1966), when some group members move away from traditional norms of social expectations and moral orientation.

Since its inception, moral panic has become a critical tool that can be applied to a variety of social situations, especially when society is undergoing rapid change (Carrabine, 2008, 166). Its wide application, however, has undermined its explicative force, as it seems to have become too much part of everyday discourse about crime. In fact, seeing moral panic everywhere becomes a way of desensitising people's reaction to it (Carrabine, 2008, 180), or has rendered this critical framework 'explanatorily divisive and misleading' (Sparks, 1992, 8). Moreover, the original inspiration for this critical tool, from a media studies point of view, lies in the work of Marshall McLuhan[2] and his account of how society has undergone an epochal change in moving from print to electronic media. According to the Canadian scholar - author of the famous slogan, 'The

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[2] In his Introduction to the third edition of his work, Cohen admits that the term was 'probably' picked up by him and Jock Young from McLuhan's *Understanding Media* (1964) (Cohen, 2002, xxxv, fn 1). References to McLuhan's 'implosive factor' in the media, as the continual bombardment of images related to otherwise insignificant phenomena, are made in Cohen and Young, 1973a, 340. More generally, for the importance of this theoretical stance, see Carrabine, 2008, 35, 173.

medium is the message' - the 'message' of any medium is found more in the changes in human behaviour and attitude resulting from use of this medium than in the effect of the message itself on people's conduct (McLuhan, 1964, 8). Especially in reference to its 'global village' metaphor, this approach has been heavily criticised, especially for its neglect of 'local' resistance by recipients of the globalising tendencies of mass media, and for its reliance on catchy slogans rather than sociologically grounded reflections (Meyrowitz, 1985). While the moral panic category is still useful in explaining some scapegoating processes and social alarms about contemporary issues, it needs to be updated with reference to more recent theoretical contributions and accurate reflections, so as to differentiate a new analysis of social crisis, or new problematic phenomenon, from repetition of the previous 'research schema'. An attempt to do this is made by McRobbie and Thornton (2005), where the two authors highlight, among other things, the shift in social control policies from political authorities to media strategies. In this way, what was once perceived in terms of a political issue, as social problem, now becomes one of the many personal or collective dramas staged for a public of consumers (ibid., 488-489). In other words, mass media are no longer just the magnifying glass of a social crisis, but the policy makers, structuring the way a social issue comes to public attention as a self-contained and highly dramatised matter that is unrelated to wider problems of public justice and social exploitation.

1.1.2 A preliminary definition of culture and representation

One of the interesting points in Cohen's analyisis of subcultures and social change is the way it makes us think about the two different but interrelated aspects of culture implicit in a process of social change. On the one hand, we have the aspect of culture which stresses creativity, rule-breaking and innovation; on the other, we find a concept of culture which stresses routinisation, continuity and social order (Bauman, 1999, xvi-xvii). Culture of the first type fits into the categories of subcultures, resistance and challenge to a prevailing tradition (Hall and Jefferson, 1976; Hebdidge, 1987; McRobbie and Garber, 1977), while the second type is more related to the

way a set of cultural habits and social routines accord with the boundaries each social system establishes to preserve its collective identity, stability and order (Craib, 1992, 41; Young, 2011, 87). Most of the sociological work on youth movements mentioned in the previous section founded on the basic assumption that culture is 'the way the social relations of a group are structured and shaped: but it is also the way those shapes are experienced, understood and interpreted' (Clarke et al., 1976, 11). For example, social groups such as punks, an international youth movement in the late seventies, are described by social analysts as an attempt to resolve social tensions by adopting a style (in clothes, music, language) which 'magically' recovers the lost sense of working-class community (Hebdidge, 1987, 56-57). An individual, or a group, in other words, has to make choices about the style, identity and representation it adopts from a pre-existent range of models in society. Each choice in turn has to be negotiated within a common language, a common culture, with a different range of opportunities (in time and place) for self-expression or social censorship, in line with the two versions of culture already mentioned.

The concept of culture will be properly discussed at a later stage. What I wish to stress at this point is how certain notions of culture and style in social science are related to a wider notion of communication and representation. From this perspective, if we stress the notion of culture as a group of shared values and meanings (however contested they might be in their entirety), then language becomes one of the media through which thoughts, ideas and feelings are represented in a culture (Hall, 1997, 1). More basically, production and circulation of meanings occurs through culture and language, so that representation becomes a second step in the process of human communication, one 'which enters into the field only after things have been fully formed and their meaning constituted' (ibid., 5). The study of culture, language and its elements (sounds, words, images) becomes the means to understanding the crucial role of the symbolic domain at the very heart of social life (ibid., 3), and how these elements carry meanings which are negotiated in a communicative context, in forms of struggle, or unequal exchange (ibid., 4). During this exchange we, as individuals or groups, give meanings to things around us according to the images, emotions and values we associate with them. For example, the idea of Americanisation of European popular culture has been associated with a wide range of different feelings, from complete despair to

ecstatic joy, (Baudrillard, 1988; Adorno and Horheimer, 1997; Hoggart, 1957), as it increasingly denied national European cultures the process of sharing a set of common values based on geographic proximity and common language or tradition. A question important for my research arises here: if representation needs to rely on a common language, how will a foreign culture, such as the American, come to share the cultural space in which the production of meaning occurs? Part of my aim in this thesis is to answer this question.

1.1.3 The cultural studies perspective on criminology and mass media: Gramsci and the return of the repressed

As already stated, the success of Cohen's work led to the publication of a series of studies investigating several aspects of mass media activity and their influence on criminological research. Among them, the contribution from the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) has been very influential by connecting criminological issues, such as deviancy amplification, with the notion of state power and social justice. *Policing the Crisi*s. *Mugging, the State and Law and Order* (Hall et al., 1978) is still considered 'the landmark text bridging criminology and cultural studies', where 'the politics of signification is prioritised over the sociology of labelling' (Carrabine, 2008, 36). Moreover, in this work, American media research based on 'effect studies' is challenged by considering the work of continental scholars such as Levi-Strauss (1972), Barthes (1997; 1993), Althusser (1970) and Gramsci (1971), who connect issues of an emergent popular mythology in modern society with ideological and social domination. Unlike their American counterparts' preoccupation with the consequences of audiences' media exposure, Europeans were more concerned with the meaning of media products, with the social role of communication systems in producing political consensus and social control, and with how this affects issues of race, practices of resistance, and subcultures (Turner, 1996, 69). In this respect, semiotics and the construction of subjectivity in language were seen as a way

forward from the more functionalist and behaviourist-oriented American approach to 'mass culture' (Harris, 1992, 113-114).

From its first pages, *Policing the Crisis* offers a close reading of news articles dealing with street robbery - the 'mugging panic' - in order to examine how certain anxieties about crime and public disorder can be popularised in media practices by associating them with racial problems and moral panic. Once again, the influence of American culture and language is lamented, as institutions of social control seem to gather around the 'new' name of mugging as a cover or front for old problems of deprivation in poor urban areas and racial stereotyping. The aim of this mobilisation of moral resources is to promote both the repressive powers of an 'exceptional state' and consent from an authoritarian 'law and order' society (Barker, 2003, 408; Hall et al., 1978, 273-274). The moral panic in this respect becomes 'one of the principal forms of ideological consciousness by means of which a "silent majority" is won over to the support of increasingly coercive measures on the part of the state, and lends its legitimacy to a "more than usual" exercise of control' (Hall et al., 1978, 221).

The elaboration of Gramsci's concept of hegemony turns out to be essential in the CCCS theoretical toolbox for assessing the mass media's role in the construction of social and political consensus. In *Policing the Crisis* the main challenge is to explain the shift from a 'consensual' to a more 'coercive' management of class struggle as witnessed in the late seventies (ibid., 118). A class, for Gramsci, becomes hegemonic if, instead of confining itself to its own interests, it takes into account the popular and democratic demands of other classes and social groups with similar interests, and forms an alliance (Simon, 1982, 23). In the same way, for Hall and colleagues, mass media in the late seventies had common political interest with the government and police in keeping society under control. They did so by providing moral tales about social problems in terms of moral panic and the need to restore social order, as a way of disguising deeper social problems. That crisis of hegemony resulting from the global economic recession of 1973, which challenged the hierarchy of political power in western democracies, was one which the media were in a position to negotiate in British society in the seventies (Harvey, 1989, 145). In a Gramscian perspective, during this time the media were able to channel current social anxieties about an

uncertain future in a conservative and repressive way, by allying themselves with social groups that shared similar social order concerns: the criminal justice system, the police, right-leaning parties and ordinary citizens affected by such upheaval.

From a methodological point of view, the advantages of using Gramsci's theory of dominance have to be measured against earlier Marxist positions, whose weakness lies in 'their inability to explain the role of the "free consent" of the governed to the leadership of the governing classes under capitalism' (Hall, 1982, 85). At the centre of the Gramscian shift was 'the rediscovery of ideology and the social and political significance of language, and the politics of sign and discourse: the re-discovery of ideology; or, it would be more appropriate to say, the return of the repressed' (Hall, 1982a, 88). But the other target in this methodological battle was American behavioural science, with its belief in an incontrovertible set of facts, 'innocent of the framework of theory in which they are identified, which can be subjected to empirical verification according to a universal scientific method' (Hall, 1982, 58). The downside of these researches was their focus on behavioural change of a nature similar to that produced by political and advertising campaigns. But how could such means explain the influence of crime news on people's behaviour? The strength of cultural analysis, in contrast, lay in its capacity to relate the ideological dimension (domination) of media activity to other practices within a social context (formation of consent), so as to offer an explanation about connections between representation of crime, policing and the moralities embedded within them (Sparks, 1992, 21).

From this perspective, Hall published a famous article, originally in 1973, disputing the linear model of communication used in American research - sender/message/receiver (Hall, 1992, 128) - and emphasising the difference between the activity of media producers and media recipients. Where the former 'en-codes' media messages according to operational routines and meaning structures predefined during production, the latter 'de-codes' the message by accepting, negotiating or opposing it according to different logics of consumption that cannot be predetermined. It should be emphasised, at this point, that Hall's formulation of this communicative model in mass media elaborates the two aspects of culture working more generally in society, as mentioned above (1.2). From this point of view, mass media's main activity is to

incorporate concepts, ideas and emotions in a symbolic form (news, film, music etc.). In doing so, however, the media have to take into account the shared codes in the culture where they operate (Hall, 1997a, 10), in order to make the reading, interpretation and circulation of their symbolic forms possible. The meaning of a symbolic form, in this sense, will always be unstable, as in each society different circuits of meaning are always circulating, sometimes overlapping in relation to diverse subjects (ibid.). Thus, the representation of crime by media is not the only source of information for an individual about the definition of a social situation, since he participates in a bigger arena where there is a constant network of validation and authentication between different speakers (Leps, 1992, 4).

1.1.4 The 'Great Denial', fear of crime and beyond

These sophisticated discussions of crime, media and social anxiety turned out to be very controversial in the eighties (Sim et al., 1987). In particular, their claim that social crisis was used by ruling elites to turn attention away from social problems of deprivation was challenged on the ground of being too romantic towards deviancy and the poor classes (Sim et al., 1987, 42; Young, 1987, 350). The new tendency in criminology, Left Realism (Young, 1997; 2001), was intended in a certain sense to oppose the harsh penal policies enacted by the Home Office during Thatcherism, at the same time criticising the approach of those left-wing criminologists (Left Idealism) who, while dealing with crime, focused on the criminal justice system and the media as the main generators of moral panic campaigns and the stereotyping of marginal groups.

Left Realists were at the centre of a new re-orientation of the Labour Party's attempt to regain popular support by devising a new approach to the role of the police and their relationship with the public (Sim et al., 1987, 52). To achieve this they initiated a flow of information aimed to help prevent crime, especially in urban areas (Sim et al., 1987, 46; Young, 1987, 339). The main targetwas the 'Great Denial' of the late 1960s and 1970s (Young, 1997, 475) by the Left Idealists in not acknowledging the urgency of the problem of crime in British society, especially among

marginal groups, but by focusing instead on 'irrational' moral panic campaigns generated by media and the justice system. The methodological tool for enacting this 'new' orientation in criminology, under the slogan of 'taking crime seriously', was the survey (Carrabine, 2008, 41; Young, 1988, 173), and was used to construct alternative databases to those of establishment criminology. According to this view, a more effective source of information about crime would promote implementation of better prevention policies and reduction in the fear of crime among communities (Young, 1988, 173). Traditional methods of gathering crime statistics largely through police reports were key filters in processing some events and not others as 'criminal', thus creating an unknown mass of unrecorded crime: the 'dark figure' against which no action would be taken (Carrabine, 2008, 41). This inactivity, in turn, caused public anxiety and fear of crime, revealed in corresponding questionnaires.

Within this climate, Hall and the CCCS were attacked for limiting themselves to content analysis of mass media news, without a detailed analysis of the social contexts of mass media production and reception (Erickson, 1991, 221), while Jock Young set the agenda of this realist approach 'against those idealist theories which portray moral panics as media-instigated events without any rational basis and against those writers who talk glibly of irrational fears without specifying what a rational fear would look like' (Young, 1987, 338).

A fierce debate ensued about several aspects of the concept of the fear of crime: the way the notion was inadequately theorised (Hollway and Jefferson, 1997, 255), its uncertain foundation (is it rational or irrational?) (McLaughlin, 2001, 118), the concept of rationality itself that was never seriously tackled, even by Left Realism (Sparks, 1992, 10),and interminable methodological problems with the 'measurement' of fear in questionnaires (Carrabine, 2008, 41-42).

In the effort to reclaim the law and order debate from the conservative agenda, most research on media and crime returned to the effect of the stimulus-response model of most American research in the sixties (experience of crime leading to more fear of crime and so on), while some other researchers dealt with the issue of fear of crime in fictional crime stories on television (Carrabine, 2008, 42-43). One example of the latter trend is the publication of Richard Sparks's *Television and the Drama of Crime* (1992). The main advantage of this perspective is to

take the issue of crime and media away from this death struggle between deviancy amplification and media-induced copycat effects, which have been the two commonplaces of criminological reflection on the matter for a long time (Mason, 2003, 5-7). In doing so, Sparks develops a conception of the anxieties related to watching crime fiction, as a contribution to a better understanding of the expressive and emotive dimension of public ways of dealing with issues of punishment and social order, this being a departure from methodological concerns with 'measuring' the fear of crime. In this respect, 'Fear is not simply a quantity, of which one possesses larger or smaller amounts: rather, it is a mode of perception, even perhaps a constitutive feature of personal identity' (Sparks, 1992, 14). Moreover, Sparks's analysis deals with crime fiction as a dramatic moral structure of outrage and reassurance (ibid., 4), giving particular attention to the relationship between a recurrent stock of situations, settings and events in fictional narratives and the context of its domestic reception. The subsequent emphasis, in this connection, is on the way television structures the daily routines[3] of its viewers, within a wider search for information and knowledge about the outside world. In our daily experience with TV Raymond Williams argues that we are not in fact watching a single programme, but a continuous *flow* of images and sound (Williams, R., 1974, 86), an almost undistinguishable load of visual information that is the defining moment of what TV has become as a cultural form. Along with the experience of watching crime fiction in a comfortable setting lies the assumption that viewers are addressed as members of the television audience, so that an individual experience turns out to be a collective ritual of sharing the same visual event (Sparks, 1992, 47; Thompson, J.B., 1995, 209). In other words, television seems to be the point of contact between public discourse about crime and the private life of leisure and intimate feelings of individual members of the audience. The main merit of this work was, at the time of its appearance, to bring an original contribution into a then neglected area of the criminological debate. The lack of attention given to the way TV scheduling becomes part of a modern routine of time organisation had caused criminologists to fail to notice the link between the

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[3] The concept of routinisation is part of Giddens's theory of structuration, according to which social practices produce and are reproduced by actors in their practices. Routine, in this framework, is integral both to the personality of the agent, in his/her daily activity, and to the institutions of society, which are such only through their continued reproduction (Giddens, 1984, 60).

formative frameworks of television production and the formed routines of daily time for the viewer (Sparks, 1992, 44).

Another positive aspect of this study involves bringing together analytical tools from different disciplines in order to establish a productive dialogue between different fields of expertise, as a way of overcoming some limitations in previous studies. In particular, Sparks recognises the necessity in television studies of developing a scheme both for interpreting television texts and for interpreting the television audience (ibid., 106). As a solution to this problem, he borrows Eco's analytical tools about semiotics of texts (Eco, 1984) to design a scheme for inquiring into television crime fiction 'which is more adequate to the internal organization of the stories as well as more suggestive both of the kinds of activity through which viewers may "accomplish" or "realize" their meaning' (Sparks, 1992, 107). In doing so, he introduces the notions of narrations (story and discourse), style and resolution, as a way to analyse and make sense of the internal organisation of his fictional stories. Moreover, he uses the concept of model reader, or viewer in his case, which is the hypothetical or implicit addressee of any message in human communication (Sparks, 1992, 110; Eco, 1984, 7). For example, a television crime drama is created with the expectation that a certain segment of audience might watch it, according to various market research, or previous similar successful formulas. In devising a new story, the author has to make some assumptions and inferences about what to include in, or leave out from, these stories, and what stylistic devices will be used, to maximise audience reception. In terms of mass media production, this implies that, in order to maximise its audience, a product has to be easily understood, and therefore rely on a process of routinisation of production and distribution (Sparks, 1992, 120).

Sparks's efforts to overcome the limitations of content analysis by including a discursive approach in its analytical model is certainly a step towards greater sophistication in a certain type of criminology-related media study. However, his analysis of police drama offers no direct assessment of the specificity of the nature of the images and the extent of the difference between visual fiction and other media as divergent forms of entertainment and social control. Moreover, his focus on the fear of crime leaves the door open to a simplified notion of the feelings involved in

watching crime fiction, with an emphasis on the negative side of human emotions. In a later work on collective ethnography, Sparks would return to study the collective and personal feelings of a local community towards crime and social control. Here he used a concept – that of 'sensibilities' – which was more comprehensive and adequately articulated than fear of crime (Girling et al., 2000, 12), as it was based on a concept of culture, promoting and forbidding certain emotions, related to certain social issues (Garland, 1991, 213). Within this notion, the various ambiguities and complexities of people's attitudes towards (either real or fictional) crime are included in a theoretical model, whose aim becomes to appreciate political and moral resonances of the category 'crime' in the context and settings where they occur (Girling et al., 2000, 15). With the validation of research on a particular community, Sparks and his colleagues can move beyond an interpretation of media products and focus on respondents making sense of crime in their everyday life. The question for my research, at this point, becomes how to overcome the lack of an ethnographic approach in debating crime and its representation; and the extent to which this lack can be counteracted, limited, or tackled at a methodological level.

1.1.5 Social representation of criminals in America and Europe

From the key texts examined so far, it is possible to isolate and sum up for each decade a theme that has characterised that particular era. Thus, in the seventies criminological attention focused on waves of moral panic and deviancy amplification, while in the eighties the focus was on 'policing' and changing definitions of social crisis. Finally, in the nineties, the issue of fear of crime gained significant attention as the focus of a new interest in the study of media and crime. During this development, criminology engaged with increasingly sophisticated symbolic forms, employing new methods, and revealing greater ambition to address new issues that were closer to current sensitivities and expectations. Sparks's work on crime drama, for example, brought the relatively unexplored territory of fiction into the study of crime and crime control, for which purpose he borrowed analytic tools from other disciplines such as media studies and semiotics.

Cross-fertilisation between different fields of study was to increase in the following years, and was a sort of invitation to go 'beyond the confines of criminology' (Braithwaite quoted in Garland and Sparks, 2006, 3) as a traditional, self-contained subject. Resulting attention to new areas of popular culture, on the eve of the new century, can be seen as a result of the challenge posed by 'late modernity' to intellectual projects engaged with contemporary social themes. Melossi's article on 'Changing Representations of the Criminal' (Melossi, 2000) tackles the issue of how criminals are represented, referring mainly to the field of criminological theory, but also embarking on a few forays into cinema and other media as a new way of addressing 'old' issues of stereotyping and social exclusion. This approach allows the research to grasp particularities of a social context mediated by communication media, while developing the issue of representation as a theoretical bridge between criminology, media and American studies.

In his theoretical framework, Melossi focuses on the way criminological knowledge in a sense predicates social domination over the representation, already established in other fields of society, of certain social groups (Melossi, 2008, 53). In contemporary life, in fact, the control of crime is subject to social practices, proper to democratic societies, based on construction of consensus (Melossi, 2000, 297). The Italian author argues that concepts about criminals follow cyclical fashion, varying between a sympathetic attitude and hostility and hatred, depending on economic conditions, imprisonment rates, liberal attitudes in social institutions and so on (Melossi, 2000, 296).

More generally, Melossi refers to the way in which language, social institutions and, specifically, the mass media offer an area of mediation and management of social conflict involving the definition of criminals and social images related to them (Melossi, 2008, 157). This discourse is framed within a broader notion of democracy as the moment of intensification of communication between elites and masses (Melossi, 2008, 80), which was achieved more effectively and earlier in American society than in its European counterpart (Melossi, 1990, 116). During their social-order crisis, European societies strengthened the State, the political structure of their administrative apparatus, whereas American democracy aimed instead at the participation of great numbers of people in the construction of its political community (Melossi, 2008, 99). The

assimilation of large masses of newcomers always occurred under the aegis of a Wasp[4] hegemony (ibid.,102), which treated new waves of immigrants with suspicion. But in the American melting pot such assimilation was still essential in creating consensus around social institutions and political projects as the most important elaborations of American social thought between 1880 and 1920 in the context of immigration and its integration and contribution to American democracy (Melossi, 1990, 105).

Melossi refers mainly to transitional stage of assimilation of 'strangers' or ethnic minorities into American democracy when he talks about the changing representation of criminals in western societies. He claims that the American penitentiary was the main gateway to the social 'integration' of newcomers to the American Republic (Melossi, 2008, 94), ironically transforming a policy of social exclusion into one of 'inclusion', albeit within repressive institutions. Nevertheless, some aspects of American society, such as the Constitutional First Amendment guaranteeing freedom of public speech, and free-market rules against authoritarian economic regulations, were the basis for a free flow of communication and goods, and for greater public participation in collective life. In turn, this flow produced the democratic shift from a social control based on censorship to one based on production of social meaning. In other words, in the process of personal integration into democratic life, governmental intervention by means of law was replaced by informal social interaction as a social mechanism of self-regulation (ibid., 110). Elsewhere, Melossi contrasts fascism and the Soviet Union on the one hand and American democracy on the other (Melossi, 1990, 82-83). The former were based on coercion, centralising power in the state along with a strong connection to its leader or governing party, while the latter exemplified an almost stateless society, where the construction of consensus is key to the functioning of public life (ibid.). However, the process of integration in America was by no means universal, as some groups experienced better levels of social organisation than others (Melossi, 2008, 123), and democracy does not dispense with coercion (Melossi, 1990, 89). Nevertheless, Melossi's assumptions

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[4] WASP is the acronym for white Anglo-Saxon Protestant. The first substantial migration to America from Europe was that of the English between 1607 and 1660. This established the English character of American institutions, language and culture against which later ethnic groups were forced to adapt (Thompson, K., 1994, 19).

regarding the effectiveness of the American democratic model, work very well in explaining the reasons for American 'success' in terms of economic social involvement and personal integration in a political project. America developed a solid economic and social fabric much earlier, in terms of a society with more channels of communication among its members, especially in comparison with the less dynamic and more fragmented European system, divided by language, class system and local traditions.

1.1.6 Knowledge and power in discourse

The details of Melossi's theoretical framework work less well when he tries to connect aspects of the social definition of criminals with a wider system of representation in society in general, and with cinema in particular. For example, during the Depression era, with a sharp rise in unemployment and imprisonment, rhetoric about the 'public enemy' in the thirties cannot be explained without reference to the diverse range of films released by the Studios at this period (Melossi, 2000, 305; Melossi, 2008, 132, 158). The titles of many films are negative, as in the case of *Scarface, Shame of a Nation* (1932) and *Public Enemy* (1931), but their content is much more complex and ambiguous than their titles suggest (Munby, 1999). Moreover, they are the result of specific production conditions at Warner Brothers and United Artists: two American film studios, whose history of internal development must be acknowledged in order to contextualise a cultural practice within the institutional routines of the Hollywood system (Balio, 1995).

It is true that during certain periods 'similar' negative knowledge about criminals might circulate, supported (or reflected) in diverse social institutions - political, religious, financial and cultural. Marie-Christine Leps's study about deviance in nineteenth-century discourse, in England and France, seems to confirm this (Leps, 2002). She studies the developing state of criminology and subsequent scientific 'knowledge' about criminals alongside conditions governing the emergence of almost parallel social phenomena, such as mass literacy, the press and publishing

markets. Her account is based on a discursive approach, following Foucault's work,[5] which links the exercise of power to the production of knowledge at particular points in space and time (ibid., 3). Despite this circulation of knowledge between different disciplines, however, the author warns that each discursive practice 'retains a relative autonomy within social discourse' (ibid., 4), which means that any possible inter-communication between different fields of knowledge has to be separately proven.

Melossi refers to Leps's work in his analysis, but fails to provide a similar account over a range of different disciplines, limiting himself to a definition of the criminological field without an extensive analysis of other areas of expertise. Like Leps, Melossi uses Foucault's approach at the beginning of his analysis, when he introduces the concept of the representation of criminals, stating that 'each cultural environment in fact produces a given "knowledge" of the criminal that spans different discursive forms, from scientific tracts to newspapers, from televised media to fictional accounts' (Melossi, 2000, 298). Subsequently, however, he fails to connect these different fields of knowledge in his theory of representation. Thus when he refers to visual examples in cinema during the sixties, he mentions the film *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) as an instance of a narrative favourable to deviant characters. In this connection, he mentions the issue of the 'aestheticizing of violence in film' (Melossi, 2000, 307), quoting a criminologist's comment on the film without any further comment on the film's engagement with social or political issues, or its relationship to a wider process of the representation of criminals.

One theoretical contribution to that particular period of American popular culture (Beard, 1998) can help to clarify the extent to which Melossi's analysis fails to link a particular form of cultural practice such as cinema to a general pattern within a social institution, and to illumine the influence of cinematic discourse within a wider social context. The article I am referring to points to the crisis of Hollywood classicism, analysing a group of American films made in the late sixties,

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[5] Foucault conceives discourses as 'rule-governed systems for the production of thought' (Dean, 1994, 14). Moreover, he argues that a group of statements about a discipline is a discursive creation, producing knowledge and a subsequent position of power (Foucault, 2002, 34; Sheridan, 1980, 96-97). This knowledge then produces both a certain degree of scientific 'truth' and 'subjects' as the consequence of that truth. For example, knowledge about the law and its violation produces a 'truth' about what is allowed and what is punishable, while at the same time producing the subjects operating the legal system and the ones at the receiving end of it, who will suffer the consequences of its application. In this sense, a production of knowledge has always to do with power (Foucault, 2002, 200).

and including *Bonnie and Clyde*, in reference to their use of graphic violence and the specific date of their release (Beard, 1998). In doing so, the author focuses on their centrality both to the film industry and to the visual articulation of the failure of liberal optimism during that period:

> The physical depiction of violence in movies, therefore, was not only analogous to the actual carnage occurring simultaneously in Vietnam (and transmitted to some extent on television), but I believe more essentially an expression of psychic trauma at the spectacle of things 'going wrong' on the level of the society's *master narrative*. Perhaps the most important thing 'going wrong' was the promise of liberalism. The 1960s was certainly the high point of liberalism in the postwar era, and by 1967 it was entrenched even in such institutions as the White House and Hollywood – though in the strident criticisms of the radical movement virtually all institutions were being characterized as fascist. Certainly, continuing a tradition from the early and mid-1960s, films forming the beginning of the period in question had liberal outlooks (…) but the imminent failure of liberal optimism may already be discerned here as well in the pessimistic endings of all (…) [and in] the theme of doomed innocence present in all of them.' (Beard, 1998)

From this perspective, the notion of the crisis of Hollywood classicism, of its routines of narration, runs parallel to the crisis of American liberalism in that decade. Any analysis of films of that period must take these different dimensions into account, as otherwise it risks reducing the meaning of a film to its 'graphic' portrayal of the subject matter.

Examination of the Hollywood system will be developed in due course, but to summarise a complex situation we can assume that Hollywood movies were based on happy endings and narrative causality: the beginning of a story, its development and final resolution (Bordwell et al., 1988, 6). These visual stories were the end result of a certain 'division of labour' among people involved in their production and distribution, which made Hollywood's mode of production close to a factory system not so dissimilar to a Ford plant (Bordwell et al., 1988, 90). Like the car factory system the American film industry was a vertically integrated system, each unit in film making

process being managed with the final goal of profit maximisation (ibid., 90). As a consequence of this production structure, Hollywood cinema had two main ways of selling its narrative stories to audiences: either through the genre (different styles of storytelling: comedies, musicals, crime stories etc.) or through its stars (main actors, or actresses, and their popularity especially in relation to certain 'genres') (Turner, 1988, 100). Crime and sex stories were often the exceptions to the dominant mode of narrating mass-produced linear stories with a happy ending (Hamilton, 1991, 62) - acting as much as a market device, to diversify an otherwise similar product, as tthe expression of a desire to depict an alternative social reality. Their presence within the major tradition of storytelling was subordinated to the formula of 'compensating moral values' (Sklar, 1976, 174): if something 'bad' or controversial is represented, it 'must be counteracted by punishment or retribution, or reform and regeneration, of the sinful one'; in other words, 'the audience must not be allowed to sympathize with crime or sin' (ibid., 174). When considering historical changes affecting the studio system, it is helpful to bear in mind how such shifts affected the structural composition of Hollywood movies and how they relate to wider social changes.

In the sixties in particular, cinema underwent a huge business crisis due to the progressive shrinking of its audience, the transformation of the studios themselves into minor elements in the portfolio of giant multinational corporations, and the growing empowerment of movie stars and agents (Beard, 1998). To what extent these structural transformations can be found in film narratives must be demonstrated through close analysis of the production, distribution and reception of a film. This theoretical frame of the social context of American films would have helped Melossi to articulate more convincingly his theory of representation of criminals in American cinema and its link with sociological theories of the same period.

One of my aims in this dissertation is therefore to produce, within the limitations mentioned above, an analysis of films that takes full account of connections between the development of the studio system and the creative efforts of film-makers in portraying crime stories alongside the unfolding of wider social events.

1.1.7 Cinema and criminology: first attempts to handle the visual heritage

At least in terms of its scope, Rafter's work on crime films and society marks a watershed in criminological studies of recent years (Rafter, 2000; 2006; Rafter and Brown, 2011), presenting an inventory of films related to crime spanning several decades and different continents. The first two books on the subject are supported by a film scholar's contributions to the history of crime film (Todd, 2000; 2006), while Rafter himself focuses on classifying crime films into homogeneous categories. The underlying assumption is that crime films tend to 'reflect' the criminological theories at the period they were produced (Rafter, 2000, 48). This assumption is partly legitimate in that criminological theories can be used as theoretical frameworks for watching, debating and enriching the interpretations of films. Some of the inevitable limitations of looking for criminological theories 'reflected in' films can be bridged by contributions from a film studies perspective - as Rafter's collaborative effort exemplifies very well.

Rafter's main thesis on films is based on the concept that they are ideological messages. In other words, her analysis deals with 'assumptions about the nature of reality that are embedded in film narratives and imagery' (Rafter, 2000, 7; 2006, 8). She divides crime films into two major groups: one related to entertainment and pleasure, the other as an alternative, critical tradition. In the former category there are films based on a safe social critique and sanitised rebellion, that tend to flatter either their characters or their audiences (Rafter, 2000, 9; 2006, 11). Included in the latter category, on the other hand, are a number of angry or cynical movies that reveal unflattering aspects of social reality and human nature, among them film noir (Rafter, 2000, 11; 2006, 15). In the second edition of her work Rafter expands the section on film noir, which was insufficiently elaborated in the first edition, and discusses the pleasures as well the fears, fascination and ambiguities that such a 'critical' group of films can generate (Rafter, 2006, 110).

Throughout her work, Rafter stresses that crime films provide a source of information about criminal nature, motives and protagonists, and in particular introduce intermediary figures in their narratives. These figures are ones who frequently assume the role of a cultural authority in explaining the mystery of crime (Rafter, 2000, 61). She stresses the role of crime film in mediating

the traffic of information about crime between the public 'real world' and the private one of the imagination (ibid. 69). More importantly, following this perspective, crime films are treated as a sort of *popular criminology* that operates parallel to, but at some distance, from academic criminology, 'where the rejection of the former by academics often seems tinged with a lofty disdain for the prurience of such work' (Rawlings quoted in Carrabine, 2008, 120).

While providing a good introduction to crime films from a criminological point of view, Rafter's contribution suffers from the limitation of introducing too many films in her analysis, confining herself to describing their stories without their narrative devices (plots),[6] and classifying them according to criminological theories. For example, when she focuses on the noir film *The Postman Always Rings Ttwice*, she assigns the film to the criminological category of 'Rational Choice' theory. This approach to explaining crime behaviour is based on the rational motivations of the offender in committing crime, with the aim of securing advantage through the criminal act (Pease, 2001, 235-236). From this perspective, the plan of the two lovers to kill the husband and live together is the result of a rational choice, even though characters in the films are 'torn by ethical dilemmas' (Rafter, 2000, 58) about the outcome of their decisions. To my mind, this analysis is informed by the vocabulary available within the criminological field, which is quite narrow and highly controversial in itself (Beirne, 1993, 9). Using these academic categories to explain the motivations of fictional characters curtails other possibilities of film analysis that draw on other fields of expertise such as psychology, according to which some of the decisions human beings make are not rational, but express deeper unconscious feelings (Freud, 2005, 59). Moreover, the reasons, say, for two fictional characters killing another character might well be left to the viewer's opinion; or equally could be seen in terms of the author's motives in accentuating certain narrative aspects. The way a film articulates motives and characters in a story, despite its internal limitations, might be a more interesting starting point for connecting that story to the economic, social and moral events that informed its production, reception at that particular time, and place in history. More importantly, not all films noir fit with the Rational choice theory, as in some of them

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[6] *Story* is intended to mean the sum total of events to be related in a narrative, while *plot* is the arrangement of these events through the use of a variety of stylistic devices (like flashback, *in medias res* construction, retardation, parallel plots, ellipsis etc.) (Stam et al., 1992).

the murder, if there is one, is just a background event as the story unfolds. This is true of classic films noir like *Laura* (1944) or *In a Lonely Place* (1950), to name only two.

In her most recent work on crime and films, in collaboration with Brown (Rafter and Brown, 2011), Rafter has analysed a short list of films. In doing so, she avoids the endless list of visual stories which prevented her from carrying out an in-depth film analysis in her previous work. However, the films under scrutiny have become a visual illustration of the various theories in criminology, thus reducing any potential reciprocal contribution between film analysis and social science. Despite its limitations, this last work emphasises how cultural values, in the form of crime films, are produced and circulated to the point of becoming a tradition, some sort of unavoidable *visual heritage*[7] for us to come to terms with, whether as an ordinary spectator or as an academic. My study is specifically concerned with this international visual heritage, and I will try to show how a different approach to film studies is more useful in disclosing the extent to which crime films, and noir in particular, are related to issues of punishment and social control.

1.1.8 Film noir as metaphor: cultural criminology

The pervasive presence in our lives of social media forces us to engage with them, and acknowledge how they already form part of our identity, culture, knowledge and information (Stevenson, 1995, 132). In this sense, cultural criminology, a trend which emerged in crime studies about ten years ago, expresses the need for a renewal of theoretical debate, methodological tools and the political agenda in criminology (Young, 2011, 103). Defined simply, it aims to study the cultural construction of crime and crime control, importing some of the insights of cultural studies with specific reference to their contribution to subcultural symbolism and mediated social control (Ferrell, 2001, 75). As we have seen, the contribution of the Birmingham Centre for Criminology has not been without its critics. However, this does not refute the validity of its work, and the wide

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[7] I am using here a concept based on McGuigan's study on the relationship between national heritage and the tourist industry in Britain (McGuigan, 1996, 110).

scope of its efforts and dialogue with other disciplines. Following this example, cultural criminology tries to widen its horizons of research by 'exploiting' the toolbox of a discipline largely concerned with the study of images. Similarly, my approach will seek a quality that some sociologists call *reflexivity*: 'the reflexive monitoring of action' (Giddens, 1990, 36). Such a project involves each individual or group involved in a complex social context or programme of action continually articulating - so as to examine - their initial thoughts or actions in the light of reciprocal influences and development. Moreover, I will show how, and to what extent, this quality is a property intrinsic to the topic I am going to analyse. Film noir has been praised, in fact, for its high degree of reflexivity, as it had to diversify its format continuously to adapt to changing social and political circumstances - such as reduced production budgets, hostile audiences, strict censorship control and politically unfavourable social events. All these conditions made this group of films extremely sensitive to the social and political circumstances within which they were produced and staged, and responsive to previous successful attempts or failures of like kind. In this sense, then, my dissertation will try to learn reflexivity from film noir narratives, as well as from the general social project of modernity, from which film noir derives.

In this perspective, film noir can be seen as a metaphor for a way of articulating some alternative instances within a major paradigm. In other words, when some cultural criminologists claim that criminology aims to cross the borders between crime and culture, thus engaging with the cultural fluidity and global porosity of our society (Ferrell et al., 2004, 3), it is easy to recognise some similarities with noir. Like noir cultural criminology defies national and intellectually parochial borders, accepting in full the interdisciplinary challenge of this postmodern period (Hayward and Young, 2007). And like noir, it reveals the political agenda of dominant practices within a system of representation, or social theory. Film noir unmasks the shortcuts and limitations of the Hollywood system, or of an authoritative visual regime, while cultural criminology defines itself in opposition to the 'needs of the crime control industry' (Ferrell et al., 2004, 1), which are served by a proportion of criminologists and social theorists, thus uncovering what I later refer to as the political unconscious of certain practices (Jameson, 2002). Some authors have argued for limiting emphasis on (conscious) reflexivity in order to stress the role of the unconscious in

uncovering the limitations of rational beings (Jewkes, 2002, 37). Such a psychological approach extends the investigation of human beings to include irrational and unconscious fantasy life as important constituents of our personality (Craib, 1989, 100).

Similarly, in my analysis I have developed an ongoing dialogue with other disciplines, to enable different aspects of a social situation to converse with each other, as is essential for promoting dialogicity. According to Bakhtin, in fact, dialogism provides a forum where different social 'accents' are brought together in a conversation with each other, as in the nineteenth-century novel (Vice, 1997, 45). The novel at that time was a new artistic form that favoured discussions between different views, in line with the revolutionary and democratic spirit of that time. In this sense the notion of dialogicity has provided a useful heuristic tool for conducting a social or textual analysis that cultivates a conversation between different symbolic practices and social inequalities (Saukko, 2003, 149). In a way this is the aim of cultural criminology as well, whose reference to Bakhtin is well established (Presdee, 2000), especially with reference to the concepts of carnival and popular culture.

This comparative research assumes a certain degree of inter-disciplinary dialogue (dialogicity or dialogism) since the involvement in it of two different departments should provide us with 'the presence of two distinct voices in one utterance' (Vice, 1997, 45). That is to say, my work can count on a multiple perspective from which I can examine and analyse my 'data', as if there were a constant dialogue between different points of view on the same subject. In this way, from the American Studies side of the story, these films are integral to a certain culture, a particular type of literature that tends to reveal the dark side of the so-called American dream (Susman, 1989, 30). At the same time, the sociological contribution to this tradition of study can provide a more socially critical edge to a field sometimes too self-enclosed in internal theoretical concerns. Moreover, the psychoanalytic dimension will provide a critical view in the sense mentioned above, preventing film studies remaining too focused on their own internal dynamics rather than on the relationship between a film narrative and the social and psychological environment it derives from (May, 1989, 9).

1.1.9 The sociological/reflexive imagination

In more general terms, my aim is for this dissertation to be part of the *sociological imagination* that 'enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society' (Mills, 2000, 6). This means recognising that an academic work can contribute to a body of knowledge insofar as it involves a process of self-discovery, self–education and self-understanding for the researcher, too. While it is essential in academic disciplines to work within traditions, it is 'part of academic life continually to explore the limits of such traditions, and foster active interchange between them' (Giddens, 2002, 45). When criminologists (Carrabine et al., 2008, 5; Barton et al., 2007a, 1; Young, 2011) search for an imaginative perspective on criminology, they often draw, inevitably, on Mills's powerful metaphor to find a starting point for clarifying what criminology is concerned with, and what its method involves. In this regard, Giddens calls for a clearer definition of this imaginative perspective to avoid trivialisation of the concept of sociological imagination. He expects this outlook to involve 'an historical, an anthropological and a critical sensitivity' (Giddens, 1986, 13), to ensure elaboration of the above-mentioned critique of existing forms of society. This statement by Giddens echoes the call for a critical theory expressed a few decades earlier by Max Horkheimer, director of the famous Frankfurt School. But while the main goal of the earlier social theory is human emancipation from the slavery of the capitalist system (Horkheimer, 1976, 224), Giddens's criticism is more oriented towards a liberal conception of modern society.

Despite the differences in inspiration and orientation between the two authors, I want to emphasise here the need in my project for a plural critical edge that helps to acknowledge the limitations of each critical plan of analysis, yet uses the different approaches in a complementary way. So, for example, a critical tradition drawing on Marxist inspiration can shed light on some aspects of exploitation in a social phenomenon and yet be limited in some other respects, while a more liberal critical approach to the same topic can uncover aspects of social integration that the other approach has missed. At the same time, a post-structuralist approach can help problematise simplistic reading of certain cultural practices, by giving insights into another order of meanings in

terms of discontinuity and creativity. To avoid getting lost in this blurring of boundaries between disciplines, an imaginative and reflexive thinker must develop what Mills calls 'the capacity to shuttle between levels of abstraction' (Mills, 2000, 34). And this particular skill comes by practising the crossing of borders, whether physical or intellectual, by travelling an irregular and roundabout route, sometimes without finding a definitive and final destination, but relying on some kind of 'piecemeal approach'. According to Thompson, while rejecting the myth of a magical resolution to all sorts of disputes, this approach allows the researcher to ponder diverse theoretical interpretations of a social problem and give them critical space for debate and comparison; and it enables us to discover the conditions which inform our approach and our analysis of complex social problems (Thompson, J.B., 1990, 26).

To summarise, then, my project aims to remain in constant dialogue with different traditions of thought (dialogicity) such as film studies and criminology, via psychology and cultural studies. It will aim to be open and sensitive to all the suggestions, lessons and doubts I have 'received' so far from different sources (reflexivity) throughout my 'academic' life. At the same time, it will examine the outlook that goes under the name of *sociological imagination*, in the tripartite sense defined by Giddens. And finally, a *double critical edge* will keep us focused on highlighting limitations and points of strength in a project of social analysis that will be examined within the piecemeal approach previously described.

Part II The study of film noir

In the second section of this chapter, I am going to introduce some concepts related to media studies, emphasising their relationship and cross-fertilisation with social studies. The first move, in this respect, will be to define what a film is from a sociological point of view, its relation with practices of social control, and how its practice is part of a wider system of public communication. I shall introduce the notion of film noir, the problem of its origins and definition, along with the reasons for its international legacy and popularity. In so doing, I will emphasise the way a film can articulate social issues worthy of exploration in a research project. In the context of cinema, film noir in particular reveals 'hidden' or dark sides of human conduct, thus providing an opportunity to debate the social contradictions and limitations of the social process of modernisation. Such a process in fact seems to offer opportunities for progress and emancipation, as well as feelings of displacement and anxiety due to loss and uncertainty. At this point I will be introducing the concept of liminality as a transitional moment in western society's passage to modernity, when social anxieties are expressed as the result of an inevitable displacement during adaptation to new conditions. Film noir, in my theory, visually and narratively expresses such 'displacement' in terms of the problematic representation of characters in a scenic 'place', or stage: the cinema.

Some reflections in terms of methodological choice and subsequent risks will follow the introductory part, articulating the stages of my progression into this study and research project, while advancing some working hypotheses. More details regarding the preliminary studies undertaken, the choice of the sample and the usefulness of the pilot study are going to be introduced, as further aspects of my methodological plan will be progressively explained. Semiology, semiotics and discourse analysis are some of the analytical tools used in this research, while a theory of representation will work as a comprehensive explanatory network, in which all these approaches converge.

1.2.1 The background of my research: towards a notion of film noir

Films are treated in this work as social acts that are, for their viewers, as much a part of a wider process of social control (Melossi, 2000, 298) as a source of information about crime and criminals (Rafter, 2000; 2006). Moreover, films can be contextualised within the micropolitical terms of the network of power relations in local institutions (Foucault, 2002; Leps, 1992; Stam et al., 1992, 213). In modern societies means of entertainment concur with those of coercion in keeping a society in 'peaceful' conditions of existence, as well as in creating a social consensus around its institutions (Leps, 1992, 132). In this sense, visual stories can both buttress and undermine public institutions' official narratives about issues affecting contemporary society, as they operate in a wider context of political control and commercial exploitation (Jameson, 1991, 18). However, while the effect of 'real' crime on society is indisputable, the representation of crime stories is more controversial, as it concerns the world of fantasy and the minds of the audience (Turner, 1993, 93). There has been dispute concerning the extent to which crime stories are a safety valve to release pent-up aggression, as in the catharsis theory (Schubart, 1995, 221), or whether they trigger imitational behaviour in spectators, and are thus a danger (Carrabine, 2008, 9). Further controversies relating to film narratives concern the way they criticise, emphasise or neglect some aspects of society, culture and human nature, as against other aspects. For example, social science debates in this field oscillate between issues of cultural imperialism (Tunstall, 1977, 57) and viewing Hollywood as 'common sense' cinema (Caughie, 2000, 16), involving subsequent political engagement or passive acceptance. These visual stories provide a source of pleasure (Mulvey, 1973; Turner, 1993, 177), at the same time as information about some aspects of criminal life that affect people's behaviour or engage their emotions (Rafter, 2000, 9; 2006, 11); the wide range of issues relating to the circulation of such narratives generate public awareness of the medium itself, as it becomes the target of demands for increased regulation (Sparks, 1992, 16).

My analysis focuses on mass media and their crucial role in providing a framework for social debate about crime, cultural domination, and moral and personal resistance (Adorno, 1991; 1992; Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997; Berman, 1983; Gramsci, 1971; Hall and Jefferson, 1976;

Hebdige, 1987; 1988; Jameson, 1991; 2002; Leavis, 1930; Melossi, 2000; Tomlinson, 1991). The moving picture image of cinema has through the years given audiences access to a visual language developing crime stories along with other forms of entertainment (Munby, 1999; Shadoian, 2003). These narratives have often been at the centre of a tug-of-war between moral censors, business corporations and the generality of viewers in relation to the degree to which freedom of expression and the spirit of entrepreneurship should be balanced by political considerations of social conformity, or 'dutiful' respect for public authorities and private moral groups (Ceplair and Englund, 2003).

Among crime films, film noir exemplifies a complex visual narrative that deals with the different aspects mentioned here of devising an appealing (or successful) version of fictional crime for an audience (Naremore, 1998; 2000). This type of narrative is, in this respect, ambivalent, as it presents versions of conformity yet at the same time can offer critical reflections on social conventions and public morals (Durgnat, 1970, 39). Film noir differs from 'traditional' crime film since its focus is on 'maladjusted' characters, who do not belong to a 'professional' world of crime - like the gangsters for example, or the police officer (Shatz, 1991, 111). Instead, it places emphasis on transitional figures (i.e. the private detective, the stranger, the war veteran, the fallen or fascinating woman), lonely individuals, away from legal (or illegal) organizations dealing with crime on a daily basis, who deal with illegalities as a result of chance, or fate. Despite living ordinary lives they do not share the same locales or destinies of ordinary people, since noir characters' stories are always taking place in transitional places, away from domestic settings and families' intimacy, as this 'habitation' is something lost, forever out of reach (Sobchack, 1998, 139). The ambivalence of these films is conveyed in the way the places inhabited by their characters are in effect non-places, resulting from the transformation of time and space in modernity (Augé, 1995, 30-31). Train stations, airports, ports, open roads, exotic locales become the virtual residence of dispossessed and displaced characters, swept by that maelstrom of modernity which 'melts into air all that is solid', to invert Berman's Marxist metaphor of modernity (Berman, 1982).

Film noir differs from traditional detective novels too, as crime is not a disruption of a pre-existent order in society, which the detective puts back in place through logic and detection. On the contrary, crime and social disorder are rooted in everyday life, either because, in a cynical view, they are an inevitable part of the world where these 'ordinary' people live, or because it resides potentially in each person's soul or mind. The main characters in these stories often cannot solve any crime at all, but acknowledge how they are only small cogs within a bigger picture of human frailty and social exploitation. More importantly, film noir characters live between two worlds: the legal and the illegal, day and night, present and past, without belonging anywhere entirely (Naremore, 1998, 146). In this regard, Dimendberg has stated that film noir lives in the hollow space of capitalism deployed 'without a mask' (Dimendberg, 2004, 4). Film noir thus expresses a cultural discontent with capitalist modernity, revealing the cracks and discrepancies in western democracies, as the labyrinthine space of modern cities becomes both a source of pride in human progress and the locus of fear and anxiety (Vidler, 1992, ix). From this perspective, film noir occupies a 'liminal space, somewhere between Europe and America, (…) and between low-budget crime and art cinema', where 'characters have an ambiguous social position between the law and the underworld' or are in danger of 'falling into a world of madness and crime' (Naremore, 1998, 220). In other words, noir deals with the black or dark side of modern society, as a way of revealing, through a series of indirect verbal or visual conventions, aspects of social injustice and repressed human frailties and discrimination, which would have been censored if expressed in a more explicit manner (Krutnik, et al., 2007a, 5). Noir can be seen as the result of a struggle with utilitarian divisions of labour, repressed desires, and pressure to conform from social authorities and censorship (Naremore, 2000, 110). Its process of representation bears the 'historical scars' (Benjamin in Frisby, 1988, 226) of such conflicts. Due to the flexibility of its narration, its representations still preserve the traces of commentary and social criticism that censors could not silence. Film noir therefore contains in its narrative, style and characters an element of displacement that renders problematic its exact location within a single culture, ideology or nation (Fay and Nieland, 2010; Vincendeau, 1992).

1.2.2 Noir: a group of films in search of a definition

The corpus of classic 'noir films' is a group of American movies released in the forties and fifties, that picks up and develops some social themes and visual styles articulated by French and German cinema in the thirties, and in forms of poetic realism[8] and expressionism.[9] Consequently, it is not clear whether these films are in origin European or American. In addition there was a considerable delay before another source of these films, the American detective novels of the thirties, migrated onto the silver screen (Vernet, 1933, 14), making the precise influences difficult to establish. Similar problems face any attempt to fix the temporal coordinates of film noir development by tracing a genealogy of its storyline. Thus, the account of film noir below aims more to offer a partial introduction to the subject, with some inevitable contradictions, than to reach a definitive conclusion about its genesis.

Following Schrader's rough chronology, noir films have been released in three broad phases (Schrader, 1972, 58-59). From 1941 to 1945, films are mainly about the private eye and the *femme fatale,* the lonely wolf and the alluring woman whose power of seduction is often ascribed more to the neuroses of the men around her (Place, 1998, 53) than to her supposed dominance over them. The first film noir of this kind is *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), starring by Humphrey Bogart, probably one of the most famous male stars in this cycle of movies (Naremore, 2000, 109). Most of the films are adaptations of hard-boiled detective thrillers[10] written in the thirties and closely scrutinised by the Hollywood censorship board (Hamilton, 1991, 60). As a result of this attention, the cinematic adaptations developed witty confrontational dialogue between sexes, full of *double entendres,* while visually they relied on stylised frame composition set carefully in a studio (Place and Peterson, 1974, 65). At the same time, explicit visual violence and sexuality are underplayed in

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[8] Poetic realism was a trend in filmmaking in the thirties France, in which a group of films with lyrical style, mostly created in studio sets, portrayed marginalised and disillusioned characters who, trying to rebel against social norms and conventions, ended up rejected and desperate (Andrew, 1995, 170-171).
[9] Expressionist films in the early twenties created atmospheres of fantasy and horror in their stories, through carefully designed stage sets and a strong contrast of light and shadows (Bordwell and Thompson, 2001, 408)
[10] 'Hard-boiled fiction was so named because the tough detective hero developed a shell, like a hard-boiled egg, in order to protect his feelings from being bruised by the callous, cruel criminal type he often encountered'. (Phillips, G.D., 2000, 3)

favour of indirect allusions or ambiguities in the narrative, thus creating a 'compositional tension' (Schrader, 1972, 57). We should note that, at this time, a wide community of European émigrés worked in Hollywood, mostly as a result of financial and political difficulties, if not persecution, in their home countries (Baxter, 1976; Taylor, 1983). Quite a few of them contributed to the look, acting and making of film noir, which would later become associated with the visual experience of exile and the dislocations of modernity (Dimendberg, 2004; Gemunden and Kaes, 2003).

The second phase runs from 1945 to 1949 and emphasises the post-war realistic period of location shooting and more descriptive camerawork, in line with the trend at that time dictated by Italian Neorealism (Stead, 1989, 147). Films tend to be more about urban social problems, police routines and corruption, seemingly more in accord with the mood of a nation of soldiers returning home from the war (Foertsch, 2008, 130). A new generation of left-leaning directors started to work in filmmaking at this time (Hathaway, Dassin, Kazan) and went on to develop their career in the next decade (Schrader, 1972, 59).

Finally, the phase from 1949 onwards goes deep into the fifties. *Kiss me Deadly* (1955) is considered the last important example of such narratives, in terms of the end of a cycle. Orson Welles's *Touch of Evil* (1958), commonly regarded as its epitaph, came out a few years after its demise (ibid.). During this final stage, the mood of these films is even more bitter and macabre, if possible, with characters who are psychotic or suicidal, while the Cold War climate gives them a science-fiction look (Jancovich, 1956). The 'ceremony of killing' (Borde and Chaumeton, 2002, 10) of the forties is in fact replaced by violent explosions, threats of atomic attack or extraterrestrial invasions that mark the end of an era for this type of stories. The genre of horror and science-fiction movies begins to replace noir in the fifties as the popular vehicle of ambivalent visual tales about depersonalised and displaced characters, while expressing a certain degree of criticism of the contemporary social situation. In this sense, *The Invasion of Body Snatchers* (1956) provides a bridge between the two trends (Jancovich, 1996, 94).

But despite the evidence of this corpus of films, the term noir itself does not come from Hollywood. Americans in fact called these films 'murder melodrama', 'intellectual exercise in crime', 'hard-boiled, kick-em-in-the-teeth murder cycle' (Naremore, 1998, 17) or 'gut-and-gore

crime stories all fashioned on a theme of plausibly motivated murder and studded with high-powered Freudian implication' (Shearer, 1945, 9). The label noir emerged, in fact, in the fifties, once this cycle of American films was over, as the French developed their own version of these movies to give visual expression to their recent past of bitter memories and hopes of a better future - as will be described in the next section.

1.2.3 The transatlantic dialogue: film noir as a transnational discourse

After the war and the end of the German occupation of France, American products and especially Hollywood films inundated the French market. The revoking of the ban, operating during the first half of the forties, allowed major US studios to sell, at bargain prices, four years' worth of already amortised product (Williams, A., 1992, 277). Among these films, 'dark' melodramatic stories of frustrated desire, lost hopes and violent death were somehow the visual equivalent of those recent psychological experiences of 'loss' (Greene, 1999), 'shame and grief' (Vincendeau, 2003, 8) that the French went through as a result of that occupation and the Vichy regime. During the process of reconstruction of their own collective identity and fragmented memory, the French could articulate the theme of the 'enemy within' (Rousso, 1991, 6), and the figure of the 'stranger within', proper to the civil war experienced during *les années noires* (the black years) - as American media products started increasingly to be part of daily national life (Kuisel, 1996; Ross, 1995). America acquired a double meaning: as both the harbinger of the 'consumer society' and of new possibilities for widening the nation's expressive resources (Kuisel, 1996, 103-104). While some intellectuals criticised the imperialist aspect of this influence, others saw the opportunity, for example, to use noir narration of social exclusion and marginality to explore and re-evaluate French national identity and cultural practice from the bottom up, from the perspective of writers, film directors and a public 'who perceive themselves to be marginal to the literary and political establishment' (Gorrara, 2003, 22). The issue of the artist, or film director, as an isolated outsider in the national context of the film noir culture industry, became more urgent as

American directors and film screenwriters came to Europe, having been expelled by the anti-communist crusade in the Cold-War America of the fifties. Among them, figures like Joseph Losey and Jules Dassin brought to the old continent the technical expertise and visual experience of American noir films (Gardner, 2004, 14; Phillips, A., 2009, 5), adapting similar stories for more sophisticated audiences and influencing the work of future French film directors and novelists alike. In this way, Dassin's films *Night and the City* (1950) and *Du Rififi Chez Les Hommes* (1955), produced respectively in England and France, would become the springboard for the emergence of a new cultural sphere in Europe, where 'a certain kind of Hollywood cinema could be celebrated for its style, vigour and, above all, alternative look on modern life' (Phillips, A., 2009, 93).

Following this trend, especially in France, young film critics and newcomers to the world of cinema made their first break into the film business, developing a personal style out of the generic materials offered by American noir cinema (Buss, 2001, 50; Marie, 2007, 44). As a result of these experimental efforts, two of the most successful examples of filmic production in the post-war era, *film policier* (cops and robbers films) and the *nouvelle vague*, would refashion the creative dialogue and cultural exchange between two cultures, revitalising a decaying industry (Neupert, 2007, 13; Vincendeau, 2003, 100). Jean Pierre Melville is the first example of an ex-member of the French resistance turned film director. In *Bob le Flambeur* (1956) he portrays a visual celebration of Paris in the details and small rituals of everyday life, using the iconography and characters proper to a certain idiom of American cinema: streamlined cars, pop jazz score, professional criminals and callow young ones, alongside deceptive women, in the plot of a perfect crime that will go wrong (Williams, A., 1992, 334). It is at this point (1955) that the term *noir* comes into common use through the first monograph on the subject: Borde and Chaumeton's *Panorama du film noir Americain* (Borde and Chaumeton, 2002). According to their theory, noir gave a new lease of life to the theme of violence in cinema, even though the anguish of these films comes from the strange unfolding of the action, rather than from violence itself. The term would later be adopted into the English language in 1968, with publication of the book, *Hollywood in the Forties* (Higham and Greenberg, 1968). Here, these 'dark' films were named *noir* for the first time, and the term became current, in both academic and popular circles. Noir is thus a *post-facto* intellectual

category, a retroactive definition for a corpus of visual stories that arose from a transatlantic dialogue between two countries with strong, popular visual traditions and the need to renew such traditions at a critical time.

Thus, for the fragmented Europe of the post-war period, America becomes a mirror where new generations can borrow styles and stories to rebuild their own national identity for the immediate future, while coming to terms with their own past. The rise of young pop cultures throughout Europe, not just in cinema, brings the contradictory tendency of loving and hating America to the core of the process of reconstructing a European identity, both economically and culturally (Pells, 1997, 235). Film noir is just one aspect of this multifaceted story, as it offers a locus, or a screen, onto which new generations can project their contradictions and controversies in a narrative or visual form. In this perspective, noir, although associated with the figure of the private eye, seems to be more 'an organizing principle for a whole network of ideas and genres that reach into contemporary fiction and film and cross the barrier between high and popular culture' (Horsley, 2009, 6). At the same time, it seems to offer the opportunity to explore alternative modes of life, or foreign cultures, through the process of 'symbolic distancing' favoured by media development (Thompson, J.B., 1995, 212). Thus, a transnational society replaces traditional national communities, and the resulting paradox of reflexivity and dependency (Thompson, J.B., 1995, 215; Giddens, 1990, 36) is considered a consequence of the increasingly mediated nature of information provided to uprooted recipients, who have little control over ever more complex systems of information production and transmission. For all these reasons, the approach in my research will be interdisciplinary: a comparative analysis of cinema narratives grounded on different systems of representation and discourse, stressing the 'hybrid nature' of the subject (Bhabha, 1994, 296) and its 'inter-national' vocation (Fay and Nieland, 2010, 1).

1.2.4   Risks and remedies in a comparative research with an interdisciplinary approach

My idea in developing this research project is to overcome some limitations in criminological research, borrowing from other disciplines the analytical tools needed to make up for those limitations. Given the comparative perspective I seek, the main problem is to build several bridges of communication between different disciplines. It is inevitable that there will be theoretical problems of coexistence between concepts from different disciplines, and thus methodological difficulties in coordinating the theoretical speculation with practical analysis. For example, I have decided to work within the general historical context of progressive rationalisation of punishment practices, as outlined in Max Weber's theory (Craib, 1997, 142-143). In this position, the eradication of tradition, mystery and emotion makes space for the development of rational calculation and instrumental rationality (Gerth and Wright Mills, 1993, 51; Marshall, 1998, 550). Here my research must consider whether, within this historical approach based on a concept of rationality, it is possible to use Foucault's approach to the power/knowledge system of social analysis, which is not predicated on a rational foundation.[11] Some authors argue that this is not possible, since Foucault rejects a generalised description of rationalisation (Best and Kellner, 1991, 52), while others allow the possibility of including some levels of discontinuity in an otherwise unilinear construct of historical time (Gerth and Wright Mills, 1993, 52; Gane, 2004, 113). This small example shows how a multidisciplinary research project must deal from the outset with contradictions and methodological problems. Nevertheless, contradiction is intrinsic to human actions in a complex world, as typified for example in our advanced economy (Elliott and Lemert, 2006), so I will risk such contradiction in order to investigate more thoroughly the representation of certain controversial issues in popular culture. The risk can be in fact limited through a more effective level of analysis, that draws on a cross-examination, or combination, of data, methods and theories (i.e. triangulation) (Saukko, 2003, 23; Semmens, 2011, 60) with reflections obtained from

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[11] According to the French philosopher and historian, 'the historical practice shatters the appearance of unilinear human progress by revealing the unstable multiplicity of historical descent' (Gane, 2004, 115).

using analytical tools from other disciplines (e.g. semiotics) (Bignell, 1997; Hodge and Cress, Jensen, 1995), or with historical details of films' production and their social context, and through an analysis that emphasises disruptions and irregularities over systematic and linear account of historical development.

Another limitation in my research lies in the lack of an ethnographic approach, or ethnographies of audiencing (Jewkes, 2002; Rose, 2001, 197), as no audience observations are available to verify the assumptions made and interpretations gained from a review of the literature and a first examination of the data. Some of these limitations can be addressed through a more effective historical approach, which finds in historical information verification of initial hypotheses and ideas (Dean, 1994). Likewise, limiting assumptions can be balanced through reference to other research and theoretical frameworks, with subsequent production of observations and the 'unriddling' of initial problems involved in categorising homogeneous groups and establishing definitions (Alaasutari, 1995, 20). Moreover, a comparative approach will become a tool of cross-examination of different hypotheses and data, which can move the analysis of film narratives on to a different level of interpretation and analysis (Alaasutari, 1995, 135). On the other hand, deeper limitations in my approach would be better addressed by different future explorations of patterns of consumption by media users and their strategies of decoding media messages, in order to compare how people make sense of institutional practices in their everyday lives.

1.2.5 The three reflective stages and cultural dimensions of my research

In devising my plan for the theoretical explanation of social analysis, I have drawn on the multidisciplinary efforts of the Critical theory of the Frankfurt School (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997) and its developments, in order to produce 'a conceptual framework of an analysis to comprehend both the structures of social domination and the social resources for its practical overcoming' (Honneth, 1991, xiv). Following this perspective, I have developed three main reflective stages of critical theory: the first represented by Foucault, emphasising the relationship

between the growth of knowledge and the multiplication of power networks (Foucault, 1977; 2002; 2002a); the second, guided by Adorno and Horkheimer, focusing on social exploitation and cultural domination, tapping into the Marxist tradition of thought with some inevitable adjustments and updates (Adorno, 1991; Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997; Agger, 1992); and the third, a psychoanalytic level, in which a degree of understanding of human emotions and their intimate connection with political values and ideological assumptions has been developed (Elliott, 2002, 175; Marcuse, 1969; Whitebook, 1995). These stages roughly reflect the three parts of my thesis, as the foundation for my analysis: a historical stage, where issues of public punishment are interwoven with a discourse on modernity, with subsequent re-articulation of the visibility of crime and criminals in public spaces; a critical debate about the notion of culture between hegemonic domination and social integration; and finally an assessment of how certain representations of violence and suffering engage with human psychological anxieties in a context of existential and social insecurity. This structure offers a tripartite classification of culture in line with the three dimensions covered by its effects: a macro aspect (culture as part of the social phenomenon of the globalisation and rationalisation of the western world), a meso-dimension, (culture as symbolic practices encoded in the film industry), and a micro one (culture as structures of feeling), about the way certain institutional instances become incorporated in an individual visual work.

The above stages of reflection differ partially from those originally devised by Honneth in his study of developments in critical social theory (Honneth, 1991). In Honneth's framework, through a sort of evolutionary development (Honneth, 1991, xiv), each stage in critical reflection draws on the work of the Frankfurt School, Michel Foucault and Jürgen Habermas (1992), and corresponds to a moment of practical criticism as a constitutive condition of critical knowledge. Honneth's aim is to reconstruct the history of critical theory in the form of a learning process, through which each stage is analysed and disclosed in its basic assumptions and relationships with parallel social issues (ibid., xv). Similarly, my research tries to build on different theoretical steps, not necessarily as an evolutionary progress but more as coexisting points of debate, to assess from different points of view the emergence of a visual dialogue in imbalance between two different systems of representation in cinema. Furthermore, unlike Honneth, I have preferred for several

reasons to remove from these stages Habermas's approach to the public sphere and communicative action. First of all, this would have led to a re-enactment of the interminable Foucault versus Habermas debate (Kelly, 1994) on the authors' philosophical foundations and opposing schools of thought. It would have shifted the focus of my research to a more theoretical approach, away from an analysis of social theory with reference to an analysis of cinema narratives in the forties and the current social issues at that time. Moreover, Habermas's emphasis on the significance of the bourgeois public sphere neglects other forms of popular culture and social movements (Eley, 1992, 289; Habermas, 1992a, 425), and fails to engage with other new forms of communications besides the press (Elliott, 2009, 163). Finally, Habermas, unlike Foucault, found it difficult to deal with the deeper and darker aspects of modernity (Whitebook, 1995, 10). Despite recognising the value of psychoanalysis as an important tool for a critical understanding of the social world (Clarke, 2006, 64), Habermas steers away from Freud's most radical discovery, the unconscious (Freud, 2005; Whitebook, 1995, 7), which is a well-developed concept in other examples of critical theory (Marcuse, 1969; Jameson, 2002). In this connection there are some difficulties in the co-existence of Foucault's theory with a psychoanalytic approach (Forrester, 1990, 286). However, this is as much a problem of the wider multidimensional approach referred to above as of some limitations in Foucault's approach to psychological issues regarding the psychoanalytic domain in more general terms (Elliott, 2001, 85). Foucault considers the psychoanalytic discourse as one of the disciplines of modernity, responsible for the medicalization of sexuality, with its definition of 'normality' and taboos, without reference to any potential political critique of psychoanalysis (Elliot, 2001, 92). One 'psychoanalytical' working hypothesis in this respect will deal, from a cinematic point of view, with the concept of 'cinematic excess' (Thompson, K., 1986; 1988), as a technique of narrative disruption that threatens the 'continuity' of a dominant narration, revealing possibilities for uncovering the political unconscious (Jameson, 2002) at work in every theory of representation. From this point of view, crime, otherness and noir are all forms of cinematic excess that overlap in media narratives, with the potential to dislocate 'hegemonic' - in a Gramscian sense - discourses in mainstream media (Brooker, 2003, 119). One of the main aims of this research is to show how such

discourses and excesses work specifically in the social context of production of the films under examination.

1.2.6 Preliminary studies for the research

No statistics, interviews, or focus groups are required in my research since it is chiefly concerned with analysis of films and their social contexts; and therefore interpretation and historical reconstruction are needed instead. However, to prevent my thesis from becoming a simplistic account of a collection of narrative texts, I have defined two arms of my research which required prior examination in order to provide the foundations for analysis of the narrative sample, and to anticipate some of the outcomes with some degree of likelihood and coherence.

One relates to the issue of capital punishment in two different continents, the other to the two structures of filmmaking, the American and the European, with their assumptions about the nature of filmmaking and the role of the director. For the first concern, I compared the systems of capital punishments in (mainly) England, France and the USA, to assess their specific features in terms of rationalisation of their traditional 'dramatic' penal practices and adoption of new forms of social integration (Briggs et al., 1996; Elias, 2000; Foucault, 1977; Friedman, 1993; Garland, 1991; Linebaugh, 2003; Hay, 2011; Royster, 1997; Sarat, 2001; Spierenburg, 1984; Whitman, 2003). The outcome of this review highlights a difference in the tradition of authority between the two continents, in term of convict degradation and State power (Whitman, 2003, 187). Throughout its history, European continental justice has displayed a *hierarchical* authority, recognising that the State has some kind of natural authority over its subjects (ibid., 206). In opposition to this model, American justice has rejected the authority of the State in the European sense of a centralised power, favouring instead a coordinated authority, closer to the idea of a *horizontal* society (ibid., 206-207). However, despite this constitutive difference, (especially Northern) Europe began to pursue a milder penal system as it progressed towards modernity (Elias, 2000). In comparison, America has developed a criminal justice system that still in some respects degrade its convicts and retains the use of capital punishment in extreme cases (Whitman, 2003, 207). Moreover,

historically, the American system has had an over-representation of Afro-Americans in its penal institutions (Friedman, 1993, 156), along with a normative violence related to the frontier tradition and resulting vigilante movements throughout its history (ibid. 175, 179). These differences seem to be confirmed by comparative works on the different conceptions of the State in the two continents, and their consequences in terms of penal policy (Melossi, 1990; 2008). In these works, as mentioned in the previous section, American society is described in terms of a democracy with a weak State and a stronger society (Melossi, 2008, 93), which still excludes groups of people not integrated in the democratic project devised by the first pioneers. From this perspective, American penitentiaries were to 'include' ethnic minorities, primarily black, along with the next waves of immigration, while excluding them from the social privileges of civic democracy (Melossi, 2008, 95).

A central concern of this research will be to assess the extent to which these facts are confirmed or contradicted in the representation of similar social groups in fictional stories. In other words, the research questions, following this conceptual frame, become: How are ethnic minorities represented in American cinema? What is the relationship of this representation to the history of the USA, if any? And how does this representation differ in European cinema?

I have also undertaken a preliminary study of the history of American and European cinema (mainly) in the first half of the 20th century (for the European case, especially France and Germany, and subsequently Italy and England) (Andrew, 1995; Bondanella, 2002; Bordwell et al., 1998; Bordwell and Thompson, 2001; Eleftheriotis, 2001; Faldini and Fofi, 1979; Forbes and Street, 2000; Huaco, 1965; Landi, 2008; Naremore, 2000; Neve, 2003; Kracauer, 2004; Maltby, 1995; 2003; Maltby and Bowles, 1994; Ricci, 2008; Schatz, 1999; Sklar, 1976; Saunders, 1994; Schatz, 1981; Sorlin, 1991; Ward, 2004; Williams, 1995). In doing so, it has been possible to isolate some films as relevant to my subject of study, and relate them to the wider context of production and critical reception. My working assumption has been that American movies are produced in a context of mass production that tends to produce a uniform style: the Hollywood system (Bordwell et al., 1988). The best of European cinema, on the other hand, has arisen from attempts to find visual expression for stories within an artistic tradition of the era (realism,

expressionism etc.) and within a national industry that uses certain conventions of 'art cinema' (Forbes and Street, 2000, 37), especially when related to the group of films noir (Spicer, 2007). Underlying this distinction lies the critical debate in film studies about the nature of film in the context of industrial production: is it art or commodity? (Arnheim, 1957; Cook and Bernink, 1999, 235). Moreover, this controversy should be framed within the ongoing debate about the ontology of the photographic image, which tries to establish the extent to which mechanical reproduction of reality correlates to the external world (Bazin, 2005; 2005a; Tagg, 1993; Wollen, 1998, 79-106). This raises the question of whether representation of a crime in a film is a 'reflection' of some sort of similar activity in the 'real' world, or is merely a fictional event, responding more to the internal dynamics of the film industry, or to available discourses about certain themes in society at a precise point in time.

Similar questions arise in film studies about the role of the director in filmmaking. One view sees the director as the sole creator of a film in certain cases when a story is brought to the screen in conformity with the director's particular vision of the world (the director as an *auteur*, according to a certain film theory) (Brooker, 2003, 15; Wollen, 1988, 50-78). The alternative to this view is that film directors operate within a predictable factory system which leaves little room for imagination and experimentation, so that the final work has to be ascribed to the system itself, which encompasses all the human and mechanical factors involved in production, shooting, financing, distribution etc. (Bordwell, 1988). Between these two extreme views, a third regards Alfred Hitchcock as the perfect example of a film director who maintained his personal style and vision while working in mainstream studios on both continents (Cook and Bernink, 1999, 246). For this reason, Hitchcock's first American films provide, in chapter 2, the basis for a discussion of the role of a filmmaker in using the expressive possibilities afforded by noir narration, articulating certain social anxieties and visual practices with a certain degree of freedom. All these issues will come to the fore in subsequent chapters as points of debate about the different systems of representation of criminals in cinema and their consequences for our discourse about noir films.

1.2.7 Sample, false starts and pilot study

In this research, films are presented, or introduced, mainly in two ways: to illustrate sociological or historical concepts as these relate to cinema or as field-test samples applicable to the main topic, the representation of crime, criminals and social order in American and European cinema. In the first case, as previously mentioned, films are introduced briefly to support a proposition, or to emphasise their particularity in relation to certain topics. In the second instance, they are the samples against which my initial hypotheses will be tested and rearticulated, and become the keystone of my project. Choosing this sample has been particularly arduous, as I discovered new dimensions of analysis and theoretical debate in the course of my work (Alasuutari, 1995, 161). Originally, my choice of films for an in-depth analysis was *The Killing* (1956) by Stanley Kubrick and *Breathless* (1960) by Jean Luc Godard, as they represented new trends in American and European noir films, marking the end of an era (Hollywood classicism and the tradition of quality in France) while amounting to a new departure for artistic work in crime films. They were to become landmarks in the resurgence of film noir in the next decades. However, despite this favourable starting point, I found myself struggling with the number of concepts I had to introduce in my dissertation to make sense of the novelties established in these films. For example, Godard's film in some respects pays homage to the tradition of Italian Neorealism, a film movement in the immediate aftermath of World War II, which portrayed real locations, used the available light conditions and also, often, non-professional actors (Bondanella, 2002, 31). This Italian movement had its origins in another French tradition of filmmaking in the thirties (Poetic Realism), which was rejected by Godard's generation of filmmakers in order to pursue a more informal practice of storytelling, more politically engaged and in tune with its period (Truffaut, 2000). After tracing most of the possible relationships between French film and both European and American cinema in this way, I realised that a great deal of the space allotted for analysis of film would have focused on clarifying its sources of inspiration and its engagement with old and new issues of representation (modern/postmodern, realism versus expressionism etc.). Moreover, given the essential link between film noir and Neorealism, I started to consider the idea that I should seek

to explain why such a link was so important for the first generation of filmmakers, viewers and critics alike. I therefore moved my sample back in time: from the end of the fifties to the middle of the forties. Instead of emphasising the beginning of a certain way of 'deconstructing' different traditions of filmmaking, as in the case of Godard and Kubrick, I focused on the initial stage of film noir as a mode which depicted an image of America, with its literature and its cinema, while circumventing local issues of censorship and obscurantism. Instead of focusing on the end of an era, I emphasised the strength of the classic Hollywood period and its consequences for European popular culture. In this connection, the film *Ossessione* (1943) by Luchino Visconti, made during the fascist era, is a unique example of the flexible narrative of film noir at a very particular period. With the benefit of hindsight, we can see it as the forerunner of Italian Neorealism, as the first film in Italy to portray its characters as amoral and engaged in perverting the course of justice. Moreover, the film taps into the general context of the anti-fascist movement in Italy in the thirties and its search for foreign sources of inspiration as a means to escape the current social and political conformism (Fay and Nieland, 2010). Visconti's film was inspired by an American novel, *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1946), which was brought to the screen a few years later by Tay Garnett for the Metro Golden Mayer studio system. The American version was particularly successful and very different in approach and tone from Visconti's. Its interest lies in the fact that it introduces into the cinema of the forties a fascination and glamour in its depiction of the crime and social order, thus enabling us to understand the enduring appeal of this kind of stories and their legacy in our era. Both films incorporate something of the localities where they were made, as much as they contrast their local colour with images, or characters, drawn from elsewhere.

I have therefore used the work done on the first two examples (Kubrick's and Godard's Films) as a *pilot study* (Alasuutari, 1995, 161; Davis et al., 2011, 351), an exploratory investigation, in order to examine the way certain films are part of a broader social picture, and the extent to which these movies can become part of a wider social analysis of changing public sensibilities about crime and social order. For example, I have studied Humphrey Bogart as the quintessential American noir character (Coe, 1991; Cunningham, 1999; McArthur, 2000; Meyers, 1997), since Godard's film pays homage to this actor several times. This study proved very useful,

especially when I compared the development of this character with the French equivalent noir icon of (approximately) the same time: Jean Gabin (Gauter, C. and Vincendeau, 2006; Vincendeau, 1998, 27-30; 2000, 59-77). In doing so, I have developed a better understanding of the role of the male star in noir films and the essential role that his performance plays both in the development of narrative (Palmer, 1991, 32) and in the identification of a certain film with his persona (Andrew, 1995, 225-231; Sklar, 1992). Moreover, detailed observation of the way these stories were packaged, through an analysis of their production, helped me to clarify which aspects are worth exploring and elaborating in the making of a film, thus establishing a clearer view of the whole process of film analysis. On the other hand, Visconti's and Garnett's films have shifted my interest and my focus in certain kinds of films - which establish a new type of visual language in dealing with certain issues - from an exploration of changing aspects of cultural practice to a clarification of the role of a creative practice in reproducing social consensus and criticism through popular culture.

1.2.8 Methodologies for film analysis: combination of approaches and melodrama

Within the area of Cultural Criminology, Majid Yar argues for a combination of approaches in the analysis of contemporary crime films, in order to reveal the contrasting meanings of films: 'the unconscious reflections of a deep-seated feature of our common cultural dispositions' (Yar, 2010, 79). According to this position, the sceptical attitude in most of the current products in popular culture made it impossible to read any clear ideological message in films, due to their increasing allusiveness and playfulness with both their sources of inspiration and representation (ibid. 76). Yar calls for a synthetic and critical framework for the analysis of crime film so as to create a multiple-reading strategy, in order to appreciate the richness and diversity of film texts (ibid., 79). In particular, the author points to a combination of Marxist and postmodern perspectives, where the former provides a tool for exposing the dominant narratives of law and order embodied in a film, and the latter emphasises the potential multiple reading of a film (ibid.,

75). The analysis of a film thereby becomes an 'attempt to unpack the dissonance within any given film text as a reflection of the ambivalent meanings of crime that circulate in society as a whole' (ibid, 77).

A similar approach seems a valuable analytical tool, in relation to the historical circumstances within which a film has been made. In particular, the gist of Yar's view is to be found in the fact that a double perspective, in the analysis of a narrative structure, increases the possibility of disclosing several points of debate, instead of relying on just one possible meaning in a film, due to the choice of a monolithic perspective. In the case of my sample, following a similar perspective, I have tried to integrate into a narrative and semiotic analysis of a film an examination of how melodrama, as a typical modern mode, articulates and develops certain recurrent themes and set of characters in film noir. Melodrama is a narrational mode typical of modernity and industrialisation (Singer, 2001,17), which is going to be treated more extensively in the next chapter. As a preliminary definition, it includes those stories in plays, books and (later) films with a 'heightened emotionalism and sentimentality' (ibid., 37), in which characters experience an unprecedented level of individual mobility and emotional instability, as they operate in a constantly changing environment, in tune with the audience's experience (ibid., 21). This sort of narrative became popular in French theatres at the beginning of the 19th century (Brooks, 1995, 12) and became widespread over the Western world thereafter. Women especially, in this new narrative context, are often at the centre of a moral conflict between a traditional role and the new position they might find themselves in the modern world as a result of their emancipation (ibid., 221). The advantage of considering a narrative analysis of films within this wider melodramatic dimension is to be found in the 'contextualist approach', whereby the emphasis is on the way a cultural object grows out of a complex social, intertextual and commercial context (Singer, 2001, 8). Intertextuality refers to the network of increasing interconnections between cultural products, as a result of the expansion of media technology, of the communications network and of the subsequent commercialisation of amusement (Singer, 2001, 263). Following this trend, for example, a newspaper article, a book, a movie or another cultural product would re-articulate successful

stories, transposing them in their own representational language and producing a larger range of sensational serials.

While a narrative analysis of a film establishes the way a story contains information about the world and how it conveys this to the audience is targeting (Lacey, 2000, 13), a wider interpretative frame, such as melodrama, locates a particular narrative within a bigger cluster of stories developed under certain historical, economic and technical conditions. In this way, it is possible to study groups of film noir as articulations of different social discourses available at a particular time in a society, which bring their own contribution in terms of a repeated formula, of a set of conventions, and of novelty to the representation of those stories. For example, I found that, in the early thirties, a group of gangster movies in America started a new way of storytelling which led finally to the birth of film noir at the beginning of the forties and to a new articulation of the narrative conventions of melodrama. Both gangster films and noir represent as much a development from previous cultural and institutional practices, as they do struggle to include new elements in the public representation of criminals in cinema: a notion which I will develop further in chapter 5.

The point I want to stress here is that, in the study of films, a double perspective has the advantage of offering a multiple level of analysis, showing how a fictional story gives a solution to different problems, related to its production, distribution, reception and departure from, or respect for, pre-existing traditions. And melodrama works as a shared mode of representation common to the western world, providing its narrative interpretative repertoire of intense emotions and displaced characters across a range of media: in our case, mainly books and cinema.

1.2.9 Language, semiology and semiotics

Language, as one of the media through which thoughts, ideas and feelings are represented in a culture, works as a representational system (Hall, 1997a, 1). It uses concrete forms, such as words, sounds, images, shapes, colours or objects, called *signifiers*, to express or communicate

abstract ideas, or concepts, to other people (O'Sullivan et al., 1994, 265). Such ideas and concepts are called *signifieds*, following Saussure's semiology, the theory of language and science of signs ascribed to the Swiss scholar (Culler, 1990, 19; Saussure, 2005, 83). The union of a form with a concept, or an idea, is a sign, which is something standing for the object or idea it represents: the *referent* (Palmer, 1991, 8). In this way, a criminal in a film is a visual sign formed by a signifier: his/her image as appears on the screen. Such signifier is in its turn the result of a division of labour, in which a network of human and technological resources reproduce narratively and photographically this story, editing it and finally projecting it for an audience. On the other hand, next to this signifier we can find a concept, the signified, which refers to something similar existing already in reality, or in our memory, the referent, that is the criminal himself/herself, as a 'real' subject, or as a common-sense figure, an image, circulating in our culture. The novelty of Sausure's approach is such that it does not share the view according to which language reflects reality, but posits instead that language and other communication systems (such as cinema) provide the conceptual framework in and through which reality is available to us (Bignell, 1997, 6). The combination of a particular signifier and signified is *arbitrary*, as it is based on mutable conventions among the community of users (Culler, 1990, 19-20) who share a common language system with a grammar. Such a system is a *langue* in Saussure's terms, as opposed to *parole* - the individual speech-acts made possible by the language (Stam et al., 1992, 8). From the arbitrariness of signs there come some corollaries: signs can have different meanings, they are *polysemic*[12] (Lacey, 1998, 58) and they are defined by virtue of their *difference* with each other (Bignell, 1997, 9). Difference is often intended in terms of opposition of meaning with other signs. Thus, cinema and its grammar can be examined as a language system, a *langue*, some sort of visual esperanto, potentially common to viewers from different cultures, while a particular film is an instance of a *parole*, one of the possible narrative combinations of signs, among the various available. A film, from this perspective, can be seen as 'a very diverse collection of visual, aural and graphic signs,

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[12] There are, of course, exceptions to this basic principle, as in the case of onomatopoeia and a few cases of 'secondary motivation' (e.g. a type-writer), in which the combination of words is motivated (Lacey, 1998, 58; Stam et al., 1992, 8), but the fact that they are considered as a special class confirms that ordinary signs are arbitrary (Culler, 1990, 20)

which the viewer works to perceive as meaningful, using his or her knowledge of codes and conventions' in cinema (Bignell, 1997, 190). Such codes and conventions are shared by both film-makers and audiences as presuppositions to establish a communication, (Bignell, 1997, 187; Hall, 1997a, 4) as they are integral part of a culture in the form of conceptual maps which help to translate an internal world of concepts and ideas into a visual one of signs and symbols (Hall, 1997b, 21). For example, one of these conventions in cinema (and in modern cultural products in general) is melodrama, already mentioned above, as a recognisable set of stories and characters, which articulates and somehow resolves in a narrative form certain current social issues, particularly meaningful, or attractive, for audiences.

Semiology, among other disciplines, contributes to uncover some of the relationships between the signs of certain cultural practices and the codes and conventions underlying a system of representation proper to a particular culture (Lacey, 1998, 58). However, one of the main limitations of Saussure's inspired analysis of sign is its assumption that the basic model to analyse other systems of signification is verbal language[13] (Jensen, 1995, 13), leaving little room to develop a sophisticated analytical project in a comparative study of images and narrative. For these reasons, Saussure's semiological approach is often integrated into, or replaced by, Charles Sanders Peirce's tripartite definition of sign, which is at the basis of his *semiotics* (Eco, 1984, 175; Jensen, 1995; Wollen, 1998, 82). According to Peirce's orientation, signs are divided into icons, indices and symbols (Wollen, 1998, 83). A sign that represents its object by *similarity* to it is an *icon*, which is exemplified by realist photography, or the recording of a natural sound. A *causal link*, a direct relationship, or a bond between a sign and its object establishes an *index*, as in the case of thermometer indicating the temperature. The third category, the *symbol*, is the *arbitrary* sign, which corresponds to Saussure's general category of the sign, in which there is a social consensus about its meaning, as in the case of the signs used in the Highway Code (Lacey, 1998, 66; Wollen, 1998, 83).

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[13] According to Saussure, speech has the immediacy and authenticity of the moment, while writing is its delayed and distorted representation (Brooker, 2003, 75).

The advantage of using Pierce's system of signs is that these categories are not exclusive, but there are possibilities of overlapping and co-presence among signs (Wollen, 1998, 84). For example, in the case of a picture of a criminal, it can have some indexical quality (e.g. as a document of social protest, evidence of discriminatory practices etc.), along with the iconic ones (e.g. police detection), and symbolic ones (e.g. piece in a museum exhibition, source for artistic reproduction), according to the use, the context of fruition, or production and other personal or social factors. From this perspective, the comparison with Saussure's theory emphasises how restricted semiology can be in limiting the notion of sign to just one dimension of Pierce's system, the symbolic one. Nevertheless, Saussure's semiology is important in stressing the role of sign as socially constructed, or incorporated, within a culture, and its system of representation. On this concept, Stuart Hall builds his theory of coding and encoding, already mentioned (Hall, 1992; Stevenson, 1995, 41). Another good point in Saussure's system is that it stresses the tendency of a sign to establish its meaning through its relationship with other signs, and in particular through a differential practice with an opposite sign, in order to disclose some of the central thematic oppositions within a culture (Lacey, 1998, 69). Without resorting to the simplistic account of binary oppositions of signs which has been part of much textual analysis in the seventies (Wright, 1977), it is nevertheless useful to articulate in this research a specific issue: how, within a dominant system of representation, different cultural practices based on different signs come to develop a resistance, a challenge or a defeat, which becomes part of the artistic and political visual heritage for future generations.

1.2.10 Michel Foucault according to Stuart Hall: discourse as a system of representation

Following Hall's account of the main differences between the semiotic and the discursive approach, the former is concerned with the way representation works (with its poetics), or with the way language produces meaning; the latter is related to the effects and consequences of

representation (its politics) (Hall, 1997a, 6). These approaches have at their centre a concept of representation, which needs to be clarified at this stage, in order to explain its relationship both with the concept of discourse and with that part of my research based on the concept of representation itself.

Traditionally, in social science, representation has been considered a transparent medium. Thus, for the so-called *reflective* approach (Hall, 1997b, 24), the production of meaning was ascribed to objects out there in the world (O'Sullivan et al., 1994, 93). Language worked as a mirror that reflected the meaning as it already existed in reality (Hall, 1997b, 24). Similarly, the *intentional* approach found the source of the production of meaning in the inner essences and feelings of individuals (O'Sullivan et al., 1994, 93), whereby the speaker, or the author, imposes his/her unique meaning on the world through language (Hall, 1997b, 25). From this point of view, language becomes almost a private matter, stressing the role of the speaker as the only producer of meaning. With the advent of the 'linguistic turn'[14] in social science, around the sixties, there has been an attempt to apply the insights of linguistics to the study of the impersonal effects of social structures and political systems (Elliott, 2009, 55). Since that time, a *constructionist* approach to meaning in language has recognised that meaning is not a property of the world out there, but an effect of signification, which is a property of language (O'Sullivan et al., 1994, 93). The focus has subsequently shifted to those 'symbolic practices and processes through which representation, meaning and language operate' (Hall, 1997b, 25). It is the language (or representational) system that conveys meaning, through the use that social actors make of the conceptual systems in their culture (ibid.). Representation functions like a model of a dialogue (Hall, 1997a 10). On one side there are shared cultural codes, always negotiable, which allow for a translation of concepts and idea into signs, as mentioned in the previous paragraph. On the other, we have the dominant position of some members of society (ibid.), which will intervene in the process of production of meaning about certain topics, in an attempt to establish certain forms of knowledge as 'true',

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[14] *Linguistic turn* refers to a shift in social science from social to linguistic structures, from society to language (Ritzer and Goodman, 2003, 581). Structuralism, associated with a number of French writers in the sixties, was at the centre of this shifting away from the humanistic viewpoint that people are self-directing agents, focusing instead on the structures which give coherence, regularity and meaning to social interaction (Elliott, 2009, 55).

meaningful, or popular, through a process of selection among discourses available. Foucault's attempt to describe the system and rules of formation of discourse has to be ascribed to this *constructionist* direction (Sheridan, 1980, 87). The French historian tries to find a level of analytical description of the 'taken for granted' knowledge produced within a particular discursive order, at a specific historical period, in order to disclose the social struggle at the basis of that knowledge (Dean, 1994, 35; Sheridan, 1980, 102). The emphasis within Foucault's discursive approach is on the historical specificity of a particular form of representation, the way knowledge produced by a discourse is related to power and the way some aspects of certain human and social issues come to be highlighted, studied or neglected, both in certain institutional practices or in everyday life (Hall, 1997b, 43, 45). With this shift from language to discourse, the discourse itself becomes a system of representation, as physical things and human actions produce meaning, only when they become objects of knowledge within discourse (Hall, 1997a, 45). Foucault refers to concepts such as punishment, madness or sexuality which only exists within the limits and to the extent of a discourse about them (ibid.). The study of such discourse has to include the following elements, as they are summarised by Hall:

1. statements about these categories which produce a certain kind of knowledge about them;

2. rules which prescribe certain ways of talking about these topics and exclude others, what is 'sayable', or 'thinkable';

3. 'subjects' who in some ways personify the discourse, according to the knowledge produced about them;

4. how this knowledge about the topic acquires status of authority, constituting the 'truth of the matter' at a historical moment;

5. the practices within institutions for dealing with the subjects whose conduct has been regulated and organised according to those ideas;

6. acknowledgement that a different discourse will arise at a later historical moment, replacing the existing one, opening up a new discursive formation, which will have a certain degree of authority. (Hall, 1997a, 45)

Hall's summary of Foucault's constructionist perspective and discursive method can be a useful analytical device to be adapted for film analysis, as it assumes representation to be a sort of 'symbolic practice by which meaning is given to the world' (Brooker, 2003, 223). This approach will be carried out in combination with a semiotic approach, in order to give a historical dimension to an otherwise too abstract and theoretical system of investigation. Attention has to be paid to the way certain visual statements in a film provide knowledge on a topic, such as crime and its representation, through its actors, narratives, techniques and reference to traditional or innovative sources of cultural practice. However, the coincidence of representation with discourse in Foucault's system seems a little too restrictive for my film analysis, as I would prefer to keep the two dimensions of analysis (the semiotic and the discoursive) as the two sides from which to look at the issue of representation: the way it works and its possible effects and consequences. Such an approach will provide an opportunity for a multiple reading of a film narrative and enhance its comparative perspective.

One criticism that needs to be made of Stuart Hall's general theory and system of representation in particular is that he tends to overstate the incorporating power of ideology, the detail of discourse analysis and its relationship with semiotics, without paying enough attention to how the economy and the State shape cultural production (Stevenson, 1995, 42). In particular, he ignores 'the growing economic interpenetration of different media sectors and the internationalisation of media conglomerates' (ibid., 43). I will address these points in chapter 3, where I am going to articulate a tripartite notion of culture, in order to disclose several points of contact between a micro analysis at the textual level and a macro one in terms of social structure and the conditions under which the production of cultural products takes place.

Conclusions

In the first section of this chapter, I have reviewed some of the key texts in the criminological discussion about media and crime that have shown the discipline of criminology to be a field of studies intimately related to urgent contemporary public debate. Starting with the famous notion of moral panic developed in the seventies by Stanley Cohen, I have emphasised the relationship between this type of research and the problem of deviancy amplification as highlighted in young rival groups. I have shown how the media acted as intermediary between a young generation and an older audience, labelling a social problem in terms of social disorder and thus generating anxiety and panic. I have suggested that the reasons for the success of such a theory were also the reasons for its demise, since the concept of moral panic entered the vernacular and came to be applied too widely to a series of diverse social phenomena. I have introduced a preliminary definition of culture, stressing its connections with the concepts of language and representation. *Policing the Crisis*, one of the books published following Cohen's work, has subsequently been discussed as providing particular indications relating to the definition of social crisis by the media at the end of the seventies. This work has been praised as a successful example of bridging the gap, in social analysis, between the study of crime and cultural studies. In particular, its analysis emphasised the re-organisation of the State in repressive terms, and the media's ability to exploit an economic crisis in terms of deviancy amplification and social alarm, while exploiting racial differences and social deprivation.

I then introduced the polemic about 'the great denial' that followed this work, which was considered too abstract and not adequately involved in studying the real nature of crime in daily life. Subsequently I examined why, during the eighties, research was focused elsewhere than on the study of crime and media. Following this shift in the criminological agenda, I analysed some aspects of Sparks's work on the portrayal of crime on television, in which he presented some concerns relating to the everyday dimension of media consumption and the methodological tools of cultural studies. I stressed the fact that this was one of the first works on fictional crime to address the notion of pleasure, alongside fear and anxiety, derived from watching crime stories.

I subsequently moved on to sociological contributions to cinema, analysing how Melossi investigated the concept of the 'representation of the criminal' in order to relate this to wider social contexts, the European and the American. Melossi argued that a more sympathetic notion of criminals seems to prevail at some periods compared with others, as economic and social circumstances change. I also underlined how his analysis included cinematic representation, as the discourse about crime and criminals comes to expression in diverse public representations drawn from different institutional sources. I then compared the limitations relating to the study of cinema in this work with studies devoted entirely to film and crime. I underlined how Rafter's contribution to the subject establishes collaboration between film scholars and criminologists. This joint endeavour tends towards defining how crime films are becoming a kind of popular criminology for a wider public in search of both information and entertainment from crime films. In the final paragraphs, I discussed the recent return to a collaboration between a media and criminological perspective in the form of cultural criminology, and I suggested how this new academic paradigm has many parallels with film noir. Finally, I have shown how this trend offers an opportunity for turning a sociological project into a dialogue between cultures, and for expanding criminology's imaginative parameters in the same way as noir has become the locus of possible regeneration for a critical and aesthetic project.

In the second section of this chapter, I have reviewed some notions that are closely related to my research, introducing the concept of film noir and its international legacy, with some of the relevant methodological aspects of my dissertation. Starting with the exposition of the history of film noir, in the first three paragraphs. I have covered the common features and some of the problems related to the classification of this group of American films. In particular, I have stressed how they have become the object of opposing feelings regarding the homogenisation of popular culture, while at the same time triggering an international debate about the flexibility and popular appeal of their narration and set of stock characters. I moved on to introducing my research project, its aims, and some of the problems related to its limitations together with possible ways of tackling them. Subsequently, I have expanded on the structure of my dissertation, describing how it has

been developed according to different stages of critical theory and the reasons why. I have introduced, at the same time, my first working hypothesis, before moving into the details of my preliminary studies necessary to start my research. I have moved into the reasons for the false start in my first project and its usefulness to me, in terms of rearticulating more realistically the plan for my next analysis and its sample. Finally, the pilot study has helped me to lay the foundations for the choice of my sample and method of study. This has determined the choice of a combination of approaches in film analysis, introducing the concept of melodrama and stressing its importance, in popular culture, especially with reference to the development of modernity and cinema.

In the two last paragraphs, I have introduced the concepts of representation and language and their relationship to the two versions of sign systems, semiology and semiotics and the concept of discourse.

Chapter 2 From scaffold to melodrama.

The return of the repressed in cinema and punishment

In the first chapter, I introduced a minimal concept of cinematic representation, along with a few notions about knowledge, power and discourse, which I am going to use in this section. In doing so, by starting to answer the questions of how cinema is related to the study of crime, and how this relationship can inform a discipline so as to widen its horizons of research and enrich its analytic tools, I will establish a connection between film and punishment. I will then introduce the notion of a 'dramaturgy of the scaffold' in the pre-modern era, relating to public ceremonies of punishment, thus establishing a link between old and new forms of spectacle devoted to the 'presentation' of criminals to an audience. Taking this as my point of departure, I will connect past forms of engagement in public spectacles with new ones resulting from the dual contemporary process of secularisation and rationalisation. Here my emphasis will be on increasingly mediated forms of interaction between recipients, and how this affects public discourse about spectacle, crime and punishment. Particular attention will be devoted to the rise of melodrama, with its refashioning for the modern era of certain preoccupations about religion, morality and guilt. Hitchcock's films will be used to exemplify some of the notions introduced, before I turn more extensively to the concept of the 'return of the repressed' and its relationship to the political unconscious of a particular historical period. Finally, I will articulate some consequences of the discursive nature of film noir for contemporary social analysis.

2.1 From scaffold to media: the experience of spectatorship in the punishment of crime

In reference to the relationship between cinema, social media and the study of crime, it is important to go back to how, historically, crime stories have entered mass media narratives and become a common feature of their daily agenda. Of course, modern systems of communication did not 'invent' the phenomenon of human curiosity and the popular fascination with felony and lawbreaking, but have simply tapped into a former tradition of social network and public communication. The most illuminating account of this shift between a pre-modern sensitivity and a more rationalised communicative ethos in society is, incidentally, outlined in Kai Erikson's work on 17th-century Massachusetts Puritan colonies (Erikson, 1966). Assessing the role that deviancy has in establishing the moral borders in a communitarian identity, the American sociologist describes an important change in modern attitudes toward crime and morality, which is worth citing in full:

> In our own past, the trial and punishment of offenders were staged in the market place and afforded the crowd a chance to participate in a direct, active way. Today, of course, we no longer parade deviants in the town square or expose them to the carnival atmosphere of a Tyburn, but it is interesting that the 'reform' which brought this change in penal practice coincided almost exactly with the development of newspapers (and now radio and television) that offer much the same kind of entertainment as public hangings or a Sunday visit to the local gaol. A considerable portion of what we call 'news' is devoted to reports about deviant behaviour and its consequences, and it is no simple matter to explain why these items should be considered newsworthy or why they should command the extraordinary attention they do. Perhaps they appeal to a number of psychological perversities among the mass audience, as commentators have suggested, but at the same time they constitute one of our main sources of information about the

normative outlines of society. In a figurative sense, at least, morality and immorality meet at the public scaffold, and it is during this meeting that the line between them is drawn. (Erikson, 1966, 12)

From this point of view, the scaffold is the social stage where lawbreakers and lawmakers enact a violent confrontation, with the final, physical expulsion of the criminal from the community of the living (Merback, 1999, 139). At the same time, the participation of onlookers at the event gives publicity and legitimisation to those involved in this social ritual (Friedland, 2012, 119). However, when the scaffold was dismantled and removed from the social scene, as no longer in tune with popular sensibilities, something else took the place of this centre of public participation. My theory is that the gradual development of mass communication systems succeeded authoritative displays of violent death in a public square, at least in part substituting for it tales about misdoings or the penal sentencing of real and fictional characters. In this way, a public of onlookers became a virtual community of readers first, and spectators later, where new forms of interaction among community members were possible, together with the commercial exploitation of technical innovations in the distribution of stories related to crime.

More generally, the disappearance of the body of the condemned from the public stage is part of a process of civilisation, accurately described by Elias, that comes with the decline of the medieval social order and the rise of western nation states (Elias, 2000). The subsequent refinements of public feelings and social manners are the result of a transformation from an aggressive expression of pleasure, proper to warlike societies, into a more passive and ordered mode of 'spectating' (Elias, 2000, 170) that marks the beginning of the modern era. Durkheim highlights this transition in modern times, from a legal point of view, by pointing to the difference between criminal acts against collective values or authorities (Religious Criminality) and other acts that offend only against individuals (Human or Individual Criminality) (Durkheim, 1899-1900, 41). The first category, according to the French sociologist, will regress along with social evolution: it will disappear, so that punishments consisting only in deprivation of freedom will become the normal type of repression (ibid., 40-41). In other words, punishment increasingly takes place

behind closed doors, initiating a 'sobriety of punishment' that resorts no longer to previous centuries' theatrical representation of inflicted pain, but instead to solitary confinement and private repression removed from the public eye (Foucault, 1977, 14).

Replacing these social rituals of public display, the advent of the mass communication system (e.g. broadsheets, news reports of sentencing, penny newspapers) increases mediated forms of interaction with recipients, while favouring the concentration of symbolic and economic power in new social organisms (Thompson, J.B., 1995, 202). Thus, the participatory moment of the spectator in a local community gives way to a 'window', a view, on the world offered by a system, where the visual field provided by the media replaces the visual world of direct experience. At the same time, a mediated discourse about crime stories taps into previous collective rituals of popular participation in public executions. From this point of view, social media provide a new way of refashioning collective identities based on the sharing of knowledge, entertainment and spectatorship, organised along the blurred lines of aesthetic fascination, power to punish, social influence and maximisation of profit.

2.2 The rationalisation of the crime drama

This mediated 'visibility' of crime in modern social discourse runs parallel to the gradual process of secularisation in western European societies that began after the French Revolution (Friedland, 2012, 226). In the same way, the shift from audience participation in rituals of punishment to spatially dislocated spectatorship can be considered a by-product of the development of the so-called capitalist society[15] and the subsequent expansion of its markets. These two tendencies exemplify the supposed dual role of capital punishment, operating both as a projection of the sovereign's power to monopolise violence *and* as a quasi-religious ritual in which the

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[15] About the 'elective affinity', in a Weberian sense, between a theatricalised, scenographic space of representation and the capitalist system, Jay argues that the development of a certain pictorial practice during the Renaissance paralleled the circulation among collectors of a detached form of commodity, the painting, available for capitalist circulation (Jay, 1994, 58-59).

community at large ushered the condemned culprit into death and thus a new 'social role' (Merback, 1999, 18). For these reasons, execution was staged as a form of spectacle (Foucault, 1977, 7; Friedland, 2012; Garland, 1991, 266; Spierenburg, 1984): that is, an arranged public display enacting, on the one hand, 'the drama of state-sponsored death' (Merback, 1999, 18) and on the other the drama of Christian repentance, purification and salvation (ibid., 144), aimed ultimately at the social reintegration of the condemned as penitent and martyr (ibid., 146). On this social 'stage' the criminal acted as a sinner who had defied God, and therefore the penalty for his/her actions should mirror the crime committed, according to the *lex talionis* of 'an eye for an eye' (Merback, 1999, 139; Spierenburg, 1984, 8). In other cases, as Gerard recalls, the lynching or mobbing of a victim from a weak or marginal group within the community would result in a scapegoating ceremony. In this way, the community re-establishes a peaceful and harmonious existence after a social crisis or an internal disturbance, whose causes are very often wrongly attributed to the sacrificial victims (Gerard, 1996, 107).

With the advent of inquisitorial criminal procedure and subsequent punishment behind closed doors, religious influence and imagery gradually disappear from the penal realm, to give way to the emergence of an 'army of technicians' who take over from the executioner in dealing with the convicted (Foucault, 1977, 11). Thus, wardens, doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists, chaplains, journalists and dramatists contribute to produce a certain amount of literature, practice and 'knowledge' (Foucault, 2002, 200) in their respective disciplines, with an emphasis on the role of language in 'disciplining' certain aspects of human conduct, within the general process of intensification and fragmentation of social communication about crime and criminals (Leps, 1992, 31). Technical knowledge replaces tradition and moral sentiments as the leading determinant of social action in penality (Garland, 1991, 179). In the same way, curtailing of spectators' direct involvement in matters of punishment is counterbalanced by the increased role of experts in devising punitive solutions, and their response to more utilitarian and rational points of view (Garland, 1991, 187). This tendency in penal practice is, of course, part of the bigger social process of rationalisation of modern life, which Weber has conveniently identified as an increasing instrumental rationality that favours the efficiency, predictability and calculability of social action

in the market economy of western societies (Weber, 2001; Ritzer, 2004, 25). Moreover, this emergence of the new social and anthropological sciences in concurrent with the development of a new set of visual technological practices, which facilitate a new form of visibility and social control (Tagg, 1993). Photography, for example, is essential to the process of classification, documentation and creation of archives for both the new science and the new organs of social control (ibid., 5). In this way, the photographic reproduction of the natural world acquires the status of realistic documentation and evidence for police detection purposes and in courts of law (ibid., 6), contributing to the emergence of a new visual paradigm. Following Foucault, Tagg claims that this emergence releases new effects of power, just as new forms of exercising power produce new knowledge of social subjects, in the sense anticipated in the previous chapter (ibid., 5-6).

This process of rationalisation, professionalisation and bureaucratisation of punishment (Garland, 1991, 177) and societal life has led, at the cultural level, to repressing and concealing behind the scenes of 'official' public life those emotional and instinctual aspects of human personality involved in the enactment of penal practices and related public rituals. In this way, these 'repressed' sensibilities (i.e. fear of and fascination with crime and violence) have found expression in other areas of human communication, such as the production of symbolic forms through a technical medium, as in painting, architecture, the press, popular literature, theatre and cinema (Brooks, 1995; Leps, 1992; Merback, 1999; Vidler, 1992). In this respect, for example, the tendency from the nineteenth century onwards to apply rational principles to gothic architecture for the purpose of constructing prisons and hospitals, making them brighter and better ventilated, provoked an interest in the opposite, dark side of human behaviour (Fiddler, 2009, 182). In the parallel gothic literature of the same period, there developed a popular interest in discovering what went on behind the façade of prisons' outer walls, and in official chronicles about villains and their sentencing (Barefoot, 2001, 63).

2.3 Melodrama and the gothic imagination in Europe

The continuity between social and dramatic ceremonies[16] outlined above can be developed further by analysing the form of representation commonly called melodrama.

Like the disappearance of public execution, melodrama comes from the process of desacralisation, or secularisation, in modern society, as a result of the growing rationality set in motion by the Renaissance and consolidated by the Enlightenment, which spread from science to all other aspects of human life. Its origins coincide roughly with the development of opera in Italy around the 17th century: etymologically, the term *melodrama* indicates a mixture of music (melos) and drama (Cuddon, 1999, 502). Its main characteristic is an appeal to sensationalism and strong emotions, in order to expose the underlying moral conflicts that mask the surface of reality. In this respect, the hidden drama of melodramatic narratives is given by the 'moral occult', as Brooks called it, referring to 'the repository of the fragmentary and desacralized remnants of sacred myth' (Brooks, 1995, 5). Melodrama stands as the opposite of naturalism in its reliance on the expression of emotion in the pure, histrionic form of dreams (Brooks, 1995, 12), and therefore is an expressionist form of representation. 'Thus if realism's relentless search for renewed truth and authentication pushes it towards stylistic innovation and the future, melodrama's search for something lost, inadmissible, repressed, ties it to an atavistic past' (Gledhill, 1987, 32). From this perspective, then, the unconscious and nostalgia play a big role in this mode of representation, in articulating a repressed desire that cannot be ultimately satisfied: an estrangement[17] (Stam et al., 1992, 198). In these stories a combination of present situations and past memories re-creates the

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[16] According to Duvignaud, 'The *dramatic situation* differs from the *social situation* insofar as the one embodies social roles in order to assert its dynamism and modify its own structure, while the other represents action not in order to carry it out but in order to invest it with symbolism. Social situations lead to the invention of new situations while the dramatic situation perpetuates a pattern of behaviour that cannot surmount any obstacle because the obstacle, sublimated as it is, makes the conflict insoluble' (Duvignaud, 1965, 86-87). In addition, I wish to argue that dramatic action often offers imaginary solutions to 'real' conflicts (Jameson, 2002, 64), making one particular aesthetic choice among different possible solutions. It is with this symbolic enactment of the social within the formal and the aesthetic that my analysis is ultimately concerned.

[17] Estrangement, or alienation, refers to a term in Brechtian theatre which emphasizes a range of disjunctions in acting and narrative, to prevent over-identification and to draw the viewer's attention to the fictional aspect of a play (Stam et al, 1992, 198-199). Thus, by presenting the world in an unfamiliar way, it facilitates an audience's critical perception of a play (Willett, 1977, 178-179.)

difficulties of fulfilling the inner aspirations of an innocent, or morally wounded, character in a secluded and inhospitable environment (Singer, 2001, 136). In this respect, the set of dramatic conventions offered by melodrama appears to be very flexible and adaptable to different contexts and conflicts. Replacing the rite of sacrifice, proper to tragedy, with emotional human intervention in a world devoid of a superior moral order or spiritual guidance, the main character has to face the abyss and the horror of evil in an attempt to reassert his/her virtue in the struggle with sometimes mysterious and menacing forces, normally personified by villains, or ghost-like figures (Vidler, 1992, 17).

Particularly interesting is the influence that gothic literature[18] was to exert on melodrama from the 18th century onwards, providing it with a visual repository of horror and mystery narratives and architectural settings (castles, dungeons, spiral staircases) that facilitated the proliferation of stories polarising the fight between good and evil (Brooks, 1995, 13) in a context where the sacred is no longer viable. The private bourgeois family was at the centre of this new kind of narrative (Gledhill, 1987, 20), as the compensatory source of moral and social order to replace the lost ethical imperatives of the previous tradition. Following this new representational trend 19th century Parisian, and Victorian English writers and dramatists unmasked the dark, hidden passions, fears within the family, or crimes perpetrated against this domestic sphere, preparing the ground for an alternative dramatic rhetoric that sided with a powerless and working-class audience.[19]

In this melodramatic trend, writers such as Balzac, Dostoevsky and Dickens elevate the crime story to high literature, and the novel becomes the place to articulate the moral problems and psychological difficulties that people face in adapting to modern times (Bakhtin, 1984, 17; Brooks, 1995, 22; Leps, 1992, 136). More precisely, the emphasis in these stories is on their 'dual

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[18] Introduced by the Romantic interest in the medieval, the period of gothic fiction extended from 1760 until 1820, contained a strong supernatural element and exerted a long-lasting influence on American cinema. Its topography ranged from castles and dungeons to cities of underground passageways and chambers (Barefoot, 2001, 67; Cuddon, 1999, 355-356).

[19] In relation to the extent of and differences in this 'break' in forms of representation in France and England, due to divergent historical and popular developments in these countries, Gledhill argues that there was a more marked change in France, where a populist mode of narration developed, while in England, where it was linked to an upper-class tradition of narration, dramatists exercised a more cautious approach (Gledhill, 1987, 14-15).

engagement' 'with the representation of people's social existence, the way they live in the ordinary, and with the moral drama implicated by and in their existence' (Brooks, 1995, 22). From this point of view, we should not overlook the contribution of these tales to the development of cinematic and narrative tales of lost illusions, repressed anxieties and psychological alienation that converged in the development of *roman noir* and hard-boiled literature (Phillips, 2000).

2.4 The drama of American gothic imagination

Unlike the European experience, American gothic (popular) literature originated in the popularity of execution sermons, 'preached shortly before the condemned was put to death for his or her offense' (Halttunen, 1998, 2). Such sermons, produced collaboratively by clergymen and printers from the 1670s onwards, provided the sinful New England community with public discourses about eternal damnation and possible reconciliation between sinner and community (ibid., 7). With the subsequent expansion of the printing industry, growing competition for cultural authority over the public of readers favoured the creation of the first 'dime-novel factories' during the 19th century, where groups of workers, hierarchically organised, would read, select, re-write and publish mostly unusual stories of city life in the form of crime fiction (Palmer, 1991, 6). On the other hand, importation of melodramatic literature to America, previously delayed by Puritan distrust of drama, was subjected to a process of adaptation and transformation at the end of the 19th century (Gledhill, 1987, 24). In this way, the class divide of the European tradition was transposed into a rural/urban opposition, where the country stands as the repository of traditional values and identity, while urban industrialism coincides with inequalities, alienation and loss of tradition (Gledhill, 1987, 24-25).

Among the different versions of American melodrama, the vigilante chronicles were fictional narrative accounts of the rough justice of the western frontier, often based on real incidents (Friedman, 1993, 172; Royster, 1997; Slotkin, 1973). In these fictions, a group of people, sometimes involved in lynching, would revel in their 'heroic' accounts of banishing evil forces - by

final 'expulsion' of the villain - which threatened the moral order of the local community (Grimsted, 1994, 199-200). These kinds of stories were mostly written to create a symbolic centre around which solidarities were formed and distinctions emphasised (e.g. with rioters). At the same time, these prejudices, combined with the narrative structure of melodrama, produced what has been called 'the Janus face of populism and nationalism': 'On the one hand a representation of the desire for a nation free of all sources of evil and freed by the activities of someone who refuses to bow to any authority s/he does not recognise; on the other a respect for naked power exercised directly through physical force' (Denning quoted in Palmer, 1991, 152-153). It is relatively easy to trace these stories back to the mythology of the American frontier tradition and the infamous practice of 'regeneration through violence' (Slotkin, 1973, 5) that runs throughout American history (Friedman, 1993; Royster, 1997) and to the subsequent individualism of the common man who takes the law into his own hands. The ambiguity of these stories resides in the sense referred to that they were, simultaneously, tales of perverse freedom and of repression. Hollywood would later take these stories from books and theatres, and develop traits of some of the most quintessential American characters, the 'men with guns' or, in Warshow's definition, the gangster, the westerner (Warshow, 1954, 89), and the private eye (Phillips, 2000, 12).

2.5 Hitchcock's noir melodrama

Thus melodrama stands out for its attempt to make drama out of the banal stuff of reality (Brooks, 1995, 2), introducing the emotional immediacy of the novel (Brooks, 1995, 83) into film, by stripping away 'the façade of manners to reveal the inner conflict at work – moments of symbolic confrontation which fully articulate the terms of drama' (ibid., 3). However, it must be specified that, 'there is no such thing as cinematic melodrama in general, only varieties of films that in specific historical circumstances took up certain potentials of melodrama to respond to the questions of their day' (Andrew, 1995, 336). Following this perspective, different authors have underlined the relationship between melodrama and film noir (Meisel, 1994, 75; Barefoot, 1994,

69), emphasising the way gothic imagination entered Hollywood, by turning an examination of the medieval battle between good and evil into a visual exploration of the dark side of human personality. One example of this practice is found in Alfred Hitchcock, a European director whose film-directing career in America started in the forties with a version of one of the most famous gothic novels, *Rebecca* (1940). Winning an Oscar for best film of the year, this film's director was subsequently much sought-after by American studios (Rohmer and Chabrol, 1980, 60). As in other films of his during the same decade (*Suspicion* in 1941, *Shadow of a Doubt* in 1943), the themes of loss of innocence, a fallen world, guilt and shifting identity (Wood, R., 1989, 296) are counterbalanced visually by masterful suspense,[20] built on the duplicitous exchange of gazes between characters, unusual camera angles and fast-paced editing that create an emotional climax in a spectator - which became one of Hitchcock's trademarks (Singer, 2004, 9).

In these three films, a young woman is about to discover the dark side in the person she is in love with, or attracted by, so that what seems an otherwise conventional love story, or family portrait, becomes a tale of suspicion and duplicity. From this point of view, there are some similarities between the film inspired by gothic literature and the detective thriller, as in both cases the characters are at odds with a duplicitous and amoral social milieu (Schatz, 1999, 236). In the gothic story, centred on a female figure, such atmosphere of suspicion is 'delivered' to the spectator through a multiple perspective, in that Hitchcock's movies offer different viewpoints, different camera angles, from which to look at characters in different ways (Thomas, 1992, 84). All these stories tap into the female gothic conventions of 'the forbidden territory beyond the door' (Barefoot, 2001 63), the crossing of the threshold after which the world will not be the same again. In this liminal place, the active and deviant world of men collides with the Victorian domesticity of (some) female characters, at least up to the point when women themselves reveal a double nature in their personality (Modleski, 1989, 54). The visual articulation of the story presents each character

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[20] In this context, suspense is the psychological condition of being suspended between two states - stability and instability, doubt and certainty, familiarity and strangeness - that the viewer might experience in watching Hitchcock's movies (Thomas, 1992, 85). At the same time, fictional characters are suspended in a world where order and chaos are very close to each other, as are reality and illusion, dream and wakefulness, physical balance and vertigo (Wollen, 1998, 141). In these double meanings, Hitchcock's suspense can be experienced as the possibility of emotional involvement in representation of certain social contradictions expressed in visual terms, especially as regards gender and violence.

as a double: the innocent becomes guilty, or an accomplice, the culprit seems to be cleverly disguising his/her misdoing, and what is familiar seems, instead, strange or 'extra-ordinary'.

In *Shadow of a Doubt*, for example, the demonic uncle and his angelic niece stand for opposite sides of the same situation, the same family. It is as if the journey of the uncle, who finds solace from his urban crimes by visiting his sister's family in a small town province, runs in the opposite direction from the niece's peregrination to the duplicitous and illicit side of her family. These journeys in the filmic narrative resemble the journey each of us takes from infancy to adulthood, when appearances are often deceptive and personalities are the results of people's instincts and their past (Thomas, 1992, 71-72). In this way, this group of films invokes the monitoring and manipulation of appearances that are fundamental in our dealings with other people (Elliott, 2001, 43), as they provide, among other things, a source of visual information on the trajectory and transformation of intimacy between real persons, not merely fictional characters. Moreover, the intersection of lost innocence, urban duplicity and moral displacement in characters activates the psychoanalytic side of melodrama, where unconscious and therefore hidden passions surface in gestures, looks, allusions, or cinematic conventions (Singer, 2001, 39). In Hitchcock's movies, the dynamics of repression and the return of the repressed find visual articulation that parallels his sources of inspiration (gothic novels and crime melodrama), where the externalisation of characters' psychological difficulties appears as a product of the conflict between melodramatic desire and repression inherent in the post-Enlightenment and secular world (Gledhill, 1991a, 213).

Some critics argue that confession, rather than suspense, is, in two senses, the central metaphor at the core of Hitchcock's work: in the psychoanalytical sense that frees us from memory by giving memory a verbal or visual form; and in the religious sense where the confession of sins is the same as their redemption (Domarchi in Rohmer and Chabrol, 1980, 98). Thus, certain films in the modern era articulate within society the moral conflicts that execution sermons used to address to the local community. In the latter case, what was at stake was the precedence given to marking the symbolic boundaries between good and bad, legitimate and immoral action, while in the former the issue is about the conditions under which, and the extent to which, it is possible to represent to the public visual stories about crime and atonement.

2.6 The return of the repressed in mainstream Hollywood movies: Hithcock's movies versus noir film

With regard to the resurfacing of repressed desires in Hitchcock's films, the investigation of social constraints, human desire and ambivalence in them echoes the concept of psychoanalysis as modern drama, where the concept of 'acting out' (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1988, 4) emphasises moments in human behaviour when repression returns as a recognition of the deepest relations in life, or the unconcealed moral identity of the characters (Brooks, 1994, 22). This relationship between psychological entrapment in a character's life and the need to escape from it, with subsequent conversion of an emotional affect into a somatic, or cinematic form, was to become Hitchcock's more explicit theme in his later movies. What is important to stress here is that the convergence within Hitchcock's films of melodrama, women films,[21] film noir and psychoanalysis integrates major societal aspects into the narrative, while the spectator is, at the same time, given a privileged position to survey that world (Thomas, 1992, 86). In this way, most of the transformations or actions in the film happen in the spectator's mind and are enacted through a combination of the actors' interpretative skills with technical effects created by backstage workers - screenwriters, photographers, editors - all under Hitchcock's direction (Fried, 1999, 18). For example, the dream sequence in *Spellbound* (1945)*,* in a setting designed by Salvador Dalí, combines the physical performance of a male Hollywood star with the unusual look of a European avant-garde painting, to visually convey the character's psychological distress and amnesia. The frequent use of subjective camera shots enables the spectator to access the point of view of the character and 'share' the protagonist's impressions, thus achieving some sort of psychological rather than phenomenological realism.

As we shall see in chapter 5 Hitchcock does not share the populist tendency of gangster movies of the thirties, or noir B movies of the forties, with their emphasis on male stories,

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[21] To counterbalance the male ethos of most films in pre-war Hollywood, the woman's picture focused on female protagonists and targeted a mainly female audience. Hence the name 'weepies', since an emotional response from these stories was expected, based on loss or self-sacrifice. Thanks to Hitchcock's contribution, this cycle would develop into the female Gothic cycle, with obvious visual and thematic ties to both horror genre and film noir (Schatz, 1999, 110-111).

masculine bonds and alluring female companions who might threaten this bond. On the contrary, his films are always set in a middle-class milieu, and articulate complex feminine 'lead' characters alongside masculine ones (Michie, 1999, 29). At the same time, these stories explore the contradictions and psychological disturbances in relationships between genders, families and moral identities. Thus, the films insert tensions, fears and insecurities into the heart of the familiar stereotype of American domesticity so widely promoted by social authorities at the time of the films' release, but without incurring difficulties with censorship or producers (Michie, 1999, 30).

The type of visual exploration thereby offered to the audience seems to offer an opportunity for them to access 'binocular vision'[22] of a film narrative, witnessing both the story line as it unfolds on the screen and the characters' psychologies as they exchange glances, or express doubts, thus revealing another dimension of the same story. In the film *Rebecca*, for example, the love story of a naïve woman married to a wealthy widower turns out to be a story of suspicion and deceit as soon as the couple return to the house of the male protagonist haunted by memories of and secrets about his previous wife. As already mentioned, the filmic narrative is fragmented by the wide range of viewpoints offered to spectators and by a similarly wide range of narrative registers (romantic, ironic, glamorous, thrilling); and all these aspects combine in producing both striking similarities to and major differences from the film noir tradition. Hithcock's films are not concerned to show how a private eye detects a crime, or how a woman's influence turns a man into a murderer, as many films noir do. In film noir, as we shall see, such encounters with dangerous females often leads to violence and self-destruction. In Hitchcock's American noir melodramas, by contrast, the emergence of dual narrative opens up opportunities for multiple readings in various directions: as simple narrative twists in a love story, or as a mystery or psychological drama, or as a visual investigation of themes related to desire, artistic creation and so forth. Besides revealing the dark side of the human psyche, these films share with noir narration the portrayal of characters in transition who are about to cross a threshold, thus experiencing some sort

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[22] I have borrowed the term 'binocular vision' from Shattuck's analysis of Proust's novel, *Remembrance of things past*, and here intend it to signify a narrative device which, within the linear, temporal order of narrative, allows occasional memories to resurface and reveal a glimpse of the past. This adds another layer of perception and comprehension for both the fictional character and the reader (Shattuck in Jay, 1994, 184).

of existential homelessness related to doubts and anxiety intrinsic to modern human existence (Singer, 2001, 134). The fascination of this cinematic universe resides, among other things, in portraying stories that, while related to a specific location, are still universal in their reference to the fragmentation and contradictory dimension of modern social life (Craib, 1994, 99) and the precarious nature of our personal security (Wollen, 1998, 143). In this way, the articulation of a complex visual language defies the form content distinction, since union of these two elements provides a means to investigate the very nature of human and cinematic perception (Schatz, 1981, 118). As a consequence, the information received from the sequence of events on the screen may be contradicted by techniques employed in depicting a scene's general mood or emotional tone, as a way to negotiate multiple readings and express narrational ambiguities.

2.7 Condensation and displacement in film noir

In this section, I return to some concepts expressed earlier relating to the way some melodrama stories can express emotions in the form of dreams, and to how melodrama and film noir use certain narrative situations to trigger the return of repressed emotions in characters. In doing so, I will analyse these situations in the light of certain psychological issues relevant to my discussion of the nature of film noir. I have also introduced the notion that films, or dramatic actions, can be the imaginative resolution of real problems or social conflicts insofar as some aspects of the totality of the external world are inscribed into the texture of the process of representation. Oliver and Trigo seem to gather all these concepts together in formulating their theory, according to which the core of noir's anxiety involves the process of identity formation itself, as film noir displays unconscious anxieties about identity boundaries in terms of race, sex and nationality (Oliver and Trigo, 2003, XV). From this perspective, film noir narratives work like Freudian treatment of dreams, whose most significant and important aspects often appear as insignificant details or marginal figures that are nevertheless essential in triggering an intense emotive response (Craib, 2001, 26-27). These emotional reactions in characters' behaviour are due

to underlying desires, fears or passions already inherently present which emerge in response to a visual stimulus or as psychological reaction to a certain 'sensitive' situation. In this respect, it is argued that the mechanisms of condensation and displacement proper to dreamwork operate in film noir to articulate tales of loss and desire (Oliver and Trigo, 2003, XV). Condensation and displacement operate originally in psychoanalysis as defensive mechanisms in the formation of the unconscious (Brooker, 2003, 43). Condensation occurs when one idea connects with several other ideas, or emotions, and is located at their point of intersection as a way of preventing these emotions from resurfacing at a conscious level (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1988, 82). Displacement is the operation by which an idea or desire's intensity is detached from it, and re-attached to other ideas which were of little intensity before the 'attachment' or investment, but are still related to the repressed idea by a chain of association. This detachment and re-attachment aims to divert energy away from intense emotions (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1988, 121; Oliver and Trigo, 2003, XVII).

Importing these concepts into film analysis means, for example, identifying in the threatening figure of the *femme fatale* in film noir a *condensation* of anxiety about female sexuality, which arises in the child from the fear of the mother physical's superiority (Modleski, 1989, 48). As the dangerous dame enters into a male story and disrupts a patriarchal order, she enacts disorder at a narrative level, at least until she is brought back under the hero's narrative and visual control, or dies. Similar anxieties can conversely be *displaced* into minor objects, such as a painting in the film *Rebecca*, which acts as a catalyst for narrative developments. But more often, as will be discussed at a later stage, noir cinematic language facilitates operations of displacement by the use of its narrative techniques (camera movements, shadows, lighting, editing) as these articulate for displaced fears and desires (Oliver and Trigo, 2003, XIX).

In normal life, repression is considered to prevent unconscious feelings from surfacing, making culture and civilisation possible (Clarke, 2003, 69); and many noir films draw on this concept. Efforts made by protagonists in these films to affirm their identity and moral direction are continually frustrated by the return of 'what had to remain secret, but has come to light', as Freud put it in his essay on the uncanny (Freud, 1995, 225). The search for a homely place, a pervasive theme in so many American noir films, reveals the impossibility of reconstituting a lost home or

secure identity, so that a foreign place - often South America - as a last refuge where noir characters try to escape to, is associated with a frustrated desire for romance and freedom (Naremore, 1998, 230).

Thus, foreignness and the unconscious seem to be bound together in film noir stories: the crossing of borders and boundaries does not allow any return to normality, if indeed this ever existed. Moreover, the emphasis on unconscious anxieties makes it possible to compile an agenda of fears typical of an era: anxiety about loss of gender, class or race privileges, the depersonalisation and uprooting of human relationships, the inevitable ambivalence of the modern world and its pervasive sense of anxiety. Ultimately, this makes it possible to uncover the 'political unconscious' (Jameson, 2002, 129) of a period, to unmask the repressed aspect of a collectivity and its frustrations. And this could be one reason why, for later generations, film noir has come to be the privileged locus of reflection on how the deepest anxieties and fears of an epoch can be revealed – also in the context of an aesthetic or political struggle.

2.8 Cinematic excess and the discursive network of film noir

From the concepts I have developed so far, film can be defined as a struggle of opposing forces. Some of these strive to unify the work, to give a sense of linearity and fluid structure that can be understood directly by an audience. Outside such an effort lie aspects of the work of representation that are not encompassed by this unifying goal - and are thus 'excess' to it (Thompson, K., 1986, 130). From this perspective, every system of representation inevitably creates an excess at the same time it achieves homogeneity and reaches a public. The elements of a film that participate in this process of homogeneity contribute to the excess in one sense or another. For example, as we shall see in chapter 5, systems of lighting embody different vision of the world, focused in practices that select certain elements of external reality and exclude others. Hollywood's three-point lighting system has a tendency to privilege the linearity of the story over stylistic experimentation, which will thereby increase the legibility of its stories. Conversely, expressionist

contrast of light and shadow aims at conveying the emotions of inner states of mind, by creating ambiguous and grotesque stories, more related to the artistic movements it originated from. Creative movements operating in European cinema in the first half of the twentieth century did not seek to emulate Hollywood in terms of popularity, but were more concerned to express a vision of reality according to ideas and debates within respective national communities. Soviet films were based on calling attention to the underlying strategies adopted in a work, their editing technique, assuming a certain degree of participation by the spectator (Thompson, K., 1988, 32) in the process of constructing a meaning. Thus, their films produce a higher degree of 'redundancy' that does not advance the narrative, but calls attention to the underlying aesthetic choices. Cinema in Europe generally has a tradition as the cinema of artistic movements, related to the specificity of a national context, or a particular generation (Fowler, 2002a, 4). More specifically European film noir should be read in this way: as able to convey shocks and challenges related to social deficiencies in a particular national context, where narrative tends to be dominated by realism (in the sense of the depiction of ordinary characters) and by authorial expressivity and individual style, rather than by the conventions imposed by a system, a structure of representation (Forbes and Street, 37).

Hollywood, by contrast, strives to conceal its artifice through techniques of continuity and invisible storytelling, in order to exert an emotional appeal that transcends class and nation (Bordwell et al., 1988, 3). Nevertheless, as it developed, American cinema diversified its production values, thanks to contributions by European expatriates and its own internal social dynamics. Depression, World War II and the Cold War brought Hollywood to a more cynical and 'excessive' visual narrative, as a challenge to its mainstream productions. In this way, film noir introduced a level of sophistication to the linear American tradition, to the point where, in the fifties, the anti-communist crusade that declared war on political cultural practice attacked these movies as 'un-American' (Krutnik et al., 2007).

But the term 'film noir' originates, as we have seen in the previous chapter, with a French post-war audience, as retrospective categorisation of a group of American films. This fact makes it first and foremost 'a discursive construct with heuristic value, which is both an important cinematic legacy and an idea we have projected onto the past' (Spicer, 2007a, 4). And this formulation is

important as it stresses the double sense of film noir: firstly as a group of American films from the forties and fifties (the 'classical' period), made by people who struggled against censorship and political repression, and therefore used dark thrillers for political ends (Naremore, 1998, 7); but secondly, as the form for a debate that constantly redefines the meanings of these films, both artistically and commercially. This process reminds me of the theoretical trajectory from 'maps to network' which discloses how every description of a given space tends to reproduce a political agenda that inevitably transforms the nature of the space to be described (Saukko, 2003, 171). A multidimensional approach to the study of a cultural 'space' in terms of a network (Castells, 2000) becomes a metaphor for a more complex way of studying a 'tangle of interconnected events and issues that call attention to complexities and contradictions' (Saukko, 2007, 172). In this sense I see the discourse about noir film as 'an imprecise and indispensable category' (Naremore, 1998, 22) that helps us to make sense of diverse but important phenomena intrinsic to our struggle between civilisation and barbarity, such as the interconnected nature of our human relationships, or our difficulty in articulating a critical view of a specific social context.

Conclusions

In this chapter, starting from the dramaturgy of crime established in the pre-modern era, I have emphasised the magnitude of the contemporary shift with its interconnected processes of modernisation, mediatisation and civilisation, as developed in sociological theory. In this sense, I have stressed how the resulting fragmentation of an organic community into separate networks of recipients resulted in specialised public discourse about crime, and also punishment. As penal practices became concealed behind closed doors, they were replaced by other forms of visibility more in tune with the symbolic and economic power concentrated in and mediated by new public systems of communication. This fact drew my attention to the role of language and communication in 'shaping' the relationship between the public and crime, and in facilitating the re-emergence of crime and punishment as a form of spectacle. Within this framework I have introduced the concept

of melodrama as a modern means to articulate anxieties and preoccupations underlying deeper moral conflicts in a society, resulting from the loss of forms of guidance provided by tradition and religion in the past. I have compared this European attitude with the American one, and stressed the different ways in which gothic sensibility can overlap with melodrama in articulating a fictional account of contemporary fears and anxieties - the so-called 'dark' side of human personality. I have used Hitchcock's films in this regard to exemplify how melodramatic themes and gothic imagery entered the world of Hollywood, stressing similarities between gothic narration and the detective thriller. I have also stressed how unconscious passions and anxieties surface in these films as recognition of repressed moral dilemmas, or of concealed identities. And in so doing I have showed how this process is achieved by careful control over several elements involved in filmmaking. Thus, the significance of filmic action appeals to the 'mind' of viewers, to their psychologies, rather than just their eyes, due to the complex construction and multiple systems of identification established in these movies. For these reasons, I then introduced the psychoanalytical terms of 'condensation' and 'displacement', relating these to film noir's narratives of rootless and doomed characters, thus disclosing the 'unconscious' universe of this cultural practice and its political relevance to my research. I emphasised that the preoccupation at the core of noir cinema is an anxiety related to the process of construction of both personal and social identity.

Finally, in the last part of this chapter I have argued for an 'excess' in film resulting from the effort a fiction has to make to be coherent and comprehensible to its audience. This redundancy in style and content is what ultimately establishes the tradition of linearity and continuity underpinning Hollywood cinema and, alongside it, an alternative tradition of fragmentation and reflexivity that has been central to the European film industry. In the middle of these two traditions, film noir stands as a discursive construct that continually shapes and defines the meaning of a cultural product and its critical relationship with the society from which it originates. In this sense, the metaphor of a 'network' proves suitable for explaining the complexity and topical relevance of this fascinating cultural practice called film noir.

Chapter 3 Outlining a sociology of culture

> The sociological study of culture is crucial, not just for understanding the relationship between groups or *between* societies, but also for comprehending what goes on, especially in terms of the wielding of power, *within* particular groups and societies. Quite simply, *culture is important*. Without a good understanding of the various things the word 'culture' indicates, your understanding of human social life will be greatly lacking.
> (Inglis and Hughson, 2003, 3)

After the introduction of the basic concepts that structure my thesis in the previous chapters, it is time now to move on to the next level. At this stage, I will develop a proper theory of culture, in order to articulate some notions already sketched previously which dealt with some basic assumptions about the function of culture. To do this, I will detail stages of public debate that have criticised the dumbing-down effects of mass culture. Then the contribution of cultural studies to the subject will be explained more thoroughly than previously outlined, confirming the importance of its perspective as central to my analysis. Subsequently, I will relate the notion of culture to issues such as colonialism, globalisation and the image of America, in order to prepare the ground for analysis of national traits, film noir and psychoanalysis outlined in the next chapters. Finally, a review of the Frankfurt School (or critical theory) position on American culture, Hollywood films and the cultural industry will provide an insight into some of the effects of western civilisation on human development. In this analysis, European intellectuals in exile in America, at around the time when films noir were made, formulated a critique of certain aspects of capitalism to criticise some unequal social practices. In this sense, film noir and critical theory will illuminate each other, as the former is a factor of social integration in a certain communication system, while the latter is a critical dis-integration of a certain way of considering western cultural practices as innocent pastime. From this perspective, in their own way, tales of displaced characters and scholarly analyses by disillusioned academicians both tend to depict a world in transition. Some try to move away from a bad past that still haunts their memories, while others commit

themselves not to forget past injustices, highlighting and perpetuating the need for critique in a complex and deceitful world. Thus the main questions in this chapter become: *What is culture?* and *How do film noir and the Frankfurt School express artistic and social criticism?*

Part I - The journey of culture

In this section, I will articulate more extensively some of the assumptions about culture outlined in the first chapter. This will involve examining how the preoccupation with American influence on European tradition marks a major part of this journey from an elitist conception of culture to a more democratic one, as preoccupations with everyday life replace old notions of tradition and privilege.

3.1.1 Towards a definition of culture

Any attempt to define culture has to consider the ways this word has been defined and analysed previously. This is because culture refers to so many things that it is essential to make clear in which direction to proceed, also in relation to previous traditions that have given rise to a 'common' view on the subject. According to Raymond Williams, culture is one of the most complex words in the English language (Williams, R., 1976, 76), as it is the changing result of a general process of trying to give a name to some aspects of human and societal development that necessarily differ according to time and location. Strictly speaking, then, there is no straightforward definition of culture, in the sense of a precise meaning, but there are different ways of talking about it. A first definition refers to culture as 'the patterns of ideas, values and beliefs common to a particular group of people' (Inglis and Hughson, 2003, 5). In this sense, culture is seen as part of the collective life of human beings, 'a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period or a group' (Williams R., 1976, 80).

A common trait of culture, then, is the fact that it is always subject to change, as it selects a series of explanations and representations of the social world that, even if they are useful for describing some contemporary social phenomena, nevertheless cannot entirely encompass the complexity of reality and its developments (Crespi, 1996, 14). Culture thus becomes a relative and temporary set of shared social meanings, generated (mainly) through language, and embodied in symbols and artefacts (Inglis and Hughson, 2003, 5; Barker, 2003, 7).

In the relationship between individual and society culture stands as the necessary symbolic mediation offering a key for understanding an otherwise too complex reality. As a consequence, an examination of culture must be sociological, as it cannot neglect the social implications of cultural factors. Moreover, 'by bringing "society" into the study of culture, sociology contributes a focus that other disciplines downplay or ignore' (Inglis and Hughson, 2003, 9). From this perspective, there are two directions to follow in my dissertation. On the one hand, in line with the theories of certain classic sociologists (e.g. Marx, Durkheim, Weber) and their further elaborations, I have to focus on the social consequences of some developments in the cultural industries (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997), underlining the role of culture as a factor of social integration into the social order. On the other hand, close attention to the texts produced by cultural agencies has to provide the micro-level analysis of the details of cultural production necessary for integrating and supporting theoretical accounts of the struggle for cultural legitimacy.

3.1.2 Culture, anarchy and the 'aliens': the evolution of a conservative approach

Among the different theories on culture, the so-called 'culture and civilisation' tradition represents, in the anglophone world, a good starting point for making sense of the shift in this kind of study from an elitist approach to a more 'popular' one. The book that initiates this tradition is Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), in which the author, drawing on the Romantic critique of industrialism (notably Coleridge's), uses the concept of culture as a basis for social critique. In this sense, culture ('the best which has been thought and said in the world'[23]) is set against the anarchy of the raw and uncultivated masses (Barker, 2003, 58). According to Arnold, the regrettable decline of old religious standards of good and evil, along with the fall of the old social order, would bring society to a state of anarchy unless a new authority - the State - replaced the old one (Arnold, 1963, 96). The State in this regard should operate through coercion on the one hand and education on the other, education being the main route to culture. Behind this 'ideal' vision lurks the separation of

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[23] Arnold, 1963, (1869), 6.

society into three classes: the *barbarians* (aristocrats) as the decaying old rulers, keen on their honours and pleasure, the *philistines* (middle class) as the people devoted to business, money-making and tea meetings, and finally the 'vast residuum' of the *populace* (working class) as the class of 'raw and half-developed' people who 'like bawling, hustling and smashing' (Arnold, 1963, 105-8). From this point of view, therefore, culture is the refuge of a cultivated elite from the disorder of social reality, as well as from membership of a particular class. The 'aliens' or 'the remnants', as Arnold calls them, are those in all classes who are led 'by a general humane spirit, by the love of human perfection' to dedicate themselves to spiritual elevation and perpetuation of culture (Arnold, 1963, 109). In other words, they are a 'self-perpetuating cultural elite' (Storey, 1993, 26), beyond the dynamics of social mobility and the limitations of the majority of people.

According to some critics, Arnold's main limitation, from a sociological point of view, lies in the fact that culture is for him an ideal, rather than inherent in existing societies. 'Thus while this view of culture may be crucial for morally informed criticism, it is very unhelpful for answering more sociological questions about the nature of culture' (Inglis and Hughson, 2003, 91). Nevertheless, Arnold's attempt to give a moral definition of culture in a context of social change stands as the first reference point in a series of studies on popular culture in the modern age.

3.1.3 Culture as difference and deference: Leavisism

> It is a commonplace to-day that culture is at a crisis (…) It is a commonplace that we are being Americanised (…) a process of levelling down (…) applies even more disastrously to the films: more disastrously because the films have a so much more potent influence. They provide now the main form of recreation in the civilised world; and they involve surrender, under conditions of hypnotic receptivity, to the cheapest emotional appeals, appeals the more insidious because they are associated with a compellingly vivid illusion of actual life. (Leavis, 1930, 34-35)

Pursuing the tradition of cultural analysis started by Arnold, other literary critics continued to give their intellectual/moral response to the modernisation of society and the rise of mass media. Among them, the influential Dr F. R. and Drs Q. D. Leavis emerged as key figures during the thirties, expressing their concern about the standardisation and levelling down of culture. Here

again, a social minority emerges as the guardian of standards of taste, and of the English language's fine qualities (Leavis, 1930, 33). Unlike Arnold's theory, the educated group is no longer found as the 'remnants' within all social classes, but in a literary minority corresponding to a cultivated class that is economically better positioned than the rest (Williams, R., 1971, 248). The goal of this 'movement', Leavisism, therefore becomes that of perpetuating this cultural elite against the threat of an uncultured wider society, its dangerous system of mass media and its increasing Americanisation (Inglis and Hughson, 2003, 92). For this reason, Leavisism is underpinned by nostalgia for a mythic, lost 'organic community', based on community life, identified historically with seventeenth-century England. At that time, according to this critical position, England had a vigorous culture shared by the lower and the upper classes, Shakespeare's plays being a case in point. However, after the changes introduced by the Industrial Revolution, common culture fragmented into two parts: a minority culture on the one hand and a mass civilisation on the other (Storey, 1993, 28-29). According to Leavis, the solution to this erosion of traditional authority would be to use schools as a mean of resistance, by dispatching cultural missionaries, as select groups of intellectuals, to maintain the cultural tradition at past standards (Storey, 1993, 32).

While the limitations of this *moral sociology* (Inglis and Hughson, 2003, 93) are quite clear, in the works produced by the Leavisites we can find some methodological novelties, such as the first attempt to apply to popular products (e.g. advertising) techniques of literary analysis previously reserved for 'serious' work (Bennett in Storey, 1993, 33). Leavisism was to be an influential approach, up to the end of fifties, and a useful theoretical reference point to be elaborated in future cultural analysis of popular culture.

3.1.4 Culturalism and mass culture: the uses of literacy

With Arnold's and Leavis's cultural analysis, the emphasis was very much on a distinction between the good and the bad, high culture and low, the educated minority and the 'dangerous'

class. When invoking romanticised versions of the past to condemn the present, they needed to establish a hierarchy of aesthetic criteria to classify different groups of people, or cultural objects. But while this theoretical framework was able to produce interesting analyses of the relationship between culture and social change, it failed to address the involvement in it of the majority of the population.

As a continuation within this tradition of studies, at the end of the fifties a new moral critique of culture arose under the name of 'culturalism'. The main difference from its predecessors was that these new cultural analyses were carried out from a left-wing rather than a right-wing perspective, with some methodological consequences and views of phenomena such as popular culture and social change. Richard Hoggart (1957), Raymond Williams (1971; 1973) and E.P. Thompson (1968), among others, represented this new theoretical stance that broke with the tradition of Leavisism, initiating a new cycle of cultural study approaches to popular culture and working class history. The main difference involved analysing the culture of a society by stressing 'human agency', the active production of culture rather than its passive consumption (Storey, 1993, 44). Moreover, these authors analysed and celebrated the everyday culture of ordinary people, previously regarded as low art and therefore not worthy of academic attention.

In this school of thought, Hoggart, with his *The Uses of Literacy* (1957), explored the development of working-class culture from the thirties through to the fifties. That is to say, he examined the everyday life and social relevance of ordinary people, using (at least in the first part) his own memories of his upbringing in that social context. The result is a nostalgic account of his childhood in a working-class neighbourhood, almost in the Leavisite tradition, even though the focus of the analysis is completely reversed. Thus, in relation to mass entertainment, Hoggart sometimes emphasises the 'natural ability ' of this class 'to survive change by adapting or assimilating what they want in the new and ignoring the rest' (Hoggart, 1957, 32), while in other parts of his work, he laments the destruction by the new mass culture of the very social fabric of an older working-class culture (Hoggart, 1957, 24).

This ambivalence is even more acute in the second part of the book, where he reappropriates the notion of cultural decline from the Leavisite tradition, comparing the full, rich

life of the past with the 'shiny barbarism' (ibid., 193) of the new popular culture of the fifties. Or in another example, when he describes the new American trends among English young people: 'the juke-box boys', playing loud music in the 'milk-bars' and staring as desperately 'as Humphrey Bogart, across the tubular chairs' (ibid. 248). Standardisation and Americanisation seem to be, from this perspective, the reasons for the moral decay of the traditional, healthy community of working-class people. Thus, while focusing his analysis on the public values and private practices of a given society, Hoggart still uses the influential theoretical equipment of his predecessors. As Stuart Hall underlined although Hoggart refuses many of Leavis's cultural judgements, he nevertheless continues that tradition, while at the same time seeking to transform it (Hall in Storey, 1993, 51).

3.1.5 After a long revolution

With Raymond Williams's work, the aesthetic and elitist conception of culture comes to an end, while from previous theories - though informed by some original intuitions - a link emerges between society and culture as interpenetrating entities. In his *Culture and Society* (1971), a book of literary history, Williams still uses Leavisite close textual analysis as his chief methodology to investigate the notion of culture. But at the same time, he tries to connect cultural products and cultural relations, representations and ideas. In this investigation, he elaborates the key category of culture as the main link between literary analysis and social enquiry (Turner, 1996, 49). This detailed focus on the concept of cultural practice is further developed in Williams's major work *The Long Revolution* (Williams, R., 1973). In this account, Williams insists on a definition of culture that is almost anthropological, based on the 'lived experience' of ordinary men and women in their daily interaction with the texts and realities of everyday life, thus breaking definitively with Leavisism (Storey, 1993, 56). According to this new social definition, the theory of culture is 'the study of the relationship between elements in a whole way of life' (Williams, R., 1973, 63). As a methodological consequence, the study of culture cannot be carried out just via the textual analysis

of the Leavisite tradition, or just according to the structure/superstructure model of the Marxian perspective. On the contrary, the purpose of a cultural analysis would be to reconstitute 'the structure of feeling' (ibid., 64), which is to say the shared values of a particular group, class or society: 'Something that is a cross between a collective cultural unconscious and an ideology' (Storey, 1993, 53). Thus, cultural objects are viewed not as free-floating entities, but in terms of how they are produced (Inglis and Hughson, 2003, 109). At the same time, cultural products are also part of a selectively preserved and interpreted tradition. In other words, culture has to be investigated in terms of creativity and change on the one hand, and of tradition and the representation of social conditions on the other. Moreover, efforts by Hoggart, Raymond Williams and E.P. Thompson to integrate the notion of culture with everyday life paved the way for the successive studies by the Birmingham School on youth and working-class subcultures introduced in the first chapter.

Importing this approach into my work provides an appropriate combination of cultural studies and sociology, involving a methodology that does not downplay social factors in the analysis of cultural objects, but nevertheless closely follows a text's specific structure. A conception focused too much on the moral aspect might run the risk of neglecting the necessary link with social factors at work in a cultural phenomenon. On the other hand, an approach within the tradition of so-called cultural studies, especially following Williams's notion of culture, helps to bridge the gap between theory and practical analysis, with a resulting methodology of the kind referred to above.

Part II Modernity, globalisation and the Americanisation of popular culture

In this section, I am going to consider the relationship between globalisation and popular culture as a consequence of economic and social development in 20th-century western society. This aspect will be analysed, especially, in the light of the debate about globalisation and Americanisation of mass culture, along with some psychoanalytic assumptions regarding the nature of identity, and transnational imagery within a process of constructing subjectivity and spectatorship.

3.2.1 Modernity and its consequences: from cultural imperialism to globalisation

The process of development in western society from the 17th century onwards can be seen in terms of a progressive detachment from traditional forms of religion and an agrarian economy. The new social order coalesced around a mode of social life based on rationality, economic industrialism, urbanism and individualism, which went under the name of modernity (Giddens, 1991, 14). As a consequence of this transition, new forms of production, consumption, leisure and cultural solidarity emerged, marking the beginning of a new era no longer based only on locality and a communitarian ethic. In its place stood a society with an unprecedented capacity to uproot social relations from their immediate local contexts, overcoming the borders of nation-state economies while gradually creating more impersonal mass systems of communication and public transport. This process has resulted in an uneven development of wealth and social opportunities for some countries compared with others. Especially the competition between European and American economies has produced a certain dominance of western economies over social systems based on more traditional ways of using natural resources. As a consequence of this societal process, the dominant societies have created a system of economic and cultural dominance, or cultural imperialism (Tomlinson, 1991), always eager to expand its influence over new markets at the expense of native culture and local traditions in the countries of destination.

Around the seventies and throughout the subsequent decade, a new term – globalisation - replaced the emphasis on the expansionist tendency of western societies with a spatial figure of social development (Brooker, 2003, 114). The focus here is on the flexibility and mobility of the economic process of restructuring and social readjustment that followed the oil crisis in the seventies. With this new notion, the original ideological meaning of exploitation has been dropped in favour of a description of a general tendency of capitalist economies to move their centres beyond nation-state borders, creating a model of development pursued also by countries other than western ones (Petras and Veltmeyer, 2001, 12). This developing trend in the contemporary world caused an increase in social mobility and entrepreneurial business, along with the opportunity to extend economic and social relationships to distant places. Some authors refer in this connection to the process of 'flexible accumulation' (Harvey, 1989, 147), as established forms of large-scale production are replaced by smaller units, scattered over large geographical distances and yet connected in the same economic cycle. This shift at the economic level gives rise to the description of a global system as abstract and distant from everyday life, almost as if it were invisible. Nevertheless, it still affects our daily existence as it becomes more problematic and fragmented (Craib, 1994, 95). In particular, this tendency of stretching social relationships along the axis of time and space has been seen as one of the most characteristic features of the globalising tendencies of modernity (Giddens, 1990, 63; 1991, 21; Massey, 1991, 233). Together with these social developments, moral doubts, new risks and insecurities increased as a result of the complex connectivity implicit in the conditions of the modern world (Beck et al., 1994; Elliott and Lemert, 2006). From this perspective, westernisation, or Americanisation, are other terms for globalisation, resulting from broader social transformations, at international levels, within the historical context of modernity. In fact, the historical appearance of modern institutions, such as capitalism, industrialism, urbanism and mass media, built up the social foundations for the development of such interconnections and flexibility, making possible the birth of the global and 'network society' (Castells, 2000, 160-161).

3.2.2 Globalisation and culture: reason for a legacy

Within the context of societal development described above, culture plays a major role as an intrinsic component of the whole process of complex connectivity, with related issues concerning the need for its change and/or protection. As has been argued, 'the idea of "a culture" implicitly connects meaning construction with particularity and location' (Tomlinson, 1999, 27-28), especially when cultural practices are related to social integration and identity construction. From this point of view, culture is not just a consequence of globalisation, but can be considered one of its constitutive elements. In shifting attention from the complex connectivity of social institutions to the individual and collective actions integrated into these institutions, it is possible to see how the everyday actions of million of people in one part of the planet are linked with the lives of many others far away. This cultural connectivity illustrates the idea of the *reflexivity* of modern global life (Tomlison, 1999, 24; Beck et al., 1994) and introduces, at the same time, the local-global dialectic: the way in which local lifestyles become global in their consequences, influenced as they are by other lifestyles far removed from each other. For example, some scholars have accentuated how the first mass media in America were organised around the simple principles of a small batch at production level and a large scale at marketing and distribution level, to provide a high standard of quality in the final product and a flexibility of workers geared to market demand (Tunstall, 1977, 67). In this way, the work of a small group of people would be related to the activity of many more, all over the world, creating the first forms of global connectivity in a mass communication system. Moreover, this interconnected activity was constantly revised and updated, according to consumer needs, the demands of the particular business and the state of its technology (Giddens, 1990).

Sociologically speaking, this concept relates to the notion of reflexivity as a typical feature of a post-traditional society. According to this view, 'social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices' (Giddens, 1990, 38), thus giving emphasis to the modern practice of constantly questioning and revising a process of social development, creating new forms of communication and solidarity, and changing the role and

content of local cultures. Following this interpretative frame, some authors have emphasised the increasing interlacing and articulating of economic and symbolic processes in contemporary society, talking in this respect of 'reflexive accumulation' (Lash and Urry, 1994, 60). In this connection the accumulation of information about a certain economic practice leads to a re-thinking and a critique of its organisation and components, with a reciprocal influence of knowledge and economy. Cinema can be seen as a typical example of this merging of the economic (film as a business enterprise) and the cultural (film as communication, or as entertainment), with an increasing emphasis on marketing and finance rather than creative work alongside a constant search for new ideas and sources of inspiration rather than organisational skills (Tomlison, 1999, 117-118).

Jameson's attempt to identify the fundamental moments in the development of the capitalist world acknowledges that each stage marks a dialectical expansion over the previous one (Jameson, 1991, 35). A market economy is followed by a stage of imperialism, with a subsequent monopolistic system, and then a post-industrial or multinational one, within an increasing process of commodification and colonisation of the Unconscious resulting from the rise of the media industry and the advertising industry (ibid., 36). The parallel cultural embodiments of these stages in realism, modernism and postmodernism are successive theoretical steps that support Jameson's theory of an 'explosion' of culture and its permeation of society, 'to the point at which everything in our social life (…) can be said to have become "cultural" in some original and yet untheorized sense' (Jameson, 1991, 48).

3.2.3 Mass culture and deterritorialisation

The *reflexive modernisation* of contemporary society includes a mobile rather than a static concept of culture. In other words, culture is based not just on social practices related to a local, stable environment, but also on the flows and connections between different localities and cultures. From this perspective, globalisation promotes deterritorialisation, which means that the relationship

of a culture to a geographical and local territory becomes weaker, with progressive loss of the existential comforts and assurances of local communal experience (Tomlinson, 1999, 107). The normative aspect of culture as a social force that inscribes values and regulates behaviour in a community is gradually challenged by the increasing decentralisation, or displacement, of collective experience and the progressive emergence of an individual culture based on more personal lifestyle and consumer choice (Lull, 2006, 44). This does not mean the complete dissolution of a collectivity related to a particular cultural context and territory, but rather an ability to change, to deconstruct, its own tradition together with other cultural models and reconstruct them in different forms (Elliott and Lemert, 2006, 58). This social practice is based on the new possibilities offered by the global changes already described, along with the availability of new technologies and the subsequent possibility of sharing flows of information and common patterns of symbolic imagery.

The final result of this social development is not a univocal one, as it presents ambiguities and contradictions. From one perspective the loss of a communitarian ethic may bring a sense of personal or social displacement (Bauman, 2000, 99), together with the recrudescence of some reactionary sense of place (Massey, 1994, 236). On the other hand, positive aspects can be seen in the expansion of the communicational space and the creation of international networks of information and symbolic practices that can subvert a traditional hierarchy of cultural values (Curran and Morley, 2006a, 2). This process of dislocation is not a one-way process, 'but one characterized by the same dialectical push-and-pull as globalization itself. Where there is deterritorialization there is also reterritorialization' (Tomlinson, 1999, 148). According to this view, the end of a shared territory does not necessarily mean the end of locality, but its transformation into a more complex cultural space (ibid. 149). The mediation of language and of a wide communication system extends our ability to establish social relations over space and time. This time-space compression is an opportunity to accept the different sources of which our identity is composed, while recognising the contingency and ambivalence of our experience in modern society. The contribution of cinema, and Hollywood in particular, in this respect, tends towards creating a new institution that alters the boundaries of public life and national identity (May, L.,

2000, 257). Gangster films and film noir, in particular, gave visibility to immigrant groups, while initiating a public debate over control of public symbols and the hegemony of different social groups and classes over others. In other words, films have contributed to a reterritorialisation of social experience, albeit a conflictual one, providing a terrain for confrontation between different systems of representation.

3.2.4 Americanisation and popular culture: the 'transatlantic gaze'

Some of the global changes in western societies described above can be illustrated practically in the development of the mass-media system in Europe and the US during the first half of the 20th century. American media were, from the beginnings of their development, oriented to a market-based system, relying heavily on marketing and technology as instruments for the penetration and expansion of their business into new global markets (Tunstall, 1977, 72). European counterparts, on the other hand, developed in much closer proximity to political institutions, in some cases (e.g. cinema) establishing strong relationships with contemporary artistic movements and political parties (Forbes and Street, 2000, 38). As a consequence, the American model of development grew much faster than its European counterpart, due to the bigger national audience that could be relied on locally, and therefore the possibility of investing bigger sums of money in the business. Moreover, unlike in Europe, the US economy never halted production during the two world wars, and at the same time gained technical and artistic expertise from the large migrations of people with experience in European showbusiness between the two wars (Balio, 1985).

All these advantages gave the Americans the lead in the mass-market world of media and showbusiness, and particularly in one of the United States' most popular export successes: Hollywood. While European films had a reputation for their distinctive visual style and artistic mastery, American movies had major popular appeal, thanks to their spectacular cinematic style and powerful star system a vehicle of promotion and diffusion of Hollywood products throughout the world (Turner, 1993, 100). The invasion of the European markets by American products in the

first half of the 20th century was to cause concerns about the integrity of national identities, the collapse of traditional cultures and the future of local film industries. Nevertheless, competition between the two sides of the Atlantic created decades of confrontation between different systems of representation, with reciprocal influences and imitations that established the basis for a worldwide repository of popular imagery and artistic inspiration for generations to come. In this respect, some authors consider the construction of American culture in terms of an 'Imaginary' construct, or as the social process of (re)production of images whereby England (or Europe) creates a speculative image of itself (Hearn and Melechi, 1992, 215). Borrowing the term 'Imaginary' from Lacan's psychoanalytic work on the 'mirror stage', Hearn and Melechi argue that, as with the development of the child, a society such as England sees an image of itself in American popular products, in which it finds both something familiar and something strange. But this process of initial identification leaves room for subsequent misrecognition, as this image is based on a different system of representation. In the same way that the equivalent stage in psychoanalysis marks the moment when the child realises his/her own subjectivity, this encounter between two cultures at a societal level develops the 'transatlantic gaze' - gaze being a concept elaborated in film studies to express the relationship between the spectator and the film (Fuery, 2000, 6). Thus, while for Lacan the mirror stage is the subject establishes a sense of self through visual identification with its image in the mirror (Elliott, 2001, 53), for mass media theorists the cultural space between America and Europe constitutes 'a rich iconography, a set of symbols, objects and artefacts which can be assembled and re-assembled by different groups in a limitless number of combinations' (Hebdige, 1988, 74).

From this point of view, then, the process of globalisation described above has a double dimension: a psychological one alongside the economic and sociological. Both elements, in fact, are based on a process of self-reflexivity. As human beings need something outside and other (the mirror) to define the imaginary contours of the self, so a culture, a system of representation, needs a reflection of its own image in another culture to visualise similarities and differences, possibilities and limitations in its own development. In both cases, mirror and popular narratives are imaginary, as ideal imaginary projections are always intrinsically false, leading to misrecognition and

providing a basis for alienation (Sturken and Cartwright, 2001, 75). Nevertheless, the experience of initial recognition and subsequent misrecognition 'generated by the mirror stage becomes the basis of all subsequent experiences of interpersonal relationship' (Elliott, 2001, 54). In the same way, the subsequent experiences of encounter, domination and cross-fertilisation between European and American culture were to underlie this 'transatlantic gaze' as a means to develop a 'practice of looking' underpinning the process of forming the (social) subject in the sense described above. Reflexivity at a societal level, as a connectivity between different people in different places, corresponds to a reflexivity at the cultural level, as the possibility of using each other's images, style and symbols in order to construct one's own system of representation based more on borrowing and hybridity than tradition or a hierarchy of values.

Part III Adorno and Critical Theory: Between cultural criticism and culture

industry. Notes on freedom, cinema and Auschwitz

> Automobiles, bombs and movies keep the whole thing together until their levelling element shows its strength in the very wrong which it furthered. It has made the technology of the culture no more than the achievement of standardization and mass production, sacrificing whatever involved a distinction between the logic of the work and that of a social system. (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997, 121)

> In spite of the films which are intended to complete her integration, the housewife finds in the darkness of the movie theatre a place of refuge where she can sit for a few hours with nobody watching … The unemployed in the great cities find coolness in summer and warmth in winter in these temperature-controlled locations. Otherwise, despite its size, this bloated pleasure apparatus adds no dignity to men's lives. (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997, 139)

The emergence during the thirties of the Institute of Social Research in Germany marks the beginning of the so-called Frankfurt School and its related critical theory. This was a group of Marxist scholars, headed by Max Horkheimer, who practised a multidisciplinary approach in their social science studies (Honneth, 1991, 18) in order to explore the question of 'the interconnection between the economic life of society, the psychic development of the individual and transformation in the realm of culture' (Held, 1990, 33). At the same time, their theoretical efforts moved away from orthodox Marxism, with its emphasis on the base-superstructure model of social development (Williams, 1977, 75), to a more sophisticated reconstruction of the Marxist project within the wider debate about modernism, popular culture and social change (Held, 1990, 77). Among its members (Fromm, Marcuse, Neumann, Pollock, Lowenthal, Benjamin), Theodor Adorno developed, in some instances with Horkheimer's collaboration, a theory of culture and cultural criticism which is worth considering in our analysis of popular culture and cinema (Adorno 1991; Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997; Horkheimer, 1976). What follows is a reconstruction of the scholar's original critical

contribution to this subject. At the same time, we should not neglect the influence of the wider social context in which the Frankfurt scholars were operating from the outset. The rise of fascist regimes in Europe, together with the persecution of ethnic minorities and suppression of personal freedom, forced these scholars to emigrate to America, while their work turned into a close investigation of the social dynamics between modern reason, freedom and human suffering in the contemporary world (Held, 1990, 36-37). In this sense, the importance of this theory has to be addressed as an invaluable theoretical resource and critical tool to interpret and make sense of that period (from the thirties to the fifties), in a particular geographical-cultural domain (Europe and America); and of the debate between full modernism and late- or post-modernism, as the theoretical borders within which I have conducted my research.

3.3.1 Handle with care: *constellation* and dialectic in Adorno's critical theory

One of the main problems in studying Adorno's work lies in his difficult, sometimes obscure, style of writing. Nevertheless, once some of his basic tenets are clarified, it is much easier (or less difficult) to make sense of his statements relating to his wider vision of society, philosophy, history, aesthetics, music, culture and social change. Adorno, writing in German, pursues the Hegelian and Marxian tradition of dialectical thought. That is to say, content and form are inseparable parts of his attempt to articulate his digressions and explore the ways concepts interact with each other. Some of his translators speak of a 'metaphysical surplus' in the German language that is inevitably lost in translation (Weber, S.M., 1992, 14). Other critics suggest that reading Adorno is like listening to a complex symphony with multidimensional levels (Thomson, 2006, 6) to which we must listen several times before understanding the relationship between the whole and its parts. As a consequence, Adorno's use of dialectic includes a form of thought that explores the connections between opposites, without arriving at any conclusion in terms of definitive certainty or conclusive ideas. But while Hegel's dialectics work between two opposite ideas, seeking a third position that embraces but also transcends both, Adorno inverts this idea by claiming that

'dialectics does not deliver us the truth of the world, but rather knowledge of its untruth' (Thomson, 2006, 6). From this 'non-identity thinking' comes Adorno's 'negative dialectic', with an emphasis on concepts that are not distinct, logical entities but mobile and slippery frames for apprehending reality, whose interactions are always evolving (Thomson, 2006, 6). The image generally used to describe this procedure of thinking is that of a *constellation*, a term borrowed from Walter Benjamin to describe

> a juxtaposed rather than integrated cluster of changing elements that resist reduction to a common denominator, essential core, or generative first principle (…). By preserving the contradictory and irreconcilable differences of arguments and observations in his work, Adorno maintains the tension between the universal and the particular, between essentialism and nominalism. (Callaghan, 2000)

As a direct consequence of this orientation, Adorno's chief strategy is to write his work largely in fragments, in order to avoid the modern tendency of using language to support a single theory, or system of social control; or simply to avoid the fossilising nature of hasty categorisation (Thomson, 2006, 88). So while writing essays, Adorno operates as an artist would with a work of art: with no apparent hierarchy between diverse statements, but creating a reciprocal interaction between the whole and its parts. In this view, therefore, the social philosopher should not provide a clear account of the world, but a way of questioning any 'official' explanation of the social system, which is inevitably connected with social power and man's domination of nature (Thomson, 2006, 5), or with theoretical imperialism in the conceptual realm (Bernstein, 1991, 8). In other words, Adorno's philosophy does not elaborate a new theory: it is not analytical, but rather develops an interpretation and a critique in order to expose ideologies, reification and false consciousness (Müller-Doohm, 2004, 286).

From a philosophical point of view, Nietzsche's conception of philosophy as a dual task of destruction and creation plays a big role in Adorno's work (Thomson, 2006, 5; Bernstein, 1991, 8), along with his joint analysis of genealogy and morality (Menke, 2004, 303). Since the concepts and

categories by which we measure and interpret the world are the result of human domination and social struggles, it is inevitable that society is inwardly contradictory. Therefore, our understanding of social process itself cannot but be contradictory itself, in a formal logical sense. So Adorno's critical theory of society necessarily becomes a critique of society in which the individual and society are reciprocal and can only be understood in their reciprocity (Müller-Doohm, 2004, 288-289). Thus as previously stated analysis of cultural phenomena starts from the assumption that the penetration of the market into more areas of society's life, along with the rising influence of mass media, requires new theoretical frameworks for studying the way these new cultural products affect our capacities for social development and progress.

3.3.2 Culture, cultural criticism and Auschwitz

One more point to clarify while considering Adorno's critical theory is the dual meaning of the word 'culture' in the German language. The Frankfurt scholar, in fact in his writing, often switches between two different expressions, *Kultur* and *Bildung* (Thomson, 2006, 72-73). The first is a normative term, which refers to some aspects of social existence (e.g. philosophy or art) and to education as (personal) development, especially in comparison to something (or someone) which is not culture (or cultured) (ibid., 72). So it has a more qualitative resonance. On the other hand, *Bildung* is a term which has gained ground over the past century and refers to 'the sum of total behaviours, beliefs and practices common to a specific group of people, with no hierarchical distinction being drawn between different activities' (ibid., 73). In this sense, *Bildung* is used to oppose one culture with another, as its meaning is closer to education in the sense of improvement, with no qualitative dimension. For example, when Adorno is talking about the decline of culture we have to 'guess' whether he is referring to the qualitative decline of a specific set of social practices (i.e. the High Art), or is talking about the fact that society is not improving in the realm of moral accountability.

For all these reasons, Adorno's thought, besides being inevitably critical, sceptical and self-reflective, sometimes is ambiguous too (Thomson, 2006, 5). This makes it very hard to extrapolate pieces of writing from the whole system of his essays and to make sense of what the author means in a straightforward way, without considering the theoretical frame of his inspiration as discussed here. For example, let us take his essay on culture and cultural criticism, which is considered as his philosophical manifesto on these matters:

> Culture is only true when implicitly critical, and the mind which forgets this revenges itself in the critics it breeds. Criticism is an indispensable element of culture which is itself contradictory: in all its untruth still as true as culture is untrue. Criticism is not unjust when it dissects – this can be its greatest virtue – but rather when it parries by not parrying. (Adorno, 1992, 22)

In line with what we have so far found, this quotation can be read in the light of the negative dialectical thinking described above, with its continual criticism of culture and its social basis. In the same essay, Adorno goes on to describe the dialectical relationship between immanent and transcendental critique, underlining the insufficiency of either a univocal historical or a sociological approach for apprehending social reality (ibid., 29). Instead, the German scholar tries to elaborate a dialectical criticism that, on the one hand, can advance beyond the shortcomings and crudeness of orthodox Russian Marxism, and on the other can avoid bourgeois acquiescence in the *status quo* of typical social attitudes in western capitalist society (ibid.). Within this framework, Adorno seems to be seeking to establish a system for examining the social tendencies expressed in cultural phenomena, through which the most powerful interests realise themselves (ibid., 30). But very soon his academic project turns into a moral one, with a significant warning:

> Cultural criticism finds itself faced with the final stage of the dialectic of culture and barbarism. To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today. Absolute reification,

which presupposed intellectual progress as one of its elements, is now preparing to absorb the mind entirely. Critical intelligence cannot be equal to this challenge as long as it confines itself to self-satisfied contemplation. (Adorno, 1992, 34)

The apparent pessimism and defeatism of this point has created some confusion among critics and readers, of whom the most famous was the Jewish poet, Paul Celan, survivor of a labour camp (Thomson, 192-193). But as previously mentioned, it is not possible to understand these quotations literally without misinterpreting their deeper inspiration. It is evident that Auschwitz stands for the lowest point in the history of western civilisation: the holocaust (Bauman, 2003). In this regard, according to Thomson, 'in a world in which such radical evil is possible, writing poetry would be at best a frivolity, a mere distraction from what Adorno described as a new categorical imperative, the task of ensuring no repetition of such horror would be possible' (Thomson, 2006, 123). From this perspective, Adorno's provocative claim about poetry would involve questioning the possibility of art in a world where Auschwitz is a reminder of its destructivity.

Adorno's final move in this essay therefore goes beyond the confines of academic research, as his project is much closer to an ethics-based questioning of morality, where three perspectives - history, epistemology and moral questions (Thomson, 2006, 109) - are inextricably intertwined. The task of his major works turns out to be the attempt to discover 'why mankind, instead of entering into a truly human condition, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism' (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997, xi).

3.3.3 The failure of the Enlightenment project and the emergence of the culture industry

> Every visit to the cinema leaves me, against all my vigilance, stupider and worse. (Adorno, 2005, 25)

Horkheimer and Adorno wrote *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1997) in exile, as the Nazi regime started to spread its succession of terrors and misery throughout Europe. The main thesis of

this book concerns the failure of the Enlightenment to free human beings from fear and subjection, turning them into a mass deprived of their individuality and the possibility of social redemption.

This fragmentary work is structured around different theoretical frames: the dynamic of societal rationalisation, as ideated by Weber (2001), the process of capital domination and reification, theorised by Marx (1961) and Lukács (1971), the penetration of the market into more and more areas of society, the transformation of language into an instrument of domination, and the phenomenon of anti-Semitism as a consequence of these social disruptions. Generally speaking, then, the task of this *Dialectic* is to synthesise psychological, historical and anthropological accounts to produce a single account of reason and its role within the history of western civilisation (Thomson, 2006, 107). In particular, it is the section on 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception' which is the prime focus of our interest here, as it helps us to articulate some useful ideas on mass culture and the entertainment business for our analysis of cinema and popular culture. In this chapter, the authors review the formation of the economic apparatus they call the culture industry, as the leading factor in a new form of social integration for individuals, under the banner of technology, standardisation and economic profit. Horkheimer and Adorno argue that the technological development of the culture industry is a key mechanism for adapting individuals to the behavioural requirements of monopoly capitalism (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997, 121; How, 2003, 35). This phenomenon leads to the predominance of the 'effect', of the detail over the organisation (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997, 125), so that cultural performance takes place in a confined space suitably constructed for consumption (How, 2003, 67-68). The shift in the production of cultural goods moves, then, from the work itself to the formula, to standardised operations that are suitable for modern forms of consumption. As far as consumption is concerned, a parallel trajectory occurs from the personal significance of a work of art for a single beneficiary to the anonymity of standardised operations for anonymous recipients. In Marxist terms, this shift is described as that from a cultural product's use value to its exchange value, effecting the transformation of human relations into the appearance of relationships between things (Jameson, 2002a, 212).

Escape from everyday drudgery is the promise that the culture industry has to offer its recipients. The sense of excitement induced by consumption leads to an illusion of individualism, where previous ties within a community are replaced by the anonymous commerce in a crowd of conformist individuals (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997, 133). But this social mechanism suits potentially authoritarian and fascist communities, since the Nazi terror was not just an aberration of modern history but was rooted deeply in the fundamental characteristics of western civilisation and its conformist tendencies (ibid., 149). The culture, in this case, would have the function of taming revolutionary or anti-social instincts (ibid., 152), rather than of criticising the *status quo* and resisting social integration (Adorno, 1991, 116). Culture industry, from this perspective, appears to have an anti-Enlightenment effect, since the precondition for a democratic society consists in removing obstructions to emancipation so that people can become autonomous and independent individuals (Adorno, 1991, 106). If that does not happen, culture's removal from any possible relation to social practice transforms it into something independent and external, related more to the administration of a business than to the progress of human critique and development.

The term 'cultural industry' was successively picked up by other scholars, as well as policy makers, but it was converted into its plural, 'cultural industries' (Hesmondhalgh, 2002, 15-16; Lash and Urry, 1994, 111). The main consequence of this new notion was the refusal to consider this social phenomenon as a 'unified field', since the different forms of cultural production that co-exist in modern life obey different logics. For example, 'the broadcasting industries operated in a very different way from the press, or from industries reliant on "editorial" models of production, such as publishing or the recording industry' (Hesmondhalgh, 2002, 16).

3.3.4 Aesthetics and utopia: developments of critical theory

Adorno and Horkheimer introduce the concept of style in art, in order to formulate a critique of lack of style in the entertainment industry (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997, 130). The difference between an autonomous work of art and a product of the culture industry lies in the fact

that the former has a style which is the result of a polemical confrontation with tradition and subsequent divergence from it, through its elements of change (ibid., 140). In the culture industry, by contrast, lack of style is replaced by strict obedience to social hierarchy and managerial organisation, where originality is sacrificed to standardisation and profit (ibid.. 131). The work of art has the power to confront the world and express its own suffering, if necessary, as in the works of Schoenberg and Picasso, through discrepancies of style and fragmentation resulting from high art's ultimate involvement in 'historical scars' arising from past social injustices (Frisby, 1988, 226) and the 'guilt' of the social privileges of the present (Jameson, 2007, 230). From this perspective, the 'fragment' of a work of art expresses its relationship to the totality of human experience (Frisby, 1998, 214) since happiness with advances in civilisation coexists with guilt at failing to succeed, insofar as, in some instances at least, the Enlightenment project has assumed barbarous and regressive traits.

Following this view, Marcuse argues:

Inasmuch as art preserves, with the promise of happiness, the memory of the goals that failed, it can enter, as a 'regulative idea', the desperate struggle for changing the world. Against all fetishism of the productive forces, against the continued enslavement of individuals by the objective conditions (which remain those of domination) art represents the ultimate goal of all revolutions: the freedom and happiness of the individual. (Marcuse, 1979, 69)

Marcuse's conception of art as a locus of utopia[24] becomes the context for rethinking the relationship between high and low art by future generations of Marxist scholars. Among them, Jameson revises the boundary between 'high' or 'low' art according to its degree of accessibility, availability or reproduction. From this perspective, the divide between two conceptions of art

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[24] The concept of utopia in Marcuse stands for the pursuit of a society in which unalienated experience is possible (Levitas, 1990, 131); here, according to a Marxist perspective, alienation refers to the estrangement of individuals from one another as a result of the socio-economic arrangements people are forced into by capitalist society (Marshall, 1998, 13-14).

would be a series of ever-shifting, negotiable limits. Jameson rejects the old distinction between modernism and mass culture in favour of a difference between authentic and non-authentic art. Here, authenticity stands for cultural practice 'which can draw on the collective experience of marginal pockets of the social life of the world system: black literature and blues, British working-class rock, women's literature, gay literature …' and in general on those works that find inspiration in real anxieties and hopes of certain social groups, whose solidarity has not yet been fully exploited by the market and by the commodity system (Jameson, 1992, 23-24). The notion of authentic art is the source of the 'utopian moment' of popular narrative (Jameson, 1992, 23; Palmer, 1991, 110) that some members of the Frankfurt School found in 'high' art (Bloch, 1993).

Jameson is, of course, aware that such popular narrative manipulates people too, by providing pleasures that are complicit with a social order based on domination and exploitation. 'But at the same time, it can only do so by representing, or referring to people's real anxieties and hopes, which always derive from some contentious feature or other of the social structure' (Palmer, 1991, 111).

3.3.5 Film noir and the discontent of modernity

This narrative strategy, of exposing cracks, anxieties and the dissent in a social order that, nevertheless, still makes money out of that order, is ultimately the essence of noir thriller and film noir - especially when it expresses to the experience of strangers, outcasts and exiles, either as its characters or its authors (Horsley, 2009, 153). Approximately eight hundred members of the Weimar film industry left Germany for Hollywood to escape Nazi persecution (Gemunden and Kaes, 2003, 4). Many more would join them throughout the 20th century to escape all sorts of limitations, establishing some sort of dialogue between two worlds. In a sense, film noir was one result of this migration: with its fusion of American narrative drive and European subtlety of suggestion, film noir is said to be almost entirely German in its origins (Taylor, 1983, 63), American in its gestation, and international in its variety of adaptations (Fay and Nieland, 2010, 1).

From this point of view, the concept of culture has become a catch-all concept, which embraces an always expanding array of practices and disciplines (Jameson, 1991, 48). Some authors (Agger, 1992) see some continuity in the reference to utopia between a certain postmodernism and critical theory. In a post-industrial society based in great part on a mediated knowledge of pseudo events (Boorstin, 1963, 19) and of images detached from any local context, these utopian moments are seen as vestiges of 'the liberating potential of modernity - industrial capitalism - as well as of its mode of consciousness (…) while attacking the insufficiencies of modernity in a dialectical way' (Agger, 1992, 292).

Noir narration, rather than being temporally restricted to a precise time and place, becomes a perennial[25] form of narrative, in the sense that its adaptability enables it to transcend national barriers and social identity, by turning myths of unity and identity into a tale of doubt and hybridity. In doing so, this form of narration seems to reveal those tensions in modern society that result from a dual process of rationalisation and repression that has allowed modern western societies to achieve goals of prosperity and technological advancement, while leaving behind a world of exploitation and psychological vulnerabilities (Berger et al., 1974, 163). In this respect, noir can be seen as both critical and assertive of a certain social order, the western civilisation process, whose core of identity contains traits of the 'other', outside the western world, or of those exploited within its own borders. Examining the effectiveness of film noir in translating these anxieties into visual stories is one of the aims of this dissertation.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have analysed the concept of culture from three points of view, in order to summarise the main aspects of my research on film noir.

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[25] Horsley introduces and debates at length the 'perennial' crossing of temporal and geographical boundaries in film and literary noir, which makes this tradition not just American, but part of a much wider western literary tradition (Horsley, 2009, 5).

I have started by enlarging on the development of the concept of culture outlined in the first chapter, based on the culturalist tradition. And I have noted how, from a European and anglophone perspective, this notion of culture as expression of a national community has gone hand in hand with attempts to isolate it from certain social groups, classes, foreign influences and cultural privileges. When first defined by guardians of a certain tradition of high literature and art, culture an elitist concept whose main practice was the study of selected texts chosen among works of literature. The result was the separation of the population into two parts: the educated and the rest. The former with the repository of 'real' culture, while the latter with colonised by the influence of mass culture, mostly coming from America. From the second half of the 20th century, culture was extended to include personal, shared memories and lived experiences of people from any background, to the point of including the part of society hitherto excluded. This democratic tendency, however, continued to include elements of the elitist tradition, regarding the negative influences of mass culture on the everyday practices and memories of popular classes. Raymond Williams's succeding notion of culture completes the this journey, by including the 'double movement' of reproduction and change in the cultural practices of ordinary men and women. Finally, I have imported the lesson from this 'journey' into my own analysis of film noir, by giving particular attention to the two aspects that characterise any cultural practice: change and creativity on the one hand, and reproduction of the social order and tradition on the other.

In the second section, I have moved to an analysis of culture, especially western culture, as a moment of domination and influence over other cultural practices. Cultural domination, in this sense, has sometimes become imperialism when it tended to impose its own practices on other cultures. But, at the same time, these new forms of international communication, and the dependence of a cultural system on another, have been part of a system of reciprocal influences that have made the world more global, in being interconnected. I then examined the reflexivity developed by each subject and social group in monitoring their own activities so as to effectively communicate with each other. The resulting concept of culture as a mobile construct no longer related to territory has brought us to contradictory consequences of displacement, individualism, progress and emancipation. Then, moving to the relationship between American and European

cinema, I have used the concept of globalisation and Americanisation to investigate the historical reasons for simultaneous dominance and interconnection. The creation of a shared repository of styles and images has given me the opportunity to analyse the psychological dimension of globalisation, in terms of our imaginary projections of 'the other'; and to hypothesise how this concept would work between two continents, two systems of representations, mutually influencing each other in the creation of what I have called a 'transatlantic imagery'.

In the third section of this review, I have made a detailed examination of the account of the culture industry that a group of German scholars formulated at about the time when noir films were being made. This historical coincidence has provided a key to exploring some of the social anxieties that emerged onto the academic scene at that point, as these scholars meditated on the way the increasing influence of popular culture was related to the rise of fascism and social intolerance. I have read this ethical side of the notion of culture in the light of its connection with the speculative tradition, proper to German philosophy, while I have tried to disentangle some obscure elements through detailed analysis of the work of Adorno and Horkheimer on popular culture and art. The importance of this work is related to the way it has affected successive theoretical studies on aesthetics and social change, in which parts of popular culture have been included in the 'utopian dimension' of high art. This dimension is considered as a moment of revelation of the anxieties and marginal realities of some social groups excluded from the social scene and public debate. I have included film noir in these instances, as it has (and still does) afford narrative opportunity for a community of strangers, outsiders and outcasts to express their vision of a fragmented community of wanderers in transition between two worlds, dealing with loss, disillusionment and hope of a better future. Finally, I have considered displacement narrated in film noir as one of the inevitable outcomes of modernity, and film noir itself as one of its more expressive and effective narratives.

Chapter 4 Questa non é l'Italia (This is not Italy)

> Not Italy is offered but proof that it exists.
>
> (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997)

This chapter will introduce the concepts of nation and Americanisation, reframing them in the concept of culture as developed in the previous sections. This framework will be the starting point for moving on to analysis of the Italian film noir *Ossessione*, stressing its origins in American literature and French cinema, along with its relationship to the 'ontology of the image' debate. All the concepts introduced will be tested and verified against this visual sample in order to discover how these notions are articulated in a specific social context. Particular attention will be given to the way crime, criminals and social differences are represented; and to whether, and to what extent, this type of representation challenges previous practices. A final consideration of this film in the context of the modernity debate will articulate the development of the notion of the 'stranger' and its relationship to film noir.

4.1 Cinema and nation

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the advent of mass communication in the western world meant that the transmission of information and symbolic forms became increasingly governed by the media industries' technical and institutional apparatuses (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997; Hesmondhalg, 2002; Thompson, J.B., 1990, 3-4). With the coming of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, this symbolic power gradually ceased to be the exclusive possession of the traditional social hierarchy (Church and State). The new system of communication started to act as the new social intermediary in the articulation of scientific knowledge and the formation of public

opinion, as well as in the production of narrative forms of public entertainment to satisfy curiosity, and offer distraction, escapism etc. to new audiences.

Development of such a mediated communication system had consequences that are very important for our analysis of new forms of discourse about crime. On the one hand, this development provided a point of reference and social cohesion for new groups of people (i.e. because dispersed over large territories), while on the other hand it created a certain degree of *space-time distanciation* (Thompson, J.B., 1995, 21,) between production and distribution contexts, as these symbolic products can 'travel' in time and space according to the nature of the medium and the circumstances of its communication. For example, printing has increasingly developed its sphere of influence among disparate members of communities and supported the emergence of a national consciousness, or other 'imagined' (Anderson, B., 2006) forms of social belonging. In contrast, a medium such as cinema, whose language is based on a sequence of images, has exerted its influence in different times and regardless of geographical distances, to the point of becoming a kind of international vernacular (Hansen, M.B., 1999, 60). Cinema has become a language of common usage with wide circulation and translatability, whose sources of inspiration, styles and visual inventions become a repository for present and future authors and audiences. At the same time, cinema as a social institution can become an arena for conflicting definitions of a nation (Williams, A., 2002a, 4). It can provide a dual social function with its storytelling: as a weapon of cultural nationalism, in promoting 'national values' and tradition, or as a critical innovator by exploring new foreign terrains in order to challenge discrimination and cultural parochialism. For example, in the case of Italian cinema under fascism that I am going to analyse, it would be more correct to speak of a national cinema as a form of internal national colonialism (Higson, 2002, 63), since this was cinema produced under strict political censorship. But as regards American cinema, I have to bear in mind as analyst that it does not stand only for domination and imperialist expansion (Tunstall, 1977, 49), since, at the same time, it offers the possibility of broadening the cultural repertoire available to audiences (Higson, 2002, 57; Hebdige, 1988, 74). Film noir understandably belongs to the second of these categories, as it maintains an ambiguous relationship with the

culture of origin and emphasises its international vocation (Fay and Nieland, 2010, 1) in referring continuously to somewhere else, to a foreign land, or to a new frontier, either real or imaginary.

It is to the notion of culture and its relationship with cinema that my attention turns next, to clarify the terms under which the nature and influence of cinema has to be formulated.

4.2 Culture, Americanism and domination

On the strength of what was established in the previous chapter, we can generally define culture in terms of a dual 'structural' emphasis: as a factor of order and social cohesion and as a subjective 'feeling', shaping personal emotions and experience articulated in thought and consciousness that 'take a social form in observable texts and practices' (Brooker, 2003, 239). By the end of the fifties, the populist trend of bringing the notion of culture down from the peaks of high art and literature to the everyday life of ordinary people had been achieved by stressing 'human agency', the active rather than passive production of culture (Storey, 1993, 44). In the previous orientation, the Leavisite tradition, an elitist concept of culture came from a reaction to the American influence of popular culture and the subsequent levelling down of the high standard of education cultivated by intellectuals and social elites (Leavis, 1930, 34-35). Contributions from Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams proposed a link between society and culture as interpenetrating agencies, giving rise to the conclusion that the purpose of cultural analysis would be to reconstitute the 'structure of feelings' (Williams, R., 1973, 64), the shared values of a particular social group, class or society, in the double meaning - as mentioned above - of 'creativity and normative regulation' (Bauman, 1999, xiv).

In particular, with the advent of mass communication, following the development of the American economic system, this notion of culture has become embedded in the process of production and exchange of symbolic forms, involving relations of power, forms of conflict, inequalities in terms of the distribution of resources, domination and so on (Thompson J.B., 1990, 12). Moreover, cultural practices are meaning-producing practices, which use signs and symbols to

make meanings, hence they are often described as *signifying practices* (Bocock, 1992, 233). For these reasons, my analysis of film must include studying whether the meaning constructed and conveyed by symbolic forms serves to establish and sustain domination relationships (Thompson, J.B., 1990, 7), and whether the assumed meanings contribute to a critique of these relations. In this way, it will be possible to verify whether symbolic structures consolidate social ones (Bourdieu, 2010), or to what extent certain cultural practices reinforce certain inequalities (Saukko, 2003, 22). Highbrow literary taste, for example, proper to the Leavisite tradition, corresponds with and consolidates a secure economic position, whereas different working-class (or middle-class) habits of consumption, such as watching crime or noir films, might achieve a different and higher status than that of the social group with which they were originally associated. For example, they might become the subject of academic debate, or be appropriated by alternative social groups to communicate a significant difference in terms of resistance to mainstream forms of entertainment (Hebdige, 1987, 85; Clark et al., 1976).

Combining a culturalist approach (according to the notion of culture just mentioned) with a sociological one (connecting the cultural product to a social context) helps to avoid the self-enclosed tendency, so common in film studies, to prioritise the study of textual forms over any other analysis. In our account of film noir, a vast contribution is found in academic studies on subcultures and American influence on popular culture (Hall and Jefferson, 1976; Hebdige, 1987 and 1988; Webster, 1988). These studies stress the importance of 'styles' and cultural practices in challenging a traditional cultural agenda based on high art, and of refashioning it as a radical one. At the same time, evaluating the two approaches through observations in areas as different as media studies, psychology, literary criticism and criminology will help this research to interact with different worlds, as part of a strategy of combining methodologies (triangulation) that tests the extent to which different kinds of material, or methods, corroborate each other, problematising any simple notion of 'truth' (Saukko, 2003, 23).

My account of the importance of film noir starts with the development of an international movement of cross-national appropriation and creativity. In so doing, it has to take account of the ambivalent role that American culture and its mythology played in Italian and European films. This

mythology developed in the tension between a desire to broaden local cultural traditions and a contrasting fear of colonisation and loss of control over artistic autonomy.

4.3 Experience of borders: the American myth in Italy

The film *Ossessione* (1943), the Italian word for 'obsession', was directed by Luchino Visconti during the last years of fascist dictatorship in Italy. With the country war-worn and the Allies on their way to free the country, Mussolini's troops destroyed the negatives of the film before retreating to the north of Italy, where the puppet Repubblica di Saló was established until its final capitulation. Thanks to Visconti's foresight, a copy of the negatives was saved (Bondanella, 2002, 29). So it is still possible to watch the film that infuriated *il Duce's* son, Vittorio, with its, for fascist standards, unconventional portrayal of crime. In fact, he was reported to have stormed out of the projection room, shouting: 'Questa non é l'Italia' (This is not Italy) (Liehm, 1984, 57).

Film conventions under fascism were that any depiction of violence, along with images of poverty and social difficulties, were banned, as they would undermine the spirit of militarism and national cohesion that Mussolini was trying to promote through the cinematic medium (Di Nolfo, 2002, 91). Ministerial censorship was surprisingly rare during fascism, as most rejection of films happened at the pre-production stage, or through some form of 'self-censorship' by those working in the cinema industry (Reich, 2002, 12). Despite poor circulation and legal controversies at the time of its release,[26] *Ossessione* would be heralded, years later, as the forerunner of the Italian Neorealist film movement, as well as a sort of corollary to American film noir, which started around the same time on the other side of the ocean (Spicer, 2007a, 13). Italian Neorealism refers to the documentary quality of films made in Italy in the immediate post-war period, following the example of *Rome Open City* (1945) by Roberto Rossellini, when the unavailability of Cinecittá Studios forced the directors to shoot their films on real locations, with recourse to non-professional

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[26] The making of *Ossessione* was possible in the first place because of the failure of the fascist government to recognise international copyright law. After the war, distribution of the film was stopped as MGM brought an action against Visconti's infringement (Van Watson, 2002, 177).

actors and stories set among poor and ordinary people (Guidorizzi, 1973, 37). Furthermore, *Ossessione* marked the beginning of a post-war Italian *Neorealismo Nero* (Black Neo-realism) with films like Alberto Lattuada's *Il Bandito* (The Bandit, 1947) or Michelangelo Antonioni's *Cronaca di un amore* (Story of a Love Affair, 1950), in which some of Visconti's themes of familial disruption and social displacement were articulated to engage with contemporary issues of returning veterans and economic development (Spicer, 2007a, 13).

The American noir connection with *Ossessione* comes from its source of inspiration, the American novel *The Postman Always Rings Twice* by James M. Cain, published in 1934, on which the film is based. The story is about a vagrant who helps a young, attractive woman to kill her much older husband (the owner of a roadside service station), taking the insurance money as the means to secure a future together. The final attempt to escape ends up disastrously, with a car accident where the woman dies and the man gets arrested. The directness of the dialogue, its descriptive, almost journalistic tone, in the rendering of the scenes, together with the avoidance of any moralising judgement in the story, helped establish this type of narration as 'realistic', both in its narrative register and in the portrayal of its characters (Bencivenni, 1995, 15). Moreover, it explored a new, anti-romantic theme for Italian cinema: the psychological and moral conditions under which sexual attraction can easily turn into obsession, with a terrible potential to victimise and criminalise (Schickel, 1992, 20).

The novel, at that time, had not yet been translated into Italian. It came into Visconti's possession in a French version, thanks to his acquaintance with some of the most notable artists active in cinema in France (Bondanella, 2002, 26). Visconti, coming from an aristocratic family, was able to escape the general conditions of cultural and moral isolation of the rest of the Italian population by travelling extensively, acquiring first-hand experience of filmmaking while in Paris, and self-financing his cinematic efforts (Fay and Nieland, 2010, 21). Despite his financial independence, however, the Italian director needed authorisation for shooting and distributing his film (Bencivenni, 1995, 13). The permission for *Ossessione* was given because the story was based on an American model, for which a certain (more direct) type of representation of crime and moral decay was somehow allowed (Fey and Nieland, 2010, 23). Fascist censors, in fact, vetoed

Visconti's previous project based on an Italian short story, by Giovanni Verga, set in Sicily, about a tormented affair between a local bandit and his lover (Bencivenni, 1995, 13). This ban was motivated by the regime's general cultural policy, as previously mentioned of rejecting any representation of 'controversial' realist subjects depicting poverty and crime among lower strata of the population (Reich, 2002, 13).

Under fascism, film output generally consisted of comedies, romantic melodramas, and literary and historical adaptations. At the same time, an increasing number of Italians films, the so-called 'white telephone' dramas (Hay, 2002, 57) based on romantic stories of wealthy people in a dream-like, luxurious setting, far removed from the real living conditions of the vast majority of Italians (Fay and Nieland, 2010, 23), started to copy the 'allure' of the Hollywood comedies. Thus, some sort of inconsistency existed in Italian culture at that time, since despite the widespread diffusion of American cultural products, in the form of comics, films and literature, officially the regime boasted its self-sufficiency and independence from foreign influence (Ricci, 2008, 126). Furthermore, anglophone culture was the ideal medium for political struggle: the myth of America became a sort of idealised Promised Land for young generations of intellectuals, artists and aspiring politicians, enabling them to establish a counterculture opposed to fascist ideals and canons in a new movement called the 'Americanisti' (Bondanella, 2002, 25). For this reason the thirties in Italy were called 'the decade of translation' (Fay and Nieland, 2010, 19), as some writers (Pavese, Vittorini, Calvino, Fenoglio) preferred to study and translate American and English novels rather than use the celebratory style of prose adopted as official literature by the political regime. In one of these writers' words:

Around 1930, when Fascism was beginning to be 'the hope of the world', some young Italians happened to discover in their books America - an America thoughtful and barbaric, happy and truculent, dissolute, fecund, heavy with all the past of the world, and at the same time young, innocent. For several years these young people read, translated, and wrote with a joy of discovery and of revolt that infuriated the official culture; but the success was so

great that it constrained the regime to tolerate it, in order to save face. (Pavese, quoted in Bondanella, 2002, 25-26)

Unlike these writers, Visconti discovered anti-fascism in France, where he came close to sectors of the French Popular Front.[27] Its members included director Jean Renoir, who gave him the copy of the American novel we have been discussing (Bondanella, 2002, 26). And while he was there, he watched the first (authorised) French adaptation of Cain's novel, *Le Dernier Tournant* (1939) by Pierre Chenal, with its 'milieu of tough criminals and poor girls' (Andrew, 1995, 43), which would be influential on his later decision to adapt the story to an Italian context. Back in Italy to make *Ossessione*, Visconti joined a left-leaning group of intellectuals, all admirers of American literature and French cinema, who collaborated on his film (Bencivenni, 1995, 13). At the same time, these people were also involved with the journal *Cinema*, run by Mussolini's son Vittorio, seeking to disseminate their idea of a new visual project, the 'Anthropomorphic Cinema', that would tell 'stories of living people, living people among things, not things *per se*' (Visconti, quoted in Liehm, 1984, 57). Just days before the fall of the fascist government, most of the group, including Visconti, ended up in jail, suspected by the secret police of supporting the Italian resistance. The connection between Italian and French cinema was thus important for the inspiration and development of *Ossessione*, and requires us to articulate the degree to which one type of cinema influenced the other, and how the representation of crime played a significant role in it.

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[27] The French Popular Front was an alliance of left-wing movements, which won the 1936 national elections as a result of changed international economic and political circumstances (Cobban, 1965, 146). Visconti's mentor, Jean Renoir, played a central role in supporting the Popular Front's battles and ideas, both through public interventions and films, the most famous of which was *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange* (1936), a social commentary on that turbulent period in France, with homage to American Western comics. I postpone to later paragraphs a clarification of the extent to which *Ossessione* owes its style and source of inspiration to these films.

4.4 *Ossessione* and the French connection: crime as style

The first methodological problem with *Ossessione* is that the version available today is Visconti's own self-edited version, rather than the one shown in cinemas at the time of its release. Nevertheless, the film still stands as a pivotal visual example of how to redefine and renegotiate the creative limits for expressing a critical view of society within a dictatorial regime, using a crime story and a foreign country - America - as narrative and cultural pretexts.

Visconti's political influences and the development of his visual style have to be ascribed to the period of French cinema called Poetic Realism. This movement, or tendency, in French cinema of the thirties, aimed to make films about the lower strata of the population, particularly its underclass - workers, criminals, deserters etc. (Vincendeau, 1998, 11). These visual stories were told in a stylised and lyrical way, often including the environment or landscape as an essential part of the gloomy mood or the tragic destiny of their characters' doomed lives (Williams, 1992, 239). Graham Greene described them as a trend that raised 'the thriller to a poetic level' (Greene quoted in Andrew, 1995, 225). Unlike their contemporary American counterparts, which capitalise on the maximum shocking effect of fast pace, visual violence, songs and screeching car tyres, these films relied on their quiet internal composition (Andrew, 1995, 220). This included very carefully selected locations (harbours, train stations, secluded urban or exotic environments, primitive rural settings etc.) as transitional spaces seemingly suspended between two worlds - as indeed were the films' protagonists (Andrew, 1995, 221). Moreover, the choice of location was meant to express, spatially, the psychological conditions of enclosure, estrangement and constriction in which such protagonists were caught. The visual style, based on a combination of of studio décor and location shooting, supported this depiction of people within still landscapes, on the brink of erupting in an outburst of rage, violence or desperation (Williams, 1992, 236). It is this particular 'symbiosis between (social) subject and (stylistic) treatment' that, according to Durovicová, makes French cinema's fascination with crime and the criminal hero so distinctive (quoted in Andrew, 1995, 227). This attention to the 'style of the crime' distinguishes this cinema from its international

counterparts (Vincendeau, 1998, 32). 'Crime, the transgression of the laws that regulate this world, is first and foremost a fingerprint, a signature, a sign of style'[28] (Andrew, 1995, 32).

The stylistic combination of studio with outdoor location is accounted for by the presence, within French cinema, of numerous German artists and technicians (Andrew, 1995, 162, 172, 265), whose contribution to the emergence of this distinctive 'French' look was essential. Studio décor, in fact, involves the use of lighting and set design as part of the narrative and mood in interior scenes. German Expressionism was famous for its mastery in handling shadows and designing sets, as well for the use of a particular (subjective) type of camerawork, as key features for expressing subjective feelings, inner visions, or dreamlike states of hallucination (Huaco, 1965, 14-15). Location shooting, on the other hand, is based on a more 'realistic' way of shooting exterior scenes, closer to French naturalism, and involving less attention to the technical quality of light and setting than to the close-to-reality look in a primitive, pastoral setting, where characters seem to be connected to and almost naturally complemented by their surroundings (Andrew, 1995. 220).

The combination of these two contrasting systems of representation is at the core of our discussions of film noir, since it relates to the debate about the so-called ontology of the photographic picture in post-war cinema: its reference to an external reality (Bazin, 2005; 2005a; Tagg, 1993; Wollen, 1998). As systems of representation, Realism and Expressionism are in fact two extremes in the reproduction of 'external' reality. Bazin, referring to painting, calls these two modes the symbolic and the realistic (Bazin, 2005, 10), where the former, primarily aesthetic, attempts to transcend its model in order to express a spiritual reality, while the latter seeks to reproduce or duplicate reality (ibid., 11). With the advent of photography, according to this French critic, plastic arts are freed from an obsession with verisimilitude to pursue the aesthetic route, while photography takes over in the realistic reproduction of the world (ibid., 12-13). Bazin stresses some qualification of this bold statement, but his position is made clear in most of the debate about cinema in post-war France and continental Europe. The favourite cinematic form, from this perspective, is Realism, in particular Italian Neorealism, as it becomes the model through

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[28] I refer to the concept of style as the 'recurrent features of texture and structure' (Huaco, 1965, 11) of a symbolic form, but also the historical conditions and individual circumstances that have promoted its emergence and development.

which to establish an existential bond between fact and image, world and film (Wollen, 1998, 92). Expressionism with its artificiality, at the other end of the spectrum, was the enemy, since its emphasis was on lighting and design, as opposed to the realist movement's lack of make-up (ibid., 93). Similar limitations were found in Soviet cinema, based on editing, with the work of Eisenstein, for its editing and aestheticism, and in American cinema for its predictable narratives (Bazin, 2005, 41; 2005a, 148). Italian Neorealism found its main source of inspiration in Poetic Realism as interpreted by Jean Renoir (Bazin, 1971), with its emphasis on faces, situations and choral outdoor scenes. This drew on the tradition of the Impressionist painters, creating a visual dialectic between reality and abstraction (Bazin, 1971, 84-85) which permits the filmmaker to say everything without chopping the world up into little fragments. In this way the Realist mode of representation 'would reveal the hidden meanings in people and things without disturbing the unity natural to them' (Bazin, 2005, 38). Bazin goes on to acknowledge Jean Renoir's influence on Italian Neorealist cinema (Bazin, 2005a 18) and in particular on the most aesthetically inclined of the Neorealists, Luchino Visconti, as a former disciple of Renoir (Bazin, 2005, 37).

These statements about issues of representation are intrinsic to our research, since Bazin was at the forefront of a French critical movement, around the magazine *Cahiers du cinéma,* that was very important in the appraisal of the noir American movies coming to Europe after World War II and the subsequent debate about their critical and aesthetic value (Hillier, 1985; 1986).

4.5 Jean Gabin: 'Oedipus in a cloth cap'

French actor Jean Gabin is central to most of the poetic realist films, articulating his characters' emotions in outbursts of rage and violent confrontations with less authoritative characters[29] who stand in his way. In films such as Julien Duvivier's *Pépé le Moko* (1936), Jean

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[29] Secondary characters, surrounding the main performer, were called the 'eccentrics' in French cinema, 'forming a dense population of familiar and much-loved faces and voices' (Vincendeau, 1998, 26) and eliciting a broad response and numerous followers among cinema and theatre audiences. Subsidiary to the main stars, they 'served them' with their theatrical repertoire of emphatic gestures, voices and performances - essential for offering on-screen a richness of linguistic nuance and witticism proper to the tradition of popular

Grémillon's *Gueule d'Amour* (1937), Renoir's *La Bête Humaine* (1938) and Marcel Carné's works *Le Quai des Brumes* (1938) and *Le Jour se Lève* (1939), he established his tragic screen persona in combination with 'a myth[30] of charismatic ordinariness' (Vincendau, 2000, 69). In all these stories, Gabin's character dies 'tragically' after a series of fights, verbal duels and sexually charged encounters with fascinating, but ultimately unattainable, women. This was to gain him the appellation of 'Oedipus in a cloth cap' (Bazin quoted in Vincendau, 2000, 62). In most films, Gabin played the ordinary worker driven to crime by social hypocrisies that prevent solidarity between members of the same social group. In other stories, he played the criminal who is good at heart, as the focus shifts from his criminal actions to his personal feelings of nostalgia, impossible love, or doomed fate, emphasising the inner workings of the mind and sense of isolation over the unfolding of external events. In this respect, Andrew has noted how, within blurring of boundaries between working class and criminality, resides 'the very attraction of marginality, isolation and authenticity' (Andrew, 1995, 226) on which Gabin's myth is based. Underlying this view is the assumption that these films' general tone of regret, nostalgia or lost illusions stands for an admission of momentary defeat of a certain social aspiration, while still holding the hope of a better future for generations to come (Andrew, 1995, 350). From this perspective, films could be seen as the symbolic response to, or corresponding visual meditation on, inchoate social problems and parallel political expectations proper to the Popular Front. Gabin became the 'icon' (Vincendau, 2000, 70) of this movement in the sense that his character, his persona, embodies its ideals, expectations and political goals.

Most of these stories became very successful internationally as early as the thirties, and during the war, for both educated and popular audiences, as they portrayed a certain image of France before the German occupation, and were celebrated for their tragic and libertarian tone. The Gabin phenomenon sparked a series of international imitations, spoofs, homages and remakes that

French theatre based on vernacular and slang (the *boulevard* theatre). 'Where the 'eccentrics' act for the spectator in the back row, Gabin acts for the camera', as Vincendeau puts it (Vincendeau, 1998, 28).

[30] Borrowing Barthes's definition of myth as a narrative device for articulating tensions and ambiguities (Barthes, 1993, 126), myth for Vincendeau is the cultural phenomenon of representation that resolves sets of opposed values into a character who is perceived as coherent, natural and authentic (Vincendeau, 2000, 64). In this sense, the conflation of political aspirations proper to the Popular Front with certain constructions of working-class character and masculinity 'appear natural despite their roots in cultural artefacts such as literature, song, and photography, and despite their deeply divided nature' (Vincendeau, 2000, 64).

would establish his status as an international star (Vincendeau, 1998, 7). In this context, the concept of 'star' has to be taken not as providing fixed meanings, or role models, but as 'a focus in the continuous production and struggle to define and redefine desires, meanings and identities' (Gledhill, 1991, xix) in a social context.

Gabin's status was quite different in the two periods separated by the war, as the tragic working-class hero gave way to the patriarch and godfather figure of the second part of his career (Vincendeau, 2000, 63). It is to the former I refer to find out how and to what extent *Ossessione* is related to French Poetic Realism, to the myth, star and icon of Gabin, to Italian Neorealism and American film noir, with their distinctive representations of crime and social order.

4.6 *Ossessione* as challenge to dominant forms of representation

At this stage it is important to stress how Visconti used noir narrative techniques to reveal the intolerant, authoritarian and aggressive quality of the nationalist mentality inherent in the fascist regime (Bencivenni, 1995, 17). To find out how the authors of *Ossessione* achieved this, we must turn our attention to the concept of representation and the importance of its analysis within a cultural context.

According to Elizabeth Chaplin, representation in terms of its communicative potential 'implies that images and texts (…) do not reflect their sources but refashion them according to pictorial or textual codes,[31] so that they are quite separate from, and other than those sources' (Chaplin, 1994, 2). The author is referring here primarily to still images, but her approach is valid in the case of cinematic visual narratives too. *Ossessione* in fact has its sources both in an American crime story and in French cinema, one providing the plot of the story, while the other provides the visual style of storytelling. As this story required changes in its geographical setting to

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[31] Codes, in this case, have to be understood as the implicit rules by which certain ideas entering the social practice of communication can be expressed through mass media. For example, codes in cinema are lighting, editing, picture composition, or *mise en abyme* (i.e. image within an image), camera movement etc. (Sturken and Cartwright, 2001, 351), while codes in culture are the discourses available at a certain time about specific topics, as they are selected through communication practices by institutions and individuals (Hall, 1992).

adapt it for a different audience, Visconti's choice was the Po valley, in north-east Italy. This geographical location is distinguished by its history, its working class, and its past involvement in social disturbances and strikes that spread to different areas of the Italian peninsula (Gramsci, 1971, 76). The working title of this film was *Palude* or marshland (Bencivenni, 1995, 13), a reference to both the geographical setting (Po delta) and the psychological condition of the characters on the verge of sinking into despair and obsession in consequence of their actions. On the other hand, the screenwriters insisted on including in the film a character not present in the original novel: lo spagnolo, 'the Spaniard' (Licata quoted in Faldini e Fofi, 1979, 61). The reference to Spain here has to be framed in the historical circumstances of that time, as this nation had become fascist after a long and ferocious civil war involving volunteers from all over the world on both sides: the republicans, and Franco's armies (ibid.). The Spaniard became the moral, political conscience of the more frivolous main character.

The casting confirmed the tendency to political bias in the film. The actress intended to play the main character was Anna Magnani, one of the most expressive and dramatic actresses in Italian cinema. From a popular background, she became famous for her expressive roles in Neorealist cinema a couple of years after *Ossessione*. As she was pregnant at the time, Clara Calamai stepped in instead (Bencivenni, 1995, 13). Calamai was already a film star under fascism, with a quite elaborate and sophisticated urban appearance, and easily identifiable with a certain type of fascist cinema. For these reasons she had to undergo a thorough change of make-up, costume and haircut, in order to strip away the glamour with which previous films had invested her, and the cinema audience would be expecting (Landy, 2008, xvi). Visconti's aim in this particular case was to counter stardom and the escapism of mainstream fascist cinema in order 'to fuel a new conception of popular cinema' (ibid.). The male character Gino, played by Remo Girotti, had neither the same cinematic presence as Jean Gabin, nor was he the icon of any group's revolutionary programme. His character was not the proactive male who bursts onto the scene, and who plays the leading part in a team of actors at his service. Visually Gino is, rather, the 'object' of desire and contention from the very first scenes of the film, while his hesitations and doubts make his character an adolescent-like figure amidst more scheming, deceitful or experienced characters.

The fact that Remo Girotti was not a professional actor seems to confirm this interpretation. The actor's body is in functional service to the greater social landscape within which he is portrayed. There are not many close-ups in the film - being the emphasis on the social context where the story takes place - apart from at the very beginning[32] where the sexual attraction of the two protagonists is stressed (Wood, M.P., 2007, 240). However, instead of romance, the tragic development of the story recalls the atmosphere of fatalism and desperation among working-class people as portrayed in Popular Front stories and their characters. Visconti's style tries to tap into the 'political implication' of a certain cinematic style (French Poetic Realism), based on location shooting and roving camera (Andrew, 1995, 161), emphasising the creative use of expressive possibilities in landscape and architecture as indicators of narrative development. This call for more realism in cinema counters the dominant code of the 'white telephone' melodrama already described as the equivalent of a 'standard' film during fascism. Interior scenes, however, deserve a separate account as they reproduce Expressionist techniques of lighting and chiaroscuro effect, to dramatise domestic settings where characters are seemingly trapped, contrasting with the sense of freedom in open spaces (Wood, 2007, 240). In this way, *Ossessione* does not replicate the codes of fascist cinema in its process of representation, but challenges the conventions of this visual practice by offering an alternative way of telling a crime story about ordinary people. Noir appears to be a good source for social subjects and narrative style that would later be developed in post-war Neorealism (Wood M.P., 2007, 263).

4.7 Representation and social practices

In Chaplin's account, 'representation can be understood as articulating and contributing to social processes. These social processes determine representation but also the social practices and forces which underlie them, with which we interpret the world' (Chaplin, 1994, 2). In this way, *Ossessione* articulates social processes at work in film production, drawing on visual techniques or

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[32] See paragraph 4.8 below, figures 3 and 4.

narrative styles already employed in previous works, while adding some new ideas and solutions that make the film a visual meditation on a certain subject, in a particular style, or create certain expectations or doubts in a viewer. Moreover, the images of this film create a particular account of the social world, drawing our attention to the way visual language uses certain narrative resources to generate specific 'knowledge', in Foucault's sense (Foucault, 1977, 26) - for instance, in the public representation of crime stories under certain circumstances and conditions. An analysis of the two still pictures below shows us, for example, how emphases of lighting, shadowing and foregrounding enable the film to invoke repetitions that have ambiguous implications.

Image 1   Image 2

The repetition, almost mirroring, of the same scene - a bed with Gino and Giovanna (the restaurateur's wife) in the first case (Image 1) and Gino and the Spaniard later in the film (Image 2), - 'might' have homosexual connotations, as some critics have suggested (Van Watson, 2002), or might simply play with audiences' expectations of a romantic relationship in a film, with two people on the same bed. Whatever the 'final' meaning, the emphasis is on generating multiple readings of similar scenes, while indirectly criticising strict gender roles and identity such as those portrayed in Italian cinema of the thirties and forties (Duncan, 2000, 103). In this connection, one of the screenwriters noticed that, despite the intention to add the character of the Spaniard as a moral and political figure supporting the reckless Gino, once the film was made this figure was much more ambiguous than expected (Alicata, quoted in Faldini and Fofi, 1979, 65). In any case,

this narrative device is part of the phenomenon of 'reflexivity' I referred to earlier, whose presence in a cultural product calls the viewer's attention to certain aspects of the production of a particular work (Sturken and Cartwright, 2001, 248) in order, probably, to break automatic identification or, alternatively, to widen the recipient's possible interpretation and pleasure. In either case, it succeeds in making the film the locus of potential struggle around a definitive meaning or preferred interpretation. The identity of the characters in *Ossessione*, the 'knowledge' of their personality, is given through the way this film introduces differences and oppositions to the main character (Gino) to advance the narrative's development. So figures of other ethnicity (the Spaniard), other gender (Giovanna and her role of wife, submissive in family and society) and other class (the difference of social status between Bragana as the owner of the restaurant and the wife from a lower background), along with allusions to sexual conduct other than just heterosexual, work pivotally in the narration. They seem to call into question a social order that in other, more 'traditional', films is taken for granted as the accepted 'common knowledge' validated by other fascist institutions. *Ossessione* seems to share with film noir a new openness towards narrative experimentation (Telotte, 1989, 36) on the one hand, while, on the other, challenging 'reciprocal validation and authentication' (Leps, 1992, 3) between various institutions in relation to the production and distribution of knowledge on sensitive issues such as family, class exploitation, nationalism, the role of violence in society and so on. In this way, an alternative cultural practice in filmic representation allows a certain visibility and potential critique of some unexplored social issues that positivist knowledge obscures (Leps, 1992, 222).

In accordance with this analysis, representation in *Ossessione* refashions its sources of inspiration. Instead of simply reflecting them, it comes up with a new practice of production, where a different recipient (the 'critical' Italian audience of the forties) is assumed in this process of communication, as a result of this re-articulation. The phenomenon of *intertextuality* - that is, the way a work points to another symbolic work, text or event, and incorporates it - is the result of this articulation, at the same time creating a new cinematic language. *Ossessione*, in fact, as mentioned, visually announced the documentary look of Neorealist cinema, as well as changing the extent to which it is possible to draw on other cultures to criticise the condition of one's own and its

limitations of representation. By incorporating a few aspects of history into the structure of a text (Iampolski, 1998, 246), *Ossessione* is thematically tapping into the latest great period of militancy in American literature (Jameson and Buchanan, 2007, 14), located in the America of the Depression era, at the same time drawing historical inspiration from one of the most divisive episodes in European history, the civil war in Spain. The plot of the American novel (if not the myth of liberal America) the visual style of French Poetic Realism, political ideas from the communist social movement come together in forming an inter-text, a symbolic work, which is the result of all these negotiations, this operation of borrowing and appropriating ideas, styles and meanings from different texts. Intertextuality in cinema, in fact, involves incorporating not just films, but also historical or artistic events (Fuery, 2000, 51), while at the same time this concept refers to the spectator's ability to embrace intertextual constructions. Thus, intertextual strategies in Visconti's film were not just the means to bypass local censorship and to escape the narrowness of the cinematic tradition accepted by the central authorities. They tended also to bring back into public debate aspects of social criticism repressed in the dominant cultural and political practice of fascism.

4.8 Criminals, law and order in *Ossessione*

 Image 3   Image 4

Visconti's treatment of space and location matches the tension between freedom and entrapment that runs throughout the film (Duncan, 2000, 1902). Thus, while the interior scenes at the beginning reveal intimacy and confrontation between characters, a progressive feeling of entrapment creeps in as the guilt and mistrust starts to grow between the two characters. From the very first scenes, as we have seen, the chief male protagonist is constituted as the 'object' of desire, at the centre of the stage, or of the gaze, both for the other characters, and for the viewers. The 'entrance' of Gino into the restaurant is an indication of this convergence, as the initial shots introducing the secondary characters (Gino is discovered as an unwanted passenger on the truck, sleeping; then he is sent away; finally he enters the restaurant) are all preparatory elements (Image 3) for his actual appearance, emphasised by a forward camera movement towards his body and the revealing of his face for the first time (Image 4). These interior scenes (also Images 1 and 2) use the play of light and shadows on the characters' faces and on the set as a way of displaying their inner feelings. This is a technique Visconti learned from his French apprenticeship, thanks to the contribution of German technicians operating in the French cinema of the thirties, characterised by their attempt to create a décor, through lighting or set design, that resembles a mindscape, or the particular atmosphere of a specific scene in a film, as already mentioned.

Image 5

Image 6

On the other hand, the exterior scenes provide the moments when a visual link is created between the main character's private vicissitudes and his desire to be free. However, as this promise progressively tends to become an illusion, the social world starts to close around the main characters. In these parts of the film, just after the killing, when the investigation begins (Image 5), police, moral authorities, and informers start to populate this open space until Gino's final arrest (Image 6). Visconti and his screenwriters tended to underplay the investigative dimension in their film, which plays such a major part in the original novel (Bencivenni, 1995, 14). The emphasis focuses instead on relationships between the pairs of characters, the two murderers, and Gino and the Spaniard, showing how their relationship develops from solidarity and love to an atmosphere of suspicion and betrayal (Bencivenni, 1995, 14). In this the role of the Spaniard, once again, is central, as the police question him to find out what he knows about the killing. The institutional authority (police) is thus represented, in this story, almost as the silent witness to the slow and progressive surrender of the culprits, under pressure from their own weaknesses and sense of guilt.

From this point of view, Visconti seems to record what is happening in this social fragment of territory as it becomes a space of contention about money and sex. This visual recording does not stand as a cry lamenting a loss of values, or as a nostalgic account of a decayed age, but as a visual analysis of the shift in Italian society from a closed world based on unity, family, land and memory to a new one focused on dislocation, utilitarian value, commercial exchange and immediate gratification (Donda, 1999, 207).

4.9 The spaces of film noir in modernity

The use of space in this film reflects Dimendberg's account of how film noir develops in society with the advent of modernity (Dimendberg, 2004). However, Dimendberg's main reference is to the development of cities in American culture as parallel to the development of film noir in American cinema. Visconti's film, on the other hand, uses a contrast between country and city to underline the shift in modern society from traditional 'organic' communities based on fixed class

and gender division to a foreign-oriented model of more dynamic social organisation. This is sign of things to come, but not yet fully developed. From a sociological point of view, this shift, from an intimate and narrow form of social organisation to a more impersonal and complex one, relates to Tönnies's categories of *Gemeinschaft* [community] and *Gesellschaft* [society] (Tönnies, 1974, 37). This transition to another social era emerges through a sense of moral, cultural and spatial disorientation in real people and fictional characters that modern cinema investigates at this time (Dimendberg, 2004, 238). Cinema, in other words, becomes a symbolic meditation on the destiny of a community, as Jameson claimed about literature (Jameson, 2002, 56). Through the use of America as a more advanced social experience, Visconti seems to articulate visually some contradictions in Italian culture, such as the parochialism of their views in political and moral matters, projecting these through the filter of a foreign critique.

The marginal wanderer Gino, who tries to cover the distance between locational spaces on foot, or by hitchhiking, is the European equivalent to the hobo, the seasonal worker, in the American tradition (Anderson, 1998) and to the *flâneur* in the European one (Baudelaire, 1863, 9; Benjamin, 1999, 168). This figure is one exposed to the infinite temptations of the new, modern world. During the journey of temptation, Baudelaire warns his readers against the ephemeral, transitory, fugitive element that constitutes the very essence of modernity. Not taking this volatile element into account, says the French writer, may result in people tumbling 'into the abyss of an abstract and indeterminate beauty, like that of the first woman before the fall of man' (Baudelaire, 1863, 12-13). Film noir can be defined as the meeting of the *flâneur* with a modern moment of beauty, from which evil also can arise, as Baudelaire, who elaborated the concept in *Les Fleur du Mal,* was well placed to know. As Oeheler writes, 'the negative beautiful dimensions of modern reality are the *materia prima* of the utopian art propagated by Baudelaire, a necessary transitional stage on the way to the absolutely new' (Oehler quoted in Frisby, 1988, 19). But this aesthetic aim was also a critical one. Once liberated from a direct relationship with a timeless past, the concept of representation reveals instead 'the savagery that lurks in the midst of civilisation and its living monstrosities' (Frisby, 1988, 20). It was by pursuing this suggestion of the dialectic between the transitory and the eternal, already present in Baudelaire, that Benjamin ultimately transposed

aesthetic reflection into the societal dimension of life (Frisby, 1988, 20) - arguing that 'there is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism' (Benjamin, 1999, 248). Within this perspective, film noir is confirmed as a middle ground from where we can gain 'a view' of, or somehow initiate a debate about, some of the contradictions, limitations and 'savagery' proper to the modernist project. Cinema stands for the privileged point of observation of the dark side of modernity, even in the case of a totalitarian society such as Italy in the first half of the forties. Film noir, in particular, offers something of a dark entrance to a passage which opens up into a world of fantasy, where it becomes possible to enact, even if only at a fictional level, the return of the repressed part of the human psyche prohibited in the dominant discourse of public institutions and social authorities.

Ossessione shows that by using a 'foreign-inspired' cultural practice to expose the contradictions and limitations of a regime's politics of representation, it is possible to dispute the power and authority of that national cinema. According to Fay and Nieland, Cain's novel worked as a kind of Trojan horse that allowed Visconti to smuggle in, by the vehicle of a film, a strong critique - disguised as a critique of American corruption - of the pillars of the fascist nation (law, religion, family) (Fay and Nieland, 2010, 23). At the same time, articulating a story around a series of marginal characters (vagabonds, strangers, poor young women) excluded from these primary social institutions, makes it possible to challenge the common view about marginality and its consequences, at the same time raising poor social classes and their problems to visibility.

4.10 The mental life of a stranger in a metropolis: noir and Europe

Travel through spaces of urban modernity produces in people the sense of moral, cultural and spatial disorientation that modern cinema investigates in film noir (Dimendberg, 2004, 238). Simmel investigated similar forms of urban disorientation in his essay on 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', where he claimed that the intensification of emotional life a person undergoes during the metropolitan experience (Simmel, 1903, 325) ultimately provokes a lethargic attitude, intrinsic

to the modern individual, that is incapable of reacting to new stimulus with the appropriate energy (ibid., 329). Within this urban situation of detachment, indifference becomes the significant, normal condition of the modern urban dweller who lives on the margins of a social group. At the same time, an attitude of suspicion towards neighbours allows the marginal figure to experience a certain degree of personal freedom and resulting individualist lifestyle. This tendency is part of the general social process of the emergence of modern individuals (Craib, 1994, 98), resulting from the loosening and fragmentation of community influences on people's lives.

But 'marginality', in the sense of living on the margins of a social group, has also some affinities with the Romantic reaction to the Enlightenment, attributing to people at the edge of society some special insight not available to more stable group members (Craib, 1997, 168). The artist and the stranger seem to share this existential condition, as they have a higher social mobility and reflexivity than the rest of the population. In the case of *Ossessione* we have analysed the importance for Visconti and his assistants of shuttling between different cultures, languages and aesthetic solutions in order to express an alternative story which included marginal characters left out of official accounts of a nation's cultural life. Likewise, Simmel's account of the stranger stresses the higher degree of mobility this social category experiences (Simmel, 1908). As a result of this mobility, the contradictory situation of simultaneous closeness and remoteness makes the stranger an element of the group, but 'an element whose membership within the group involves both being outside and confronting it' (ibid., 144). Yet while, at the time the German sociologist was writing, being a stranger could still present a challenge to authoritarian and xenophobic traits in nationalistic mentality, today the condition of the stranger has become a common experience for every member of contemporary society (Bauman, 1991, 94). The extreme division of labour and sundering of private experience from local community that are inherent in contemporary life are a radical departure from the spirit of unity and locality that was the essence of a pre-modern community. But moving into modernity means, for an individual, becoming more 'reflexive' about moral choices, personal involvement and social anxieties; and thus to the same degree, reflexivity has become integral to symbolic forms produced at this period (Beck et al., 1994).

For Visconti – and for the 'Americanisti' of thirties Italy too – 'going' to America, symbolically, as a source of inspiration, paralleled the same route that Italians took in travelling to America to escape poverty and exploitation. For emigrants, going to America was seen as a gesture of revolt, sometimes substituting crime or banditry for a situation regarded as impossible to change (Melossi, 2000, 304). In so far as European film noir depicted the modern urban or suburban milieu as a world of strangers, this representational practice challenged the core of nationalistic pretensions, and ultimately posed the chief challenge to European film production during the twentieth century, especially in countries with totalitarian regimes. Moreover, noir's daring propensity to use foreign sources of inspiration, in order to criticise domestic social conditions, made this form of narration an ideal training ground for new generations of directors (Neve, 1992, 146) in search of a new visual language. In this sense, noir became one of the most common terrains of contention between the European artistic community and American film production during the post-war search for new forms of transnational visual identity and critical defiance.

Conclusions

Following the introduction of the notion of film noir in chapter 1, section II, I have provided a period and location for this cycle of films, warning that its definition is highly controversial and easily subject to dispute. Placing the production of this group of films during the forties and fifties of American cinema has, however, helped me to move further towards explaining why, despite their 'foreign' origin, such films are so important in the process of reconstituting European identity in the post-war era. Especially in France, this group of films provided an opportunity to visually articulate some controversial events of the recent past, while simultaneously coming to terms with feelings of shame, guilt and loss. In this way, noir revitalised European cinema by providing it with an organising principle that articulated an ambivalence - which I have termed reflexivity and dependency - towards the American Myth. This was, and is, a love-hate relationship with a continent involving both an image of democracy and progress, and also a source of anxiety and fear about domination and dependency.

In this last respect I have introduced the concept of nation, while accentuating the ambivalent role that cinema plays in relation to this concept in terms of simultaneously amplifying and diminishing a country's symbolic power. I have underlined how cinema works as a sort of 'international vernacular' language that challenges discrimination and parochialism, while promoting national values and practices. Here I have introduced the concept of culture, showing the development in cultural theory of a 'populist' conception of it. Culture, including films, becomes an everyday practice of ordinary people, but one nevertheless exposed to threats of domination and subordination, as in the case of the influence of American popular culture.

While bearing in mind the ambivalent position of American culture in European cinema, I have analysed the social conditions of production of the Italian film *Ossessione*, which is based on an American novel of adultery and crime. I have demonstrated contrasting feelings of anglophilia and anglophobia inherent in different aspects of Italian cultural practices, and shown how *Ossessione* engaged with them. Censorship in this connection exerted great pressure, as the fascist regime did not allow the screening of violent material. Articulating the historical circumstances of *Ossessione'*s genesis and its relationships with contemporary French cinema helped my analysis to move further in explaining how certain challenges to dominant forms of representation were possible at the time, despite censorship.

In my subsequent analysis, I have used the concept of representation to link filmic choices in terms of casting, location and story development to a process of re-articulation of a critique of fascism and its tenets. In so doing, I have discussed the notion of intertextuality and difference, in order to discover how 'otherness' was represented and how this concept challenged the dominant cultural practices of the time. Finally, in the last part of the chapter, drawing on Baudelaire's notion of modernity and Simmel's conceptions of urban life and the stranger, I have analysed the outcome of Ossessione, with its claim to raise into visibility stories and characters excluded from fascist cinema. And I have discovered how articulation of a story in 'transnational' terms is one of the basic features of film noir, which ultimately aims to depict the savagery still present in the midst of civilisation. The missing link in my theoretical puzzle is to see how American film noir is articulated and how *Ossessione* is related to it. I will take up this challenge in the next chapter.

Chapter 5   Crime stories according to Hollywood

> *'The term [film noir] describes the psychology and
> the look not simply of a genre, but of a surprisingly
> pervasive tone in Hollywood films of the 1940s'*
> (Sklar, 1976, 253)

In this chapter, I will introduce Hollywood and its system of representation, especially in reference to crime stories and noir. In doing so, I shall examine the studios' structural organisation and the way this affects the aims and terms of their activity. Similarities with and differences from European counterparts will be stressed, along with peculiarities of this tradition of storytelling. Similarly, I will emphasise comparisons with previous crime story productions, relating them to their social and period contexts. I will engage in analysis of a film adapted from Cain's novel *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, focusing on the way certain controversial issues find their way into a visual story. Moreover, it will be essential to discover how this film articulates the 'transnational' dimension typical of film noir, and how this type of film makes its contribution to the range of characters portrayed in this tradition.

5.1 There's no business like show business

Two of the main areas of difference between European and Hollywood cinema are the production contexts and the conflicting roles popular culture plays in these countries (Bordwell and Thompson, 2001, 408-409). In the first case, Europe has for example a *divided* identity, due mainly to the different nations that constitute it, with different systems of production, distribution and promotion. As a consequence, the cinema of each country explores varying themes such as political

propaganda, nostalgia, scepticism, ironic distance and self-reflexivity (Trifonova, 2009, xv) in relation to the complexity of their internal problems and to the different systems of regulation and degree of freedom. On the other hand, relative national homogeneity and political stability in America throughout the 20th century have given its film industry the opportunity to strengthen its position on the international market, neglecting the search for an identity in favour of pursuing another more practical goal: the maximisation of profit (Gomery, 1985, 218-219). As early as 1915 the United States Supreme Court declared that 'the motion picture industry was a business pure and simple and was therefore not protected by the Constitution's First Amendment - the one that covers freedom of expression' (Hamilton, 1991, 58). By 1930 the Studio System was formed by five major companies, 'The Big Five' (Warner Bros., MGM, 20th Century-Fox, Paramount and RKO) and three smaller ones, the 'Little Three' (Columbia, Universal and United Artists) which, unlike the big ones, did not own cinemas for screening (Kochberg, 1999, 19). Each studio specialised in the production of a particular genre over others (e.g. Warner with gangster films, MGM with musicals, Universal with horror films) in order to build a loyal consumer following (ibid., 20). For the same reason, each was associated with particular teams of actors/actresses, directors, creative personnel and technicians who were kept on studio payrolls on an exclusive basis (ibid., 21). In 1948, the Supreme Court ruled the 'system' to be monopolistic, so the studios had to sell off their cinemas, and considerably reduce their activity and influence (Conant, M., 1985, 537). Prior to that, however, from the early twenties onwards, it became evident that American films dominated the world (Bakker, 2005, 43). Due to the smaller size of their purchasing population, European competitors just coming out of the First World War found it very difficult to keep pace with the development and rapid market growth of their American counterparts (Sorlin, 1991, 23), as they could never match the latter's capacity to recoup their costs simply by relying on the internal market (Turner, 1993, 14). Moreover, foreign films needed to have a prior arrangement with one of the Hollywood studios before being released in the US, as a result of their total domination of the internal market (Kochberg, 1999, 21). The structuring of the American film companies in a vertically integrated system, overseeing production, distribution and exhibition - the Studio System - gave them an increasing dominance in several areas (Bordwell, 1988, 90). One of them was

Paramount's practice of pre-selling films to independent exhibitors as a group, or 'block', in order to guarantee a screening for their product, while the exhibitor bore much of the risk of film failure (Hanssen, 2005, 123; Turner, 1993, 15). This block-booking practice, outlawed in 1948, was an essential move for the studios to further increase their share of profits and negotiating power. Another effect of concentration of power was the practice of putting the most popular acting talents or other creative workers under exclusive contract, as a way of advertising the corresponding motion pictures to their growing colonies of fans and admirers, with integrated participation of all the social media in establishing the star system (Klaprat, 1985, 355).

The increasing scope of financial investment in this business changed the number and identity of participating social agents, as Wall Street bankers and Washington politicians became progressively involved in the development and transformation of the most powerful communications industry in the world (Gomery, 1985, 220). Consequently, the emphasis in filmmaking tended towards securing a financial return from screening, at the expenses of experimentation and creativity (Cook and Bernink, 1999, 12). Moreover, the pressure of releasing a constant flow of films led to adoption in the film industry of the principles of the Fordist assembly line and Taylorist scientific management, as a means of improving industrial efficiency and final output standard (Bordwell, 1988, 6). The studios developed a system of mass marketing, creating a synergy of institutions working with Hollywood, and 'integrating the film industry into the mainstream of mass-retailing, big business practice' (Gomery, 1985, 219). This strong organisation and detailed division of labour among film workers had a strong impact on the industry's output, in terms of uniformity and predictability of story lines and visual style (Bordwell, 1988, 1). However, the promotion and merchandising of film stars and their 'classless' appeal, especially in comparison to European productions (Neve, 1992, 2-3), enabled these limitations to work to the studios' own advantage, ensuring global success. One of the most powerful Hollywood formulas from the age of the silent movies onwards - derived from the comedy tradition with its liberating disorder - portrayed the individual pitted against violent and chaotic authority (Sklar, 1997, 109-110). Another successful formula was the 'mythology of the amorous couple', the romantic comedy (Polan, 1993, 63). In both cases, the assumption of a standard Hollywood narrative is that

a character wants something, has a desire (Bordwell and Thompson, 2001, 76), generating a cause-effect process in the narrative which precisely directs the story towards a final resolution. Within this classical narrative, another character's opposition to that desire creates conflict and several variations on the main theme (ibid.). Finally, there is an 'invisible' style to these stories, whereby the film seeks to hide all the elements of its composition - camera, editing, lighting etc. - in order to give audiences an easily comprehensible, unambiguous narrative with the widest appeal possible (Bordwell, 1988, 3). In the next section, I will examine the extent to which the assumptions of this classical narrative clash with crime films and film noir stories.

5.2 Gangster movies as noir ancestors in an age of social unrest

This American mass marketing and financial system favoured an increasing trend towards 'conspicuous consumption' (Veblen, 1979, 68) among American citizens, along with the formation of a 'leisure class' regardless of economic or educational differences. This was increasingly true as the new immigrants supplanted the previous community of Puritan settlers to become a new majority in the American purchasing population (Burchell and Homberger, 1989, 157). In fact, successive waves of immigrants from all over the world led to the forming of conflicting ethnic groups in big cities on the East Coast, the most representative of these being New York City and its borough of Manhattan (Allen, 1969, 7). Hollywood's strategy to increase its profit margins and, especially, to survive the Great Depression and the financial difficulties related to that period, was primarily targeted at these growing urban audiences (Willett and White, 1989, 272-273). A parallel shift happened in cinema in 1929, when 'the gangster for the first time surpassed the cowboy as a subject for Hollywood filmmakers' (Sklar, 1992, 8). While westerns were some kind of visual celebration of a bygone, traditionally 'American' era, gangster movies started to deal with more contemporary issues, sometimes finding inspiration for their stories in current news headlines about ethnic gangs fighting for the control of illegal rackets in major American cities (Munby, 1999, 41).

The most popular examples of this new trend are *The Public Enemy* (1931), *Little Caesar* (1931), both produced by Warner Bros, and *Scarface: The Shame of the Nation* (1932) produced by Howard Hughes (United Artists) (Schatz, 1981, 81-82). All these stories were based on the quick rise to wealth and social prestige of a small, tough member of an ethnic gang (Italian or Irish) and his sudden downfall, ending in violent death (Shadoian, 2003, 29). The main actors (James Cagney, Edward G. Robinson, Paul Muni, George Raft) all came from ethnic minority groups (of Irish, Jewish or German origin) living in New York's[33] Lower East Side, where the real gangsters of the thirties likewise came from (Sklar, 1992, 12). Their sympathetic portrayal of underdogs at a time of financial adversity, emphasised by their strong ethnicity, together with the actors' unconventional looks (at least compared with Hollywood's typical male romantic leads) made these stories instantly recognisable as parables of upward mobility, depicting the hindrances and aspirations inherent in ghetto life (Munby, 1999, 62). According to Munby these films brought to the screen a frustrated desire for economic and cultural inclusion that lived in ethnic groups of the Depression era (Munby, 1999, 48). Following this perspective, cinematic representation of the conflict between dominant Anglo-white culture and other emerging ones was based on a paradox: 'The paradox was that while the dominant order seeks to render its challenge invisible and inaudible, it requires for its very constitution the continual production of representations and dialogue with the "other".' (Munby, 1999, 62). Thus, in trying to hide its underlying code and be 'transparent', Hollywood cinema ends up revealing it through film noir's opposite style of narrative. These racial and aesthetic considerations will be developed in due course, but the point I wished to stress in this section concerns social reactions to the first crime movies in the thirties. Direct representation of sex and violence in these movies was denounced by the Protestant middle class as the intrusion of an alien[34] metropolitan culture into the provincial values of the American tradition. Catholic groups

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[33] New York City in the thirties was the capital of a critical cutting-edge of intellectuals and artists, who came into contact with wider sectors of working-class and union audiences during the Depression (Stead, 1989, 74). The Federal Theatre Project was probably one of the most evident examples of this tendency. As a New Deal Social project, it provided entertainment to poor audiences by giving employment to out-of-work artists, such as Arthur Miller, Orson Welles, Elia Kazan and Joseph Losey, who were to make their name in Hollywood and, particularly, in the film noir cycle of the following decade (Hamilton I., 1991, 130).

[34] The word *alien* was often used negatively as a synonym for Jewish. Likewise, the gangster film cycle was considered to cater to the basic instincts of 'morons', 'a term widely used to refer indirectly to the immigrant working class' (Maltby and Bowles, 1994, 114). From this point of view, the debate surrounding the gangster

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called for a boycott of movies - explicitly the gangster movies - that offended Christian sensibilities and displayed members of the Roman Catholic Church in negative terms (Maltby, 1995, 60). In responding to this, Hollywood engaged in efforts to insulate its movies not only from a turbulent America, 'but also from the representatives of alternative cultures and politics who had even penetrated into the studios themselves' (Stead, 1989, 85). From this perspective, cinema appears to be the locus for a conflict between the competitive drive of market expansion (in new sectors of population) and the pressure to assimilate new popular tendencies and subject them to the moral and political hegemonies of a dominant culture. The solution to this tension, in the thirties, was consolidation of the already existing Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA, but commonly known as the Hays Office): the industry's own organ of self-regulation, concerned to mediate between pressure groups and the film companies' entrepreneurial drive, in order to prevent the likely action of political censors (Maltby, 1995, 38).

The agreement between the Hays Office and the Catholic Legion of Decency, signed in 1934, is seen as the watershed separating the age of turbulence at the beginning of the decade from the 'return to order' in the second part of the thirties, in parallel with Roosevelt's 1933 New Deal (Willett and White, 1989, 277). According to this pact, every film under production had to apply for a certificate, issued by the Production Code Administration, in order to be released or distributed (Kochberg, 1999, 50). Wrongdoing in a film was to be displayed as being ultimately punished, thus avoiding any identification, or sympathy, with the wrongdoer (Koppes and Black, 2000, 15). In this way, film companies 'internalised' in their own production routines more sophisticated ways of including scenes of violence and sex, while influential members of the emergent ethnic groups in American society (such as Joseph Breen for the Catholic group) became participants in the organs of film production control (Maltby, 1995, 62). Within this perspective, the lesson Hollywood learned from the thirties was that audiences were eager to accept more realistic stories, as new themes reached the silver screen for the first time: alienation, social corruption, sexual perversity, the coupling of ethnicity and crime (Buhle and Wagner, 2002, 14).

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films was related to the changing 'ethnic' composition of American audiences, as well as to the social position in American society of the Anglo-Saxon middle classes and their special responsibility for guiding and governing the rest (May, H.F., 1992, 334).

The different lead characters in all these stories became the new popular idols of cinema audiences. These actors played the ethnic anti-hero, as a kind of character quite opposite to those from romantic comedies with happy endings (the *matinée idol*), while 'new' female characters (e.g. the fallen woman) replaced the glamorous *prima donna* of major Hollywood productions (Klaprat, 1985, 356).

The main problem after 1934 for the film companies was how to deal with such 'sociological themes' (Stead, 1989, 43) and critical realism without incurring resistance from the Hays Office, or boycotting from religious groups throughout the country. For these reasons, crime films in the following decade became more sophisticated and less direct in their storytelling, as they developed a kind of ambiguity and complexity in both style and narrative (Schatz, 1981, 111). The largely straightforward storyline of gangster movies gave way to more complex and problematic characters and narratives and an elaborated visual style, as portrayal of a world of uncertainties and doubt.

5.3 The 'dark' films of the forties

With the coming of the war, representation of violence in cinema was not limited just to ghettos' urban areas, or to gangsters' activities. Violence became a fairly pervasive attribute of society in general. Like the Depression of the early thirties, the war created those 'extenuating circumstances which would bring more violence and political subjects to the screen' (Koppes and Black, 2000, 70). Familiar genres, from musicals to gangster films, were reworked to accommodate 'war themes' (Koppes and Black, 2000, 61), while endemic conflicts inside Hollywood (due both to demands for better working conditions and dominant positions, and to violations of trust) were put aside until the end of the war, so as not to undermine the collective wartime effort to keep the country united (Schatz, 1999, 163). The previous decade still provided an inspirational repository of ideas and narrative frameworks for a critique of contemporary society, but the new political climate no longer allowed direct reference to social themes that could generate political

controversy and social unrest. The result, in cinema, was the depiction of a universe of claustrophobia and entrapment, where suspicion, disillusionment, cynicism and self-sacrifice were new 'feelings' to be displayed visually in cinema during the war (Maltby and Bowles, 1994, 118). The 'dark' look and sombre tone of these films was often enlivened by the witty dialogue and twisted plots of the hard-boiled narratives from the thirties, or by the expressionist look - based on low-key lighting, disorienting camera angles and elaborate setting - originating with the European émigrés who came to work in Hollywood to escape racial persecution, or financial difficulties (Baxter, 1976; Taylor, 1983).

A classic example of these tendencies is Paramount's *Double Indemnity* (1944), a film by Billy Wilder, a European scriptwriter and director, who used the original 1935 novel by Cain to make his film about an insurance salesman who ends up helping a sexy housewife to kill her husband and collect the insurance money (Silver and Ward, 1992, 93). The tragic ending and the betrayal of the two lovers in the film are the result of the Production Code's influence in ensuring that ultimately 'crime does not pay'. But the representation of crime in a domestic setting, the sexual encounter, based on deceptive appearances, between the two lovers, and the casting of the ethnic gangster of the thirties, Edward G. Robinson, as a superior moral character, clearly mark the transition from the dynamic style of gangster movies in the Depression era to the 'compositional tension' (Schrader, 1972, 57) and narrative ellipses of the forties. The degree to which this film creates sympathy for the murdering couple was seen, both by audience and industry, as a watershed that allowed development of more explicit films (Schickel, 1992, 24). Another tendency at this stage in Hollywood cinema is the hierarchical positioning of the male lead in the acting team as the 'American' character within a gallery of colourful characters, including the *femme fatale*, the nurturing woman, the 'deviant' stranger, or the ethnic companion (Naremore, 1990, 43). In this connection restrained performances by, for example, Humphrey Bogart and Robert Mitchum in this decade can be compared to the more active and physical renditions of the gangsters of the thirties (Dyer, 1998, 115). As a general rule 'Hollywood has required supporting players, ethnic minorities and women to be more animated, or broadly expressive than white male leads' (Naremore, 1990, 43). In other words, American white characters in film noir are at the centre of the story now,

'economising' their gestures and facial expressions,[35] while such actors as Peter Lorre, Ingrid Bergman, Marlene Dietrich and Dooley Wilson (the black piano-player Sam in *Casablanca*) liven up the show by displaying their physical features, foreign accents and exotic looks, as roles supporting the main lead's entrance (Naremore, 1990, 43; Neve, 1992, 2-3).

Criminals in noir cinema inhabit a world they share with other heroes or antiheroes: cops, private eyes, soldiers, psychopaths, beautiful women, double-crossers, vagrants etc. (Shadoian, 2003, 64). In some cases, there is no crime at all in these stories, only 'accidental deaths', but it is the general atmosphere of entrapment and subsequent feelings of guilt and loss that make a character a fugitive who will end up caught by the police. This is the case in *Detour* (1945), directed by the émigré Edgar G. Ulmer, and produced by one of the 'poverty row' studios, the Producers Releasing Corporation, with a small budget, bare sets and several technical limitations. In spite of these, the film became famous as an example of how to make a quality movie on a shoestring, while preserving all the biting social criticism and box office appeal of its more expensive counterparts. Film noir and its dark stories, in fact, would become one of Hollywood's favourite 'cheap' narrative formulas, often employed in the B production units of the major studios, as a way of releasing short, inexpensive movies for the double-feature screening market. By offering audiences two films at once (one high-budget A and one low-budget B), theatre owners tried to appeal to a broader public, as double bills would often mix different genres, e.g. comedy with western, melodrama with horror movies and so on. These B productions were originally executed only by small companies, but once their profitability was established, the majors joined in. Moreover, this production system became the training ground for future major directors, as well as providing a more accessible opportunity for émigré artists to succeed in the American film industry (Lyons, 2000, 39).

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[35] Referring to the 'inner-reflective' faces of some Hollywood male actors (Bogart among them), Shaffer claimed that 'These actors seem to be doing a good deal of thinking. Their faces look preoccupied, as if attending to some inner voice, or memory' (Shaffer quoted in Naremore, 2000, 71).

Image 7   Image 8

The differences in the representation of violent death between the gangster features of the thirties and the film noir of the forties is quite clear in these two shots above. The directness and life-like quality of the former (Image 7) lacks the complexity of the picture composition of the latter (Image 8). The urban, fast-paced crime story of the first example still uses physical pantomime to convey the meaning of the action, partly due to its temporal closeness to silent movies and their emphasis on theatrical gestures. In Image 8 on the other hand, the way the scene has been carefully constructed (camera angle, lighting, depth of field, reflection in the mirror, arrangement of objects), even in a small budget production, is an indication of how sophisticated film narrative had become in forties Hollywood, in the attempt to convey the atmosphere or mood of a psychological situation, rather than its immediate resemblance to surface actuality, to a real world out there. These observations on the referent of an image, on the relationship between a fictional construct and its external source of inspiration, lead us to the long-standing critical debate on photographic reproduction of reality, or the 'ontology of the image' (Bazin, 2005; 2005a; Tagg, 1993; Wollen, 1998). In film noir, at least within American cinema, the world is translated into pictures with an artifice that gives the 'system' dominance over an individual's human sensibility. The system, as a global media powerhouse, has the financial support, the organisation and the colossal structure to produce symbolic forms on an unprecedented scale. Human intervention here is to be found in efforts to modify or obey the premises of a dominant style (Bordwell, 1988, 6). In this view, Bazin's comment about American cinema as a classical art, emphasises 'the genius of the system' (quoted in Bordwell, 1988, 4), its ability to absorb new elements into its mode of

production, without losing strength and momentum. The comparison the French author has in mind here is with a certain kind of European cinema (mainly French and Italian), in which greater political weight was given to the realistic component in representing life (Bazin, 2005, 10) - as we have seen in the case of *Ossessione*. Within this debate, American cinema is certainly seen to have modernised the deployment of photographic reproduction of reality as an administrative practice (Tagg, 1993, 11), with subsequent development of different areas of expertise, knowledge and control. As cinema becomes increasingly rationalised in every aspect of its activities, its nature and social function oscillates between a strategy of control and one of representation (ibid.). My next step is to examine how these two practices overlap in a practical example of American cinema of the forties.

5.4 Before the novel: formative events in Cain's career

A film such as *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1946) is distinguished by the time interval between the novel, written in 1934, and its glossy version for the big screen, produced by MGM twelve years later. The American company, in fact, had promptly secured the rights for turning the story into film in the thirties, but waited to carefully negotiate the terms and details of the operation with the Hays Office, concerning the crime and sex portrayed. As already mentioned in relation to the plot of the novel when discussing *Ossessione,* we must here turn our attention to societal events that occurred at this particular period and examine how they were elaborated in the novel some years later.

Between the end of the twenties and beginning of the thirties, just as the United States was at the peak of its economic and technological success, the Wall Street crash revealed how fragile was the American dream[36] of providing legally acquired wealth and success to the majority of its citizens. At the same time, parallel with the emergence of criminal organisations in society and

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[36] American Dream is intended 'a broad cultural ethos that entails a commitment to the goal of material success, to be pursued by everyone in society, under conditions of open, individual competition' (Messner and Rosenfeld, 1997, 6).

gangster films at the cinema, 'pulp' magazines such as *Dime Detective* and *Black Mask* started to gain popularity among readers, and became a publishing phenomenon. These 'cheap' crime stories, printed on rough, wood-pulp paper, used on a journalistic style of prose, typical of writers like Hemingway, and emphasised the climactic moments of suffering and death over more general matters of economy, politics and human relations (MacDonald, 1962, 177). Writers like Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler and Horace McCoy were rivals on these journals, creating Hemingway-esque, characters who were outwardly 'tough' and cynical, most often detectives, with a soft, romantic spot under their hard exterior - subsequently a staple of film noir male characters (Krutnik, 1991, 34). Within the formula of a crime story, these characters would elaborate a bigger picture of the desires, frustrations and conflicts underlying the social changes and moral transformation of their time. Unlike the writers of these stories, James M. Cain was a journalist who never wrote for pulp magazines as such, but whose name was closely associated with the hard-boiled tradition. The events that professionally shaped his career as a novelist included his job as a reporter on a famous 1927 case, the Snyder-Gray murder trial.[37] This case, in fact, very well summarises Cain's economic, sexual and racial agenda for his future novels (*The Postman Always Rings Twice* and *Double Indemnity*), both turned later into films noir. The themes he focuses on chiefly concern failed attempts at female emancipation, social anxieties about tramps and foreigners, along with the influence of big corporations, such as insurance companies, on people's everyday life.

Another important *cause célèbre* in 1927, which for a long time attracted the attention of many intellectuals and ordinary people, was the controversial case of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo

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[37] Millions of people followed the case of a housewife from Long Island, New York, seemingly happily married, who killed her husband with the help of her lover, a local salesman. The alleged killer was so distressed, during the trial, that, according to newspaper accounts, he resembled a tramp, The case attracted even more public curiosity when particulars were revealed in court about the intensity of the woman's sexual desire for her lover. Furthermore, she adopted stratagems to receive the payment coupons of her husband's double indemnity insurance by means of the postman's previously arranged special signal of ringing twice (Marling, 1985, 153). All this information has to be framed within the debate at that time about the 'flappers' and their supposed ability to fulfil the role of good mothers (Marling, 1985, 148). The name of flapper was applied to the 'new breed' of women in the twenties who introduced various changes in fashion, lifestyle, public behaviour and morals during the decade, embodying more liberal attitudes and social freedom in the way they expressed their femininity and social status. Some social critics would consider the subsequent economic Depression as some kind of punishment for these and other social excesses (Marling, 1985, 71). The housewife in this trial, a flapper herself, received a death sentence by electrocution - one of the first women ever to receive such a punishment in the United States.

Vanzetti, executed in the same year after a lengthy and disputed judgement (Marling, 1985, 160). The whole story came from a payroll robbery in Massachusetts, in 1921, when two people were killed. The arrest of the two Italian immigrants and self-confessed anarchists was based on fragmentary and contradictory evidence. In the end, the general impression was that the final verdict was influenced more by fear of radicalism and foreign immigration than by the intention of finding the real guilty parties in that case (ibid.). From that time on in America, as John Dos Passos put it, there where two nations (Fear and McNeil, 1989, 242). Cain sided with and supported the condemned (Marling, 1985, 160-161).

In writing his novel *The Postman Always Rings Twice* in the thirties, Cain elaborated the societal themes of illicit sexual desire and the scapegoating of foreign workers. Unlike most of the 'hard-boiled' writers, Cain wrote the story without the intermediary figure of the detective, but from the point of view of the hobo[38] turned criminal following his encounter with an alluring, married woman. For this reason, the story is told in the first person, as a kind of interior monologue about the events that led the character to fall in love with the woman and kill the husband. At the end of the novel, it is finally revealed that the book's narration is the confession the killer has written, in his cell, about the murder, to give it to the prison chaplain for possible publication (Cain, 2004, 115). Given this, it is still surprising to reconstruct how one of the grittiest and darkest novels of the thirties was glossily produced, a decade later, by the most lavish and conservative of the studio companies: Metro Goldwyn Mayer, the company of the Stars (Cook and Bernink, 1999, 16).

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[38] Hoboes were migratory workers, whose number increased considerably during the Depression. Looking for work they followed the westward railroad and often travelled for free on freight trains or motor vehicles, crossing state borders. Unlike tramps, who did not work, they actively sought casual or seasonal work, and were often members of the radical union (The International Workers of the World), mostly 'American' (or of Anglo-Saxon lineage) and reasonably educated. For a full profile, see Anderson, N., 1998. Cain, in his novel, never directly mentions the term hobo, but his story is clearly inspired by this figure because, at the time the novel was written, the hobo phenomenon was a topical issue in the current social and literary agenda (e.g. in Steinbeck's novels). The book seems to reveal this 'migratory' atmosphere with its very first lines: 'They threw me off the truck about noon…' (Cain, 2004, 1).

5.5 MGM's tale of the wanted man and the glamorous woman

The opening of the film (Image 9) visually anticipates the destiny of the main male protagonist, Frank Chambers, working as a sort of narrative hook for the viewers to make possible inferences about the double meaning of the sign 'man wanted' in a petrol station.

Image 9   Image 10

The presence of the district attorney and a police officer, at the very beginning of the film, confirms this ambiguity in the sign. The opening of the film mirrors the end, when in his cell, Frank confesses the murder to the same district attorney and the priest with him (Image 10). The constant presence of these authoritative figures throughout the film establishes the tone of the whole story as a tale of retribution, rather than one of transgression (Sklar, 1992, 179), marking the first difference with the novel. The voiceover at the beginning of the film ('It was on a side road outside of Los Angeles…'), recited by Frank, is revealed, at the end of the story, to be the account of his actions that brought him to jail, as he tells them to the priest before his execution (Hollingher, 2003, 254).

The ambiguity of the first scenes - withholding essential information for comprehension of the meaning of the visual hints disseminated throughout the story - is thus resolved at the end of the film. In the final scene, in fact, the 'Postman' of the title is identified with a sort of god-like figure[39]

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[39] What follows is the character's monologue at the end of the film: 'There's something about this that's like – well, it's like you're expecting a letter that you're just crazy to get, and you hang around the front door for fear you might not hear him ring. You never realize that he always rings twice. (…) Well, he rang twice for

of retribution who ultimately punishes wrongdoers who have tried to get away with murder. From this initial analysis, it is clear how some of the screenwriters softened the critical edges of Cain's novel, to make it closer to the requirements of the Hays Office and more in tune with MGM's canons of production standards and audience expectations. As in *Ossessione,* the visual emphasis in the first part of the movie is on the entrance of the most important character, the catalyst of future actions and narrative developments. The choice in this case, unlike its Italian counterpart, falls on the female lead who is introduced with an explicit visual display of her physical features (Images 11 and 12) and final glamour shot (Image 13), as she appears skimpily dressed in an almost (ironical?) virginal white. [40]

Image 11   Image 12   Image 13

From these very first scenes, the story's characters are already well defined: Frank, the vagrant as the narrator, Cora, the wife as the object of desire and conflict, and Nick, as the old husband in charge of the place, who displays neither lead authority nor physique. Police, district attorneys, lawyers and priests, who surround this triangle throughout the film, make their presence felt by stepping into the scene every time the law is broken. The difference in social status, the class difference, between the two men, Frank and Nick, turns in this way into a sexual competition for the body of the woman. Moreover, in the first part of the film, the criminal motives in the story

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Cora and now he's ringing twice for me, isn't he? (…) The truth is, you always hear him ring the second time, even if you're way out in the backyard. (…) I guess God knows more about these things than we do.'
[40] This is how director Tay Garnett recalls the reasons for the choice of the dress: 'At that time there was a great deal to getting a story with that much sex past the censors. We figured that dressing Lana in white somehow made everything she did seem less sensuous. It was also attractive as well. And it took the stigma off everything that she did' (Garnett quoted in Hannsberry, 1998, 539).

are played down, while the attraction between Frank and Cora and their difficulties in living together as lovers take most of the narrative time. In this sense, as a film critic would put it, the female subject is on the side of the spectacle, while the male counterpart is on the side of the gaze (Stam et al., 1992, 72). In other words, the dominat male point of view in the story constitutes the woman as a passive object to be looked at, as an object of desire, displayed for the sexual attraction she might cause. On the other hand, the male character is the desiring subject, as the story unfolds from his point of view and his own perspective. In this respect, the shift in cinematic representation of crime stories, from gangster to noir, is that while the former emphasised the issue of its characters' class and ethnic background, the latter relies more on the contraposition of characters in terms of gender (Mulvey, 1973).

Visually the story becomes eroticised as the body of an attractive woman is displayed before two men, as a sort of trophy to be won after the killing of one of them (Harvey, 1998, 45). From a narrative point of view, the story develops the lovers' encounters in moonlight by the sea as the beginning of a love affair halted by their return to their ordinary roles of waitress and mechanic at the roadside restaurant. Any reference to class, or social origin of the characters in the novel has been erased, leaving Cora, as a young woman in need of emotional support and financial security, the only character unhappy with her identity and social position. In the same way, the racial motives underlined in the novel (Cora's fear of miscegenation with her Greek husband Nick) are replaced by the difference of age between the married couple, which makes their married life unpleasant and unbearable, at least for the wife. In this sense, racial suspicion of southern Europeans, prevalent in twenties and thirties American society, which the novel taps into, fades into the romance and murder plot of the film. Finally, the characterisation of Nick as Greek, relies more on 'difference' due to his age and obesity, than on any evident ethnic trait.

5.6 Film noir at Metro

The Postman Always Rings Twice was, for Metro Goldwyn Mayer, a foray into an unfamiliar genre - the film noir, which other studios had developed further. Warner Brothers was the studio that, more than others, specialised in gangster movies, social problems and war films, holding that social awareness was more than a duty, it was good business (Cook and Bernink, 1999, 19-20). Following this principle, Warners first developed the 'headline' movie in the thirties, with the filmmaker 'occupying a position similar to that of the editor of a metropolitan newspaper' (Hamilton, 1991, 114). In the same way, they quickly released committed war (or noir) films in the forties (*Casablanca*, *Destination Tokyo*, *To Have or to Have Not*), when the government was eager to use American films as a 'weapon' in its cultural reoccupation of the Axis-held countries, as 'audiences in those nations were eager to see American movies again' (Koppes and Black, 2000, 140). As stated, the characters and actors in these films were often from working-class and ethnic origins, as were their producers. The Warner Brothers in fact, from a Jewish working-class background, achieved success due to their movies' good reception during the Depression. As a result they were able to join the privileged circle of the main Hollywood Studios when most of these were on the brink of bankruptcy. (Cook and Bernink, 1999, 20; Kochberg, 1999, 21).

By contrast, MGM's approach to filmmaking during the Depression was focused on presenting film as both a lavish spectacle and a vehicle for stars (Hamilton, 1991, 124). This company established a reputation for star-studded productions (e.g. *Grand Hotel*, 1932), with a penchant for romance (Clark Gable and Jean Harlow in *Red Dust,* 1932, and *China Seas*, 1935) and with an ability to turn frankly erotic stories into narratives more palatable both for the Hays Office and audiences (Cook and Bernink, 1999, 17), as they did with *The Postman*. As some critics stressed in this regard, 'If one studio would try to turn the grimness of war into a musical it would be Metro' (Koppes and Black, 2000, 215). The common strategy in the Studio System, to structure a narrative around a star, as a framework to standardise and reproduce the star's picture (Klaprat, 1985, 370), became a golden rule at MGM. The studio could rely on a measure for 'increasing regularity and regulation of the cinematic institution - both in its product (the same actors appeared

regularly) and more crucially in terms of its audience' (deCordova, 1991, 25), which would attend the cinema with a certain regularity and establish a preference for a certain star. For these reasons, *The Postman Always Rings Twice* was primarily a vehicle to launch Lana Turner as a top actress, after so many films with MGM which established her status as a pin-up girl during the war years (Hannsberry, 1998, 537). The tendency to use (would-be) stars for 'negative' female characters in noir stories was not a common practice in Hollywood films in the forties (Dyer, 1998, 119). Especially during the first half of the decade, in noir films - whether from A or B production units - the role of these 'treacherous' female characters was not developed significantly in terms of personality or involvement in the story. As a result, these parts would usually be played by 'secondary' actors in the studios' ranks, such as Bette Davis in the thirties at Warners, who though a star was at a lower level in terms of payroll and command of audience numbers than her male colleagues (Klaprat, 1985, 363).

The 'new' practice of employing big names for such negative female roles became more familiar in the mid-forties also as a consequence of the shortage of male stars during the war (Haskell, 1974, 12). Thus interpreters such as Barbara Stanwyck in *Double Indemnity* (1944) and Rita Hayworth in *Gilda* (1946) started to appear in these films as seductive goddesses, with a recognisable personality, look and range of interpretive roles, to be capitalised upon in their future career (Dyer, 1998, 118; Schickel, 1992, 58). In parallel with this, Hollywood promoted enough publicity and media attention for the actress to develop a glamorous image and find a favourable reception with the public (Dyer, 1998, 116). In this respect, Lana Turner's stardom appears to be the result of a fortunate convergence of these social factors in developing her 'star' image, in her role of glamorous lover and duplicitous murderess in *The Postman Always Rings Twice*.

Among the rising stars of the forties, John Garfield was the actor on loan from Warner Brothers who in this film supported Lana Turner, his lover and accomplice. He came from the same social and ethnic background as Warner's male stars in gangster movies of the thirties. His younger age, however, made him more suitable to interpret the role of the psychologically wounded and self-pitying vagrant and eternal outsider (Sklar, 1992, 83). In fact, Garfield had himself been a hobo in real life for a short time during the Depression era (Nott, 2003, 32) before

becoming a Hollywood actor. For all these reasons, according to some critics, he anticipated young rebels in the fifties, such as James Dean, with their roles of the troubled or petulant adolescent (Sklar, 1992, 94).

5.7 Eroticisation and glamour in noir

The popularity of Lana Turner and John Garfield with audiences might explain why *The Postman* was one of the hits of the year at the box office (Maltby, 2003, 566). But the rarity of this kind of film in MGM's production of the forties is evidence of how the style of this company started to look anachronistic at this time, when in general profits were decreasing, together with Oscar nominations and future prospects (Cook and Bernink, 1999, 18). As stated, Metro preferred to release polished version of romantic comedies, or musicals. In fact, when, a few years later in 1948, the same company distributed another film noir, *Force of Evil,* independently produced but also with John Garfield as lead, its intervention condemned the film to premature failure. On this occasion, MGM ordered some extra cuts and released the film on Christmas Day, hardly good timing for a tale linking the worlds of business and crime. The same film, years later, was to be hailed as one of the most radical films ever made, but by then the Studio System had collapsed (Nott, 2003, 233-234).

All these episodes confirm the involvement of major studios in the making and screening of film noir in the forties, and illustrate the differences in style and politics of their output depending on the ways they employed their artistic and technical resources. In the case of *The Postman*, for example, we have seen how political conformism, self-regulating institutions and glamorisation of actors took precedence over critical treatment of social themes and challenge to representational routines. Similarly, the issues of intertextuality and ambivalence examined in the previous chapter were channelled into Metro's glossy production values, using star actors as a way of establishing routines both in the production of movies and in their reception. In this sense, social discourses implicit in society (e.g. murder, sexual attraction, youth, beauty, social criticism,

comsumerism etc.) can be embedded, through a film star, into a coded symbolic narrative (Hall, 1992). An audience makes sense of the narrative, a new film, to be decoded (ibid.), according to their own orientations and expectations, familiarising with a new product, a new story, through the presence of a recognisable main lead, or a recognisable type of film (Freud, 1955). Thus in the passage from one medium to another (novel to film) a gradual elimination of the controversial scenes of Cain's Depression novel has transformed a story of self-destructive desire and racial hate into a romantic visual tale about doomed lovers in search of final redemption, against the backdrop of some imprecise historical era and effective social policing. I refer here to the 'cultural policing'[41] of the film studio, in the prior careful selection of the elements of the story that are going into the final product, as a result of exclusion of some controversial social issues in favour of others. Each film studio had a range of priorities to represent in its movies, according to issues of product differentiation in a competitive market, or in reproducing common or controversial issues already current in society at a particular time.

The casting of the main two actors in their roles in *Postman* engaged with Hollywood's stereotype of using women as subsidiary to the action normally carried out by men (Haskell, 1974, 97). As Laura Mulvey claims, 'The presence of woman is an indispensable element of spectacle in normal narrative film, yet her visual presence tends to work against the development of a story-line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation. This alien presence then has to be integrated into cohesion with the narrative' (Mulvey, 1973, 384). According to this view, the eroticisation of women in classic Hollywood films works at two levels: as erotic objects for both the protagonists and the spectator, while the male character plays the hero (or anti-hero) who tends to have power to intervene in the events of the narrative. This distinction thus seems to underpin the seductive power of the female character in film noir, as she needs to figure next to a male figure, within a patriarchal order, in order to part of that power she is excluded from (Krutnik, 1991, 140). In this sense, Cora is married to a much older husband in order to secure her domestic

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[41] By cultural policing I mean to the practices of control and administration in the production of symbolic forms, within a certain institution, in which a certain selectivity and censorship is established in the selection, development and representation of some issues over others. For a discussion of this concept in the light of cultural policies and politics, see McGuian, 1996, 6ff.

security and welfare. But when a younger, poorer and more virile hero comes on the scene, the woman makes a pact with him with a view to a better future, using the combination of artifice and sensuality common to a *femme fatale* in a noir film as a means to secure a new social position (Dyer, 1998, 117). From this perspective, film noir narrative discloses the unbalanced relationships between genders in a system of representation, such as that of Hollywood studios, while revealing at the same time the workings of the mechanism of prejudice underlying this disequilibrium. (Stam et al., 1992, 62). At the same time, this privileged view of the workings of gender differences at a narrative level can be read as a symptom of deeper and more profound social anxieties related to the post-war return of the male population to work after women took over their jobs during the conflict (Krutnik, 1991, 57) and established new forms of independence between sexes (Schickel, 1992, 59).

5.8 The political ambiguity of film noir

To sum up, the process of representation in *The Postman Always Rings Twice* heavily refashions its sources of inspirations (novel, historical setting, circumstances and characters portrayed), by making them conform to its own production values and routines. In other words, Metro Goldwyn Mayer gave a potentially subversive story an allure inherent in its symbolic products, where social circumstances are transformed into individual destinies, doomed characters into an attractive guise and social critique into a conservative account of the need to restore order in society. This successful film offered opportunities for spectacular display of female beauty, male violence and social escapism as a new formula in which to repackage the content of the so-called hard-boiled narrative tradition, without resistance from the organs of film censorship. Thus, while the film noir formula allows room for social critique and debate about some unequal aspects of society, the same formula can be used to support a conservative vision that focuses on some aspects of social disorder in order to justify the intervention of social authorities (Fay and Nieland, 2010, 29). The emphasis moves to other aspects of the story (i.e. the display of sexually attractive young

bodies, romance, the efficiency of the organs of social control, the latest fashionable models and so on) that are likely to provide a responsive audience with some form of entertainment. This is what has been called the 'ambiguous politics of film noir' (Fay and Nieland, 2010, 17; McCann, 2007, 122), its adaptability in one direction or another, according to the politics, or priorities of the social agent (e.g. film institution, political artist, marginal writer) who draws on the expressive potential of the noir genre. From this point of view, film noir does not emphasise one political stance over another, but it seems to be a narrative formula more suited to focusing on the doubts and uncertainties of an age, or exposing the flaws in society, rather than asserting alternative principles about a preferred political project.

In this sense, film noir elaborates on the social trajectory that brought America from the radical years of the early thirties to the witch-hunt of the Cold War period (Schrader, 1972, 79). According to Ceplair and Englund, the Hollywood film communities and New York City in the thirties were the most important centres of international consciousness and activism in the United States, as they linked national support of unionism with concern about the international growth of fascism and the protection of victims of wars or social repression (Ceplair and Englund, 2003, 94). Some sectors of Hollywood were of course more active than others in this sense, with the majority of screenwriters and some actors actively involved in political, or social reform. In this way, Warner Brothers was more a writer's studio than MGM (Hamilton, 1991, 77), as its writers had more freedom to experiment and introduce new stories in films. But with the shift from the anti-fascism of the thirties and the war years to the anti-communism of the Cold War era, the left-wing community in Hollywood began to disappear, as a prelude to the emergence of a thriving and conservative new media industry in the fifties (Ceplair and Englund, 2003, 365). Screenwriters were the category of Hollywood workers most badly hit, along with directors, musicians and other entertainment professionals, as they were prevented from working in Hollywood for alleged participation in, or involvement with, the Communist Party (Krutnik et al., 2007a, 4). Most of these artists were involved in making noir films such as the anti-Semitic *Crossfire* (1947), or the documentary-style *The Naked City* (1948), the ghetto story in *Body and Soul* (1947), or the radical parable against the business world in *Force of Evil* (1948) (Hamilton, 1991; Krutnik et al., 2007).

Ten of them were jailed in a media-circus frenzy and 'red peril' phenomenon that established so-called McCarthyism in the 1950s (Hamilton, 1991, 289). Some other artists left the country and went to Europe as exiles, reversing the route of expatriates who had left the old continent in the thirties to be welcomed in Hollywood (Gardner, 2004, 14; Phillips, 2009, 5). Within the atmosphere of witch hunt in Hollywood, at the time when creative heads were falling, two noir films made screenwriters lead protagonists in their stories: *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) and *In a Lonely Place* (1950) (Krutnik, 2007, 73; Polan, 1993, 52; Silver and Ward, 1992, 277) in a sort of indirect but powerful critique of Hollywood's capacity to destroy the very dream of a better world that it generated.

5.9 The politics of lighting: German shadows over Hollywood

As already stated, the many European filmmakers, technicians and actors who emigrated to the United States during the thirties and forties exerted a substantial influence on Hollywood production studios and their styles, particularly in relation to horror film and film noir, thanks to authors such as Fritz Lang, Billy Wilder and Robert Siodmak (Gemunden and Kaes, 2003, 4). However, before the coming of European directors to Hollywood, American films already had their own style, narratives and lighting, which were retained thereafter in their main productions. Unlike their European colleagues, Americans made films for a mass market with no strict relation to artistic movements or avant-gardes as sources of inspiration. Since the beginnings of the Hollywood Studio era, American cinema preferred a more 'realistic' approach to narratives and techniques, based on continuity and linearity, so that its films could be easily followed by, arguably, any audience, regardless of education and social class. In this sense, a story had to respect precise visual conventions in camerawork, editing, lighting and spatial continuity to be marketable and therefore successful (Cook and Bernink, 1999, 40). Adherence to these conventions typifies the style and content of classical Hollywood cinema as we know it, in comedies, musicals and adventure films (Bordwell et al., 1988, 3-10). The advent of cycles such as horror or film noir

with their imported fragmented visual style and emphasis, flash-back narrative, 'excessive' characters and thematic ambiguity, complicated the matter of representation in Hollywood (Bordwell, 1988, 72-73). In this section, I want to show how this 'alien' contribution challenged Hollywood practices of representation, by analysing the case of lighting in classical Hollywood and in noir film, with their respective underlying politics or ideologies.

Light is at the core of storytelling in cinema, as it represents more than just illumination. It is, rather, a way of conveying meaning and atmosphere on the screen. To put it simply, an area of light is a source of information, while an area of shadow is charged with mystery and ambiguity (Bordwell and Thompson, 2001, 164). Hollywood lighting practice was characterised by a soft and bright approach to story representation, *high-key lighting*, which was much closer to the three-dimensionality of real life: the so-called three point lighting system (Bordwell amd Thompson, 2001, 167). This system was a general practice used, with some variations, by the major film companies of the Studio era, and accorded with their style and policy (Kochberg, 1999, 17). To create a depth of field on the scene, which is the three-dimensionality effect on the screen, Hollywood requires at least three light sources per shot. The positions of these light sources are changed, however, according to number of characters and their position. Three-point lighting thus became particularly well suited for the high-key lighting used in classical Hollywood cinema and other filmmaking traditions (Bordwell and Thompson, 2001, 167). With high-key lighting, the scene is brightly lit by a key light as well as using fill and back-light more intensely, so that the picture has a low contrast between bright and dark areas. This creates a soft, warm and fairytale appeal, as in images 14 and 15.
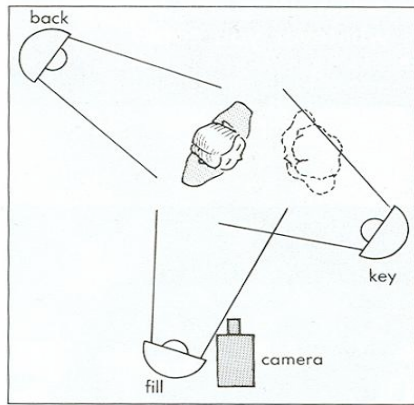
Three-point lighting, the basic technique of Hollywood cinema (source: Bordwell and Thompson, 2001, 167)

Image 14

The Awful Truth (Leo McCarey, 1937)

Example of 3-point lighting in comedy

Image 15

Within the main tradition of high-key lighting, a smaller *low-key lighting* tendency was developed in Hollywood after German and European directors arrived in America in the thirties: these visual frames were called 'Ufa shots' from the name of the German production company, where they were originally devised (Bordwell, 1988, 72). Low-key lighting uses fill and back light less intensely than high-key, so that the contrast between the light and dark areas of the screen is much stronger. Its dark, chiaroscuro effect was used in thriller films involving horrors or gangsters in the thirties, and in film noir from the forties to the fifties (Bordwell and Thompson, 2001, 168). Its technique creates the cold, dark atmosphere that fractures a story into a series of puzzle-like visual events, establishing a very individual look, whose legacy can still be found in modern contemporary films around the world (Fay and Nieland, 2010).

Films noir made by 'German' directors in America:

Left - *The Woman in the Window* (Fritz Lang, 1945) Right - *Sunset Boulevard* (Billy Wilder, 1950)

Images 16 and 17

From an ideological point of view, according to Hayward, the practice of Hollywood's three-point lighting system is based on the idea that none of the elements of filmmaking, such as lighting, sound, colour and editing, should draw attention to themselves. Even so, lighting should still be used to create dramatic or realistic effects. It should therefore fit the situation but never dominate to the point of artificiality or extreme abstraction - which could create unease in the audience. The idea that cinema-going and watching must be safe, unchallenging and non-disruptive is a key ideological aspect of the so-called 'seamlessness' of Hollywood and mainstream cinema (Hayward, 2000, 211).

In other words, everything in films should be presented in such a way that it appears to have no breaks, no disconcerting unexplained transitions in time and space, with few exceptions to this rule. This seamlessness of Hollywood and mainstream cinema contrasts with non-mainstream, or counter-cinema common to a post-war mode of European production: the art cinema (Forbes and Street, 2000, 37). In other countries' cinemas, for example, low-key lighting effects were identified with German expressionist cinema of the twenties. The chiaroscuro effect for signalling mood and the working of the unconscious had been used in Danish films as early as 1910 (Bordwell and Thompson, 2001, 406). This type of cinema could disrupt and distort the reality

effect and remove the illusion of three-dimensionality, in contrast to Hollywood 'realism'. The strong relationship of German Expressionist filmmakers with contemporary artistic movements meant that there was a highly recognisable style widespread in the visual arts of that time such as theatre, painting, cinema and architecture (Ward, 2001). Consequently these movements made a favourable impact mainly within the middle-class milieu, unlike the target of Hollywood mainstream cinema, which was the wider working-class audience (Davis, 1998, 20-21). And this explains why noir films were so popular - as a *post facto* category – as explained in chapter 1, Part II, among critics and artists alike, as they had both the look and sophistication of old European cinema and the energy and seduction of the younger America (Marie, 2007, 44). This convergence of different traditions and practices in lighting and storytelling enabled Hollywood to exercise a major influence over foreign audiences and companies, along with an undisputed mastery in different ways of 'painting stories with light' (Alton, 1995).

Film noir ultimately results from this cultural exchange, hybridity and intertextuality, to a point that is neither identified in a movement, as for European films, nor in a genre such as American movies. Once again the nature of these stories seems to be in a state of suspension, in that 'liminal place' between Europe and America, life and death, shadow and light, 'where cultural differences contingently and conflictually touch' (Bhabha, 1994, 296), developing some of the most creative moments of ambivalence and transgression. But at the same time, as has been argued, 'any story is better understood by considering other possible ways in which it can be told' (Bruner, 1987, 32). Analysing a 'minor' tradition in filmmaking, such as film noir, helps our understanding of a mainstream tradition's politics, strength and limitations.

Conclusions

In the course of this chapter, I have introduced the subject of Hollywood cinema and its mode of production. In so doing, I have discussed the reasons that brought American cinema to be first and foremost a business venture, with the progressive involvement in its activity of financial

and political institutions. I have also explained the motives for its significant position of dominance over the rest of the world and for the superiority of its organisational structure, in terms of productivity and the wide circulation of its products. From there I have moved to identifying the cycle of gangster movies as the 'ancestors' of film noir, emphasising their distinct social context, the audacity of their stories and the social provenance of the actors who played in them. Following the scandal of their screening, my attention turned to the concept of censorship and its instrumentality in the next stage of films related to violence and crime: film noir. I explored the elements that distinguished them from gangster movies, especially in terms of the representation of violence, and related them to the social atmosphere of their time. I also examined noir's sources of inspiration, namely German Expressionism and hard-boiled novels, before turning to analysis of a post-war film noir as best exemplifying the concepts introduced: *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. In particular, I focused on societal events that led to the writing of this book, comparing these with the film adaptation. Analysis of the film itself has been a useful way of understanding the process of circumventing censorship, while still producing a successful story with popular appeal and moral approval. In particular, I have paid attention to the way issues of racism, adultery, rebellion and murder were articulated visually within the more general trend of Hollywood filmmaking. Representational practices from different studios have been taken into account, in order to show how they took the story in a certain direction. For example, the concept of film as a 'star vehicle' gives *The Postman* a different characteristic emphasis than is the case in *Ossessione*. In this way, I have found that glamorisation and conformism prevailed over critique of and challenge to social conventions and production values in this particular film. On the screen, it replicates the same stereotypes as can be found in real life, as regards eroticisation of the female body and exploitation of the male's proclivity to social action and violence.

Finally, I have examined the nature of the noir style so essential to the formulation of this type of movies. In relation to European expatriates' contribution to Hollywood linear style, I have investigated how their use of lighting introduced some modernist experimentation into an already successful, but somewhat too predictable, system of representation and style of filmmaking. Thanks to this contribution, Hollywood could ultimately represent stories of violence and crime as

typified by film noir. This artistic contribution gave Hollywood the opportunity to further develop its own style and to realise its capacity to reach different audiences from diverse backgrounds. I have concluded the chapter by identifying film noir as being at the crossroads of these diverse contributions and by proposing the hypothesis that in this 'dialogue' between different traditions we can find a key to unlock the politics, or ideology, of different systems of representation.

Chapter 6 The fantasy of the Unconscious

In previous chapters, the notion of the Unconscious[42] has been used with little or no explanation. It is time at this stage to articulate properly the extent to which this concept is an integral part of my analysis of film noir and the representation of crime in American and European cinema. For this reason, I am going to introduce the term Unconscious as developed in Lacan's psychoanalytical theory, based on the Freudian tripartite distinction between conscious, preconscious and Unconscious. Lacan's notion of the Unconscious and imaginary has been very influential in film studies, as it has become part of an ongoing analysis of the cinema apparatus and texts in psychoanalytical terms (Fuery, 2000; Metz, 1982). This approach is very useful for allowing us to glimpse the psychological process at work in narrative texts, and for conceptualising the sources of sexuality and fantasy in films. Moreover, this contribution enables us to study the role of cinema in the psychological and societal formation of subjects and to compare fictional works to dreams, since displacement and censorship are at work in both processes of articulation.

Despite its advantages, Lacan's system needs to be updated and freed from its structuralistic heritage. Thus, I will examine some of his concepts in the light of theoretical developments relating to psychoanalysis and cinema, especially in the work of Teresa de Lauretis and Jean Laplanche (de Lauretis, 2010; Laplanche, 1999). Additionally, in my investigation, I will use an aspect of the film *Citizen Kane* involving an enigma rooted in childhood to develop further the concept of the Unconscious as enigma for the researcher, and the possibility of applying this concept to *Ossessione* and *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. Some considerations over the advantage of using a multidisciplinary approach in researching crime and culture will reconnect some of the issues raised in chapter 1 with what has emerged during the course of the analysis.

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[42] Given the centrality of this concept, it is always referred to as a noun with capital letter by Freud and later scholars.

6.1 Introducing the Unconscious

Freud theorized his conceptual system, regarding the Unconscious, as one formed of three distinct psychological domains: the Unconscious, the pre-conscious and the conscious (Brooker, 2003, 258; Freud, 2005). Instincts, internal conflicts and unacceptable desires (the *drives*) gravitate to the first of the three categories, being excluded from the conscious mind through processes of censorship, displacement and denial (Elliott, 2001, 18). Evidence of the Unconscious has been found in dreams, slips of the tongue, obsessions and psychological symptoms of diverse traumas (Freud, 1920). When these unconscious elements try to enter the conscious stage, they do so in a compromised form 'after having undergone the distortion of censorship' (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1988, 474). This psychological function of censorship operates like a selective barrier that excludes of the conscious and preconscious domains feelings - such as physical attraction towards parents, or other unsocial instincts - that are related to the child's initial sphere of raw emotions. These prohibitions are successively internalised by the subject, as failure to do so might lead to hysteria, or other psychological illnesses (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1988, 390).

The *preconscious* is what evades immediate awareness, without being unconscious in the strict sense of the word: e.g. knowledge and memories still accessible to consciousness at will, but not yet present, or recalled in it (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1988, 325-326) - like the residues of dreams. The main difference between the Unconscious and preconscious is dictated by the presence of censorship in the former that does not allow unconscious contents and processes to pass into the preconscious without undergoing the transformations mentioned above. To be more precise, a 'secondary censorship' is likewise present in the passage from the preconscious to the conscious, the main function in being is to distort unconscious memories, rather than select them, in order to prevent disturbing thoughts from reaching consciousness. In this way, a person is freed from the unconscious burden and this allows attention to focus on a subject (ibid., 326).

Finally, *consciousness* is situated at the frontier between the outside world and the mnemic system, as it receives information both from external and internal sources, transforming

quantitative phenomena into qualitative form (ibid., 84-86). It operates as a defensive system against numerous memory traces and external sensory stimuli, gradually allowing into consciousness some of the repressed material that has slipped through the preconscious system. This process of transposition to consciousness does not, however, imply a real integration of the repressed into the preconscious system, as such a process needs to be complemented by an effort to overcome the communication resistance between the Unconscious and the preconscious systems. The mechanism of forgetting acts as a self-protective manoeuvre to shut away and therefore to repress desires in conflict with external reality (Elliott, 2001, 51). The subsequent split between the conscious and the unconscious mind arises from the emotional force buried in our Unconscious that can be glimpsed in the dreams, distortions of memory etc. already referred to. Thus, the processes of socialisation, education and, especially, learning to speak in childhood become subjects that need to be studied in order to assess the extent to which a certain amount of repression has taken place, or certain repressed instincts find their articulation in (pre)conscious spheres (Craib, 1994, 65). Moreover, as repression is never complete, it reveals inevitably, through its cracks and imperfection, the unconscious desires and instincts that are meant to stay hidden and inarticulate (Craib, 2001, 23; Elliot, 2001, 51).

6.2 Lacan, the Unconscious and the Imaginary

The 'return to Freud' in Lacan's theory developed within a historical and social climate during the sixties in France when the so-called structuralist movement was in full swing. Structuralism can be defined as 'a mode of analysis of cultural facts which originates in the methods of contemporary linguistics' (Barthes in Culler, 1975, 3). This movement provided a generation of scholars with the analytical tools to investigate structures of meaning in distant cultures and civilisations, as in anthropology, or to analyse films and advertisements with the same rigour and subtlety traditionally devoted to literary works (Barthes, 1993; Lévi-Strauss, 1972). In a way, this movement can be considered the French equivalent of British Cultural Studies, widening

the concept of what the analysis of culture should include in its agenda, and admitting into the academic domain the study of mass products and of consumer orientation once despised by the intellectual elite. The contributions in each discipline influenced and contributed to theoretical advancements in other fields of knowledge, within a process of cross-cultural fertilisation and reflexivity. Basic structuralist assumptions were founded on the theory of structural linguistics developed by Ferdinand de Saussure in the twenties (Saussure, 2005), according to which language has a privileged role in determining the structural relations of meaning in cultural practices, based on an articulated system of differences, as anticipated on chapter 1 (paragraph 1.2.9).

Lacan's notion of the Unconscious as being structured like a language (Lacan, 1994, 20) has to be set in the context of this intellectual domain, as it emphasises the linguistic aspect of the split in the Unconscious, suspended between the urgency of unconscious desire to find an expression and the necessity of censorship to prevent conflictual emotion from emerging at the conscious level. For this reason, according to Lacan, the acquisition of language, essential for human development, never achieves the aim of establishing a connection between the word, the signifier, and the thing it describes, the signified (Craib, 1994, 64-65). This relationship is rather conventional: naming one thing, or one emotion, does not put us in a condition to recover the lost dimension, or object of the experience that invoked the emotion in the first place, as language is experienced primarily as a loss of some sort of 'primary' meaning. This becomes apparent in the famous infant's game described by Freud, where the mother disappears for a while, to reappear again after a short while. It is in this gap that we can locate an unconscious fear of losing something/someone we have already lost (Craib, 1994, 65; Lacan, 1994, 25). From this perspective, the Unconscious is 'that split through which that something is for a moment brought into the light of the day' (Lacan, 1994, 31). To cope with this fear of loss, we have to internalise an experience, an image, or an object that will enable us to bear the separation from the caretaker. Language itself does not offer this possibility, as we are engaged in a constant struggle to express what we mean without ever succeeding entirely. Furthermore, Lacan's theory offers the possibility of looking at psychosis in linguistic terms: as when the connection between words breaks down and the psychotic slides from word to word with no apparent order (Craib, 1994, 65). In this case, an

internal reality of disorder has become an external reality of lack of verbal control, since the censorship system has let through too much psychic energy from the Unconscious to be safely managed by the conscious domain.

Similar to the linguistic image, Lacan's mirror stage (which I briefly introduced at 3.2.4) is based on the idea that the infant, between the age of six and eighteen months, becomes aware of his/her own body by seeing it reflected in a mirror as an image. The French scholar claims that the mirror stage is an *identification* in the full sense that analysis gives to the term: 'Namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image' (Lacan, 1977, 2). The identification is not an identity, but a fiction, an imaginary projection, the ideal-I, that needs to be constantly reinforced throughout life. This identity is ultimately based on a relationship and a process of communication, as the child at the very young age requires the caretaker's assistance to look in the mirror, as if the sense of self can be validated only by the presence of some 'other' (Clarke, 2003, 109). The resulting corporeal image of wholeness, corporeal unity, that the mirror provides is opposed by the lack of physical coordination that the child actually experiences. This obstacle, this lack, is overcome by the intervention of another person who helps the child in the process of discovery, ultimately triggering the mechanism of identification, which is based on an illusion of self-sufficiency. Thanks to this imaginary projection, the subject discovers, through self-reflexivity, both his/her position within the symbolic domain of language, and the interplay between individual desires and social constraints (Fuery, 2000, 27). In other words, 'The original experience of misrecognition generated by the mirror stage becomes the basis of all subsequent experiences of interpersonal relationships, of family ties and friendships, of social and communal bonds, and most importantly of intimacy and love' (Elliott, 2001, 54).

6.3 Psychoanalysis, cinema and the birth of 'phantasy'

Lacan's contribution to psychoanalytic theory sparked a series of studies in literary and cinema studies, where concepts such as the Unconscious, drives, the imaginary, condensation and displacement became analytic tools giving scholars, critics and readers a glimpse into the psychological process at work in narrative texts (Fuery, 2000; Metz, 1982; Stam et al., 1992, 126-127). At the same time, this contribution has initiated a debate about the mechanism of identification or denial in written and visual stories, along with articulation of a theory of seduction and pleasure in literary and cinema studies (Bhabha, 1994; de Lauretis, 1984; Hall, 1996, 7). Christian Metz, in particular, combined semiotic studies and psychoanalysis to investigate the nature of the cinematic institution in a double sense: as cinema industry and in terms of the spectators' psychological capacity to adapt to film consumption (Metz, 1982, 7). With regard to the former sense, the comparison of film to dream makes room for a series of investigations of the Unconscious in visual stories, along with the notions of condensation and displacement already examined in section 2.7. From this point of view, the film operates as a communicative process which is at the same time the result of social organisation in terms of its production and distribution, as well as of a visual gap between some contradictory human emotions and a need to repress them, in a social process shared by members of a social order (Fuery, 2000, 26). Within this convergence of psychological and linguistic themes, it is possible to refine some of the aspects of the interplay between symbolic visual forms and psychological development that are related to the development of cinema and film noir.

According to Lacan, it is in the 'traumatic' opposition of pleasure principle (search for satisfaction of instincts) and reality principle (transformation of physical energy into psychological forms of displacement and denial) that a new space opens up, sometimes even in a hallucinatory form, 'between perception and consciousness' (Lacan, 1994, 54). The formation of phantasy[43] is

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[43]The term fantasy comes from the German 'Phantasie', which is used to denote the imagination as the imaginary world and its contents, into which the poet, the artist and the neurotic so willingly withdraw for their inspirations or symptoms. It has to be distinguished from the parallel faculty of imagining abstract theoretical systems, proper to academicians (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1986, 5-6). Psychologists refer to

related to this stage of the construction of social subjects, where a desire does not take a direct route for its satisfaction, but 'makes detours and postpones the attainment of its goal according to the conditions imposed by the outside world' (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1988, 379). This detour, like the title of the American film noir of the forties mentioned in section 5.3, can be considered as 'that space in which fantasy stages its *mise-en-scéne* of desire' (Burgin et al., 1986a, 2) or, in other words, the locus where desire finds room for its representation, for its visual and verbal articulation on a public stage. The satisfaction of a desire is obtained through illusion, staged according to the historical conditions and the social and psychological constraints proper to certain periods of time, culture and place.

Laplanche and Pontalis, in their influential essay on 'Phantasy and the Origins of Sexuality', argue that 'Phantasy is not merely material to be analysed, whether appearing as fiction from the very start (as in daydream) or whether it remains to be shown that it is a construction contrary to appearances (as in screen-memory), it is also the result of analysis, an end-product, a latent content to be revealed behind the symptom' (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1986, 14). Fantasies then started to be studied from two aspects, as both manifest data and latent content, as two extremes of the same process of dreaming. On the one hand, according to Freud's theory, to which Laplanche and Pontalis refer, fantasy is linked to the ultimate unconscious desire (first elaboration) and as such it underlies the 'zig-zag' path, or detour, which is supposed to follow excitation, through a succession of psychological systems: from the unconscious scenes of fantasies to the preconscious, where it collects the day residues, or transference thoughts. 'But fantasy is also present at the other extremity of the dream, in the secondary elaboration which (…) must be identified with the work of our waking thought. (…) Thus the extremities of the dream and the forms of fantasy that are found there, seem, if not to link up, at least to communicate from within and, as it were, to be symbolic to each other' (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1986, 21).

The clarification to be made at this point concerns the relationship between these two orders of fantasising and the way this link is reconnected to a 'primal phantasy', or 'inherited

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'phantasy' in the former sense, to keep the concept distinct from the second meaning of 'fantasy'. I will use both terms (fantasy and phantasy) in the first sense of these meanings: fantasy as a process of creative imagination.

memory traces' of past events, that will in turn provide support for individual fantasies (ibid., 19). In this respect, the initial moment of fantasy become an integral part of the way a certain imagination is structured, according to the context and the terms in which such experience was originally encountered.

Fuery emphasises how films might correspond to, or contribute material for some primal phantasies, or daydreams, recollection of past events etc. (Fuery, 2000, 18), providing the spectator with a basis for identification with stories and characters, as in the case of most Hollywood movies from the classic period. However, watching a film also implies accessing the technical information provided in the construction and organisation of a visual story and its codes. Thus an analysis, in terms of codes and narrative strategies adopted in a story, might indicate a resistance to straightforward mechanisms of identification - for example by using strategies of 'non-dramatisation' that are closer to documentary, or by resorting to fragmented narrative that calls attention to the nature of the language used, rather than to the sequence of events narrated (Metz, 1974, 185). In this latter case, a process of identification might take place between a spectator and a style of filmmaking, an artistic movement, or an author as the main creator behind a collective work, as was the case for most European cinema during the first half of the 20th century.

6.4 Unconscious fantasies in *Citizen Kane*

Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1941) is a perfect example of a film that occupies an intermediate place between the two strategies of identification previously mentioned. It is quite an unusual production for an American film of the forties, as the director had total control over every aspect of the movie's production, unlike any other Hollywood film of that period. From a narrative point of view, it can be noted that although the film starts as a mystery, detective-type story, the reporter investigates a character instead of a crime. The story is developed around the search for the meaning of the word 'Rosebud', last pronounced by the protagonist on his deathbed. The ending resembles a tale of lost childhood, a nostalgic account of a bygone era, since the last frame reveals

to the spectators - but not to the fictional characters in the film - the meaning of the mysterious word. The narrative structure of the film is fragmented into a series of past events, with a complex use of filmic codes such as narrative flashbacks, low-key lighting, deep focus cinematography (infinite depth of field) and other narrative practices very unconventional within the mainstream tradition of Hollywood storytelling. Among Welles's important collaborators, the cinematographer Gregg Toland probably contributed greatly to the film's distinctive look and narrative style, planning the photographic approach long before shooting the film – something not done in any other previous Hollywood film (Schatz, 1999, 93).

The film itself has been regarded as one of the greatest experimental cult films ever made (Tyler, 1963), as well as one of the greatest films of all time (Schatz, 1999, 90), and exerted a great influence on the development of film noir and its visual style. However, my interest here relates to the unconscious fantasies portrayed in it, the influence of this on film noir, and my discourse on the origins of fantasy and sexuality.

Returning to Laplanche and Pontalis's essay on the relationship between fantasy and unconscious memories, the two authors follow Freud's assumption that the period of maximum fantasising activity is at the time of pubertal and pre-pubertal masturbation (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1986, 24). From this notion, they establish a close correlation between fantasy and auto-erotism, when a child 'in the absence of a real object (…) reproduces the experience of the original satisfaction in an hallucinated form' (ibid.,).

This hallucinatory satisfaction of desire emphasises the need for imagination to compensate for a loss and separation in the physical, instinctual sphere and therefore the importance of the role of illusion, or fiction, in re-enacting the Unconscious trauma of loss based on the psychological mechanisms of repression and search for (or promise of) satisfaction of desire.

In the first scenes of *Citizen Kane*, the main protagonist feverishly pronounces the word engraved on his childhood toy (a sledge) as a visual embodiment of a primal fantasy of innocence and lightheartedness. However, the film does not just visualise a moral story, but is 'more concerned with psychological states and relationships than with the hero's public deeds and adventure' (Bordwell and Thompson, 2001, 79). What Welles and his collaborators were most

interested in was the 'translation' of enigmatic feelings, or states of mind related to memories of childhood, and loss, into an elaborate and reflexive visual style. Part of the importance of this style of filmmaking, and the reason for its appeal to contemporary viewers, lies in both the fact that its narrativity and style resemble those of a work of art, and that its process of representation is as intricate as the psychological process in a dream work, as I am going to explain in the next section.

6.5 The enigma of the Unconscious and film

The 'childhood enigma' that Welles and his collaborators planned to turn into a visual story resembles the journey of an unconscious desire to consciousness, through recollection of past memories. The tenuous nature of the narrated events in the film brings attention to the style of the story, and to the way the spectator is involved in making sense of the visual puzzle, by completing the sense of the narrative through his\her own complicity ('imaginary' position), especially at the end of the film. Similarly, a person can make sense of the psychological residue of his/her dream by considering the processes of condensation, displacement and denial operating in the dream, especially when involved in a communicative process with an analyst. Both film and dream have to deal with the obscure 'figurality' of language, in order to represent what would be otherwise unrepresentable, namely the Unconscious (de Lauretis, 2010, 73). From this perspective, making a film, writing and recollecting memories are confrontations, or even 'struggles with the nonhuman element of language, the phonemic, morphological, syntactical and tropologogical structure that are active in language before and beyond any writing activity begins, independently from the writer's intention or wish' (de Lauretis, 2010, 147).

De Lauretis refers constantly to Laplanche's theory as an ideal successor in the unfinished Copernican revolution initiated by Freud with his radical discovery of the Unconscious. This is especially the case because, as I mentioned earlier, Lacan's notion of the Unconscious, unlike Laplanche's, is too anchored to the social climate of the structuralist movement, with its strong emphasis on linguistics, to explore further the psychological dimension of this notion. On the

contrary, Laplanche has developed his conception of the other in the direction both of the other person and of the internal other (the Unconscious), rejecting Freud's conception of the Unconscious as an innate biological and instinctual kernel (Laplanche, 1999, 256), while emphasising its relational and communicative aspect. Laplanche repositions a theory of sexuality within an inter-human relationship between caretaker and child, as a 'primal seduction' based on an asymmetrical relationship in which the child is entirely dependent on the adult. The resulting unconscious sexual fantasies 'implanted' in the infant, before the acquisition of language, become messages that are too complex to be translated and understood. Therefore the child perceives these messages as enigmatic and will go back to them, time and time again, in an attempt to translate them according to the knowledge available, at different stages during the course of his/her lifetime (Laplanche, 1999, 212).

6.6 The Unconscious in *Ossessione* and *The Postman Always Rings Twice:* a semiotic review

Using the interpretative frame from chapters 4 and 5, it is apparent the repetition of certain scenes of seduction in *Ossessione* and *The Postman Always Rings Twice* responds to bigger psychological dynamics present in our culture. Moreover, the psychological framework of primal seduction helps to explain both the psychological motivations of the fictional characters and the possible identification of a viewer with the representation offered. Films noir can be classified as a group of stories dealing with loss, while revealing certain assumptions involved in their representation. I have already mentioned how the American film neutralises the racial issues in the novel, by diverting the focus of the story to the attention of the viewer and on an attractive female body. At the same time, the absence in the Hollywood films of the forties of black characters is quite striking in terms of unbalanced representation of ethnic groups in fiction. On the other hand, *Ossessione* uses the story from an American novel in order to escape the fascist censorship. Despite the political climate, the seduction scenes in *Ossessione* are all centred on Gino's body, the male

character, in his interactions with different characters in the film. And the racial issue is developed in a more ambiguous way, thanks to the presence of the Spaniard and his deceptive role in being close to Gino.

The two representations differ too from a semiotic point of view, since Gino is an index, in Pierce's system of sign, due to his strong link with the landscape around him, while Cora and Frank are symbols, arbitrary signs, with no particular connection to a place, a social history a particular time. In *Ossessione*, there is a primacy of the object over the image, of the reality over its reproduction, the natural world over its sign; while *The Postman* is a celebration of the supremacy of the image over any natural element. Thus, the American film relies technically on what has been called the 'subjective emotions' of the Hollywood cinema of the forties, based on 'a deep-rooted belief that the close-up of an actor's face somehow acts subjectively on the viewer' (Caughie, 2000, 94), which has become a trademark for 'naturalism' in tv fiction (ibid.). Visconti's film, on the other hand, anticipates the Neo-realist tendency to reveal the emotions of their characters through the landscapes in which they are placed, according to the teaching of Jean Renoir, even though this statement has to be qualified by the fact that some of the key scenes in *Ossessione* , like the final one, are melodramatic and theatrical, following Visconti's love of Opera (Bencivenni, 1995, 11). The consequences in terms of the representation of crime are that his film narrative is fragmented in several directions, of which the crime detection is just one, and the viewer is invited to choose among the several points of interest. In *The Postman*, the story is told in flashback from a prison cell, while focusing on the interplay between sexual desire and social constraints between the young lovers in a studio set. In both cases, there is an articulation of elements in the representation whereby some are hidden and others are emphasised. Both articulate the theme of loss, one within the main American film convention in favour of coherence and seamlessness, the other exemplifying the Italian tendency towards discontinuity and realism a visual articulation of the theme of loss, within the main convention that make American film being in favour of coherence and seamlessness and Italian towards discontinuity and realism.

6.7 Expanding the criminological imagination: notes towards a critical media criminology

The title of this paragraph is taken from an anthology on the need for broadening cultural horizons in criminology (Barton et al., 2007) in order to understand the social, economic and political contexts that produce both crime itself and the response to it (Barton et al., 2007a, 5). The way to achieve this aim, according to the authors, is to be found in transcending the boundaries of the discipline, by interrogating its assumptions, imaginary scenarios and alternatives (Barton et al., 2007a, 7), or in other words, by developing a certain degree of reflexivity.

The punitive and exclusionary climate currently influencing criminal justice policies (Young, 1999), along with the restructuring of the labour market in higher education and research (Barton et al., 2007b, 199), tends to have a limiting effect on academic agendas and methodological frameworks. The tendency to block these theoretical and methodological frameworks in turn limits the analytic tools available for social investigation. In crime and media research particularly, there are tendencies to recycling old theoretical frames for new social phenomena, such as the moral panic (Cohen, 2002; McRobbie and Thornton, 1995), or to use internal categories for the definition of criminal conducts to classify crime films (Rafter, 2000; 2006; Rafter and Brown, 2011). In other cases, theories of representation of criminals in mass media do not come forward beyond the border of their own departments to test the validity of certain academic truths (Melossi, 2000). It therefore becomes a generational duty to move on from our fathers and mothers and face the challenge that the current world poses us. If I had to find in this work any original contribution to scientific knowledge, it would come from the horizons that this research may open for future generations in several directions: historical, cultural, cinematic and psychological. I have laid just some of the basic stones for a new beginning. The ideal field of study for the acceptance of such a challenge would be cultural criminology, since it carries in its name the interdisciplinary vocation.

The call to cross disciplinary boundaries and for overcoming methodological limitations derives from the interdependency of the diverse social spheres in an advanced society and from our nature as cultural nomads within an ever-changing social world. Along with the expanding

geographical and temporal influence of cultural and media activity, this invites us to articulate the concept of sociological imagination (Mills, 2000) that I introduced at the beginning of my work, in the tripartite direction indicated by Giddens, at once an historical, anthropological and critical (Giddens, 1986, 8). The pleasure in discovering new fields of knowledge, the ongoing determination to resist resourcing obstacles and the rebellious spirit that manifested in the crossing of geographical borders and linguistic barriers, could be an ideal way to pay intellectual homage to the European exiles, or hardboiled American novelists, who transformed individual tales of loss and alienation into ones of redemption and hope. It could be said that America and Europe, in film noir, have each developed the repressed side of the other, to give visibility to marginal ethnic groups, social tensions and cultural practices, thereby challenging social hierarchy and moral conformism. I have learned, through these films, that there is always a hidden dimension to uncover in the relation between two (or more) nations, or at the margins of a major tradition, and that this liminal space has a potential for expanding a discipline's imaginative scope, as much as for expressing utopian longings.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have developed the notion of the Unconscious that was introduced in different parts of my work without being fully articulated. Thus, I have introduced the Freudian topography of the Unconscious, emphasising the role that the concept of censorship plays in this respect. After this initial section, I examined Lacan's reception of these Freudian concepts and connected the development of his theory of the Unconscious to the structuralist context within which he operated. Structuralism's linguistic emphasis on its objects of study influenced Lacan's theory of the Unconscious, which he saw as being structured like a language. I have connected this notion to Lacan's view of the limitations of language as communicative tool for expressing the psychological energy of the Unconscious. This conception of language was the prelude to Lacan's more complex theory of mirror stage, as an important phase in the child's psychological development and formation of identity. All this information has been useful in explaining why the Lacanian approach became so important in cinema studies in the seventies. In particular the

convergence of semiotics and psychoanalysis gave film studies new analytic tools to investigate notions of seduction and pleasure in cinema and literature, and to investigate the parallel between processes of filmmaking and the workings of dream.

From this theoretical perspective, I have introduced the notion of fantasy and its relation to the formation of sexuality. At the same, time I have established some assumptions underpinning a study of cinema and creativity, based on the possibility that film provides its spectators with mechanisms of identification, or recollection of past events. I have used a practical example from the film *Citizen Kane* as a visual embodiment of a primal fantasy of innocence. Furthermore this film has been useful in exemplifying the relationship between fantasy and unconscious memories and their relationship to hallucination as a form of satisfaction of unconscious desires. In this respect, the film is based on a traumatic story of loss and separation, which finds a solution in a hallucinated form, both for the protagonist in the film and for the spectator. The film is in fact based more on mechanisms of psychological identification and hallucinatory states of mind, than action and adventure.

Using the childhood enigma in the film, in the last section of this chapter I have recapitulated the psychological processes involved in both cinema and dream, in order to introduce the concept of figurality of language. In order to represent the Unconscious, which is unrepresentable, language must rely on the ambivalence of its sources of inspiration and on the hallucinated forms of memories and dreams, in order to solve the enigma of childhood which is at the basis of our human adventure. A further examination of *Ossessione* and *The Postman Always Rings Twice* has been carried out in the light of these last notions, before closing the chapter on a call for a multidisciplinary approach in the study of crime and culture.

General Conclusions

Beginnings and context

This dissertation has been developed along two main lines. One concerns the analysis of a group of films, called noir, which deal with crime, desire, loss and displacement. The other is related to the multidisciplinary effort required in order to carry out such a task, from a criminological point of view. Any serious attempt to study the representation of criminals in cinema, within the sociology of crime, has to come to terms with the scarce literature on the subject, due to the suspicion that research into fictional products might take the attention away from more important, and serious issues. Therefore, the first move in this project has been to review the literature on the subject and acknowledge the state of art in criminology and media studies. Since the seventies there has been a fair amount of dialogue between the two disciplines, in terms of borrowing the analytical tools for application to those cases, popular at the time of the research, such as forms of juvenile protest and riots, amplified by media coverage, articulations of group identities such as punk movements at international level, with the sharing of a similar set of language, fashion, music, or codes (in culturalist jargon) to indicate the mental maps commonly used among group members, soon to be identified as sub-culture, and become the subject of a lot of academic research, as well as of media interest. One common concern, in both the academic and the media world, has been the ambivalent role played by America: a nation seen as being the capitalist headquarters of the world's strongest financial and cultural power, capable of dominating the rest of the world, on the one hand; and on the other, as renewing the oppressive national, narrow outlook and cultural heritage of traditional European communities, especially for the younger generation. This process of cultural exchange and social criticism of traditional local communities, for European youngsters, was part of a bigger phenomenon of restructuring identities, places and ideas, using a set of traditions interwoven with mediated symbolic forms from

junk food to high literature. Cinema, in particular, within this context, becomes the medium through which a series of visual narratives end up shared, criticised, discussed and stored in our visual memory, preparing the way for the media-saturated and mass-consumerist society of today.

In the seventies, the academic world of social science started to study these phenomena in youth subcultures, especially in the form of news reports, or ethnographic research, coining new expressions such as the 'moral panic' (by Stanley Cohen) induced by the media coverage of social riots and juvenile deviancy. Within the academic community a debate was triggered, about the best ways to investigate popular culture, as it became increasingly more mediated and international. In the first section of chapter 1, I review a series of attempts to come to terms with this new field of study: successes in highlighting new dimensions of popular culture and failures in addressing new social phenomena with old concepts that do not fit anymore the changed situation. Particularly interesting, in this respect, appears to be the attempt made by the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, since the sixties, to come to a new definition of culture, away from the world of high art and literature and from the bottom up, and to study it with new analytical tools and political agenda. The work of Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams, E.P. Thompson, Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, among others, gave a new energy to the academic world (which still reverberates at the core of my attempt to make sense of such a big issue as the influence of American cinema on European culture).

Within the new notion of culture arising from academic debate there is a double-tiered analysis which recognises the coexistence, within the same social processes, of creativity, innovation and renewal and of routinisation, continuity and social order. Along these theoretical lines, I was able to frame my attempt to describe the influence of a certain type of crime films in popular culture, illustrating the ongoing cultural dialogue within a culture between the old and the new, the marginal and the dominant, innovation and tradition, that keeps the world changing. America breaks the European conventions of taste and high culture, with the spread of its films around the world, among other products, while at the same time establishing a trend, a tradition in visual culture, which the rest of the world tries to contend with. It is within this contested terrain that my research project begins, reviewing the journey of criminological science towards a better

understanding of the visual cultural heritage that has become part of our everyday world. During my review, I have found an ideal sympathetic audience for my research in the group of scholars, that goes under the name of Cultural Criminology. They share the culturalist assumptions of the Birmingham Centre, while developing an analytical framework closer to crime and its representation in contemporary society. Moreover, I have identified, in their efforts to innovate a similar 'attitude' to that of a group of creative workers, trying to change the expressive conventions within a traditional and dominant artistic community, as happened somehow with film noir. In doing so, I am using this narrative mode as a metaphor for a search of a new imagination, in the direction indicated by C. Wright Mills. Both imaginations require an effort to cross boundaries, which is the first step for building a dialogue between different traditions of thoughts.

My Research

In the second section of chapter 1, I laid out the cinematic premises and the methodological issues of my project. Film noir is a post facto category, created during the debate among groups of European critics, while watching American movies, black dramas (as they were called), from the forties related to crime, sexual desire, transitional spaces (liminality) and loss. The look, the stories and the characters in these movies are different from the standard Hollywood production of happy ending stories, populated with good-looking actors. Films noir, on the contrary, rely on the cynical stories of American hard-boiled literature from the Depression era, and on a specific visual look mostly created by European expatriates, the majority of whom went to America to escape racial persecutions. As these films, along with most of American products, were banned in Euorpe during World War II, they flooded the European cinema screens in the aftermath of the conflict, becoming cult objects for imitation all over the world. Film noir is first and foremost the result of an international dialogue, which is better examined within a comparative perspective and interdisciplinary approach, in order to disclose the various cultural, critical and psychological dimensions that made it unique. Consequently, I worked along three reflective critical stages in

order to group together the issues raised by this study. These were an ideological account of the consequences of Americanisation, following the spread of commodification of popular culture, as developed within the tradition of the German Frankfurt School; a connection of the representation of criminals in film with the historical rationalisation of penal law, as described by Michel Foucault's investigation into the combination of power and knowledge in public executions; and a psychoanalytic level, as a way of connecting the affective dimension of a narrative form, such as film, to the sociological emphasis on structure, as related to the study of cinema as institution.

A set of preliminary historical and media studies led me to some generalisations about American and European systems of public punishment in the past and the development of cinema institutions in the first half of the last century. I have individuated in Alfred Hitchcock the case of a European director who mastered the ability to work successfully on both continents, making some noir melodrama during his American experience. After this preliminary stage, I have connected issues in the sociology of crime and the representation of criminals in cinema (as in chapter 2), by using analytical tools from literary and media studies, such as narrative analysis, melodrama, semiology and semiotics, combined with notions of discourse and representation. After a false start, in terms of choice of my sample, I have used the analysis undertaken as a pilot study and moved on to redesign my sample, located in the forties: *Ossessione* as a case study for European cinema and *The Postman Rings Twice* for the American cinema, in order to see how issues of creativity, domination and prejudice are articulated together in both in the narrative and in the cinema institution.

Crime and its representations

In chapter 2, I have examined the way the source of entertainment provided by capital punishment has developed, within the wider process of secularisation, rationalisation and democratisation of penal law and modern society. A process of democratic communication replaced the hierarchical display of the power of the monarch to punish criminals, whereby a

narrative and visual tradition - melodrama - articulated stories, characters and narrative strategies to elicit emotions in readers and viewers. Alfred Hitchcocks's early American work has been analysed as an instance of melodramatic noir stories, unconventionally centred on women, unlike the main tradition of crime and noir films. I have emphasised how a psychoanalytical account of these visual stories revealed the mechanisms of condensation and displacement at work in such narratives, reconnecting a wider macro change in society (i.e. emancipation of women) to a micro detail of the filmic text. My analysis went on to show how a film is sometimes a fictional resolution of social issues in real life, and a struggle of opposing forces trying to get expressed in a narrative, producing an excess, which is a set of visual and narrative conventions that make that type of story alternatively articulated by a narrator, and easily recognisable by an audience.

In chapter 3, I developed extensively a tripartite concept of culture so that I could contextualise my analysis of films within a wider context of social development and critical theory. Doing this, I have followed the historical growth of the Birmingham Centre, already mentioned above, that developed a more 'popular' concept of culture, closer to the cultural practices of everyday life, identifying in this analysis the micro dimension of culture as a 'structure of feeling', according to Raymond Williams's definition. The second notion of culture describes a macro dimension of culture, as part of the wider economic expansion of modern societies, describing the globalisation of communication and the phenomenon of deterritorialisation. In this way, with the advent of mass media, audiences no longer share the same place locales, while at the same time large concentrations of economic and symbolic power develop as a result (cinema among them). I then reconnected this economic development to a psychological one, introducing the concept of the Imaginary, following the French scholar Jacques Lacan. In this way, I emphasised how there is always an element of the imagination in coming to terms with a notion of otherness, and clarified further development of the psychological dimension of my research to a later stage. The last notion of culture involved a socio-philosophical meditation on the future of a democratic society, which promotes inequality among its members, as elaborated by a group of Marxist scholars, the Frankfurt School. A particular emphasis is given in this analysis to the way the culture industries, Hollywood among them, have transformed a world of rationality and progress in to one of

consumerism and social conformism. This theory is important, especially as developed by successive generation of scholars, to reveal how a philosophical criticism of the present conditions can turn into the promotion of a new way of thinking and aspiring to a better world, even through a certain appropriation and reinvention of the use of cultural products in a mass society.

The conceptual link between my samples in chapters 3 and 4 is James M. Cain's novel, *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1934), with its depiction of adulterous love and crime. I have related the analysis of both *Ossessione* (1943) and its American counterpart (1946) to the question of how conservative cultures such as a fascist one, or Hollywood Studios, could allow representation of such stories, without incurring censorship. The answer is to be found in the ambivalent image of America and its mythology, as a land of social opportunity and moral decay, together with the flexibility of its narrative, which offered a certain degree of adaptability and deformation. In the Italian transposition of story to the screen, the way it is portrayed alters the meaning of the original setting. Moreover, I have shown how the story taps into the narrative conventions of European cinema, to stress the importance of real location, of stripping away the glamour of film actors and of other narrative devices to give the story a different look in comparison to the fascist films made at that time. I have also stressed that the social context within which the film was made gave it the connotation of an anti-fascist film and the title of forerunner of Italian Neo-realism. At this stage, the notion of intertextuality at this stage helped me to articulate the way the film incorporate alternative ideas, history and styles in its representation of crime, which make the story almost a documentary portrayal of a doomed love story, focusing more on the struggles between the illicit lovers than on the investigative side of the story. Furthemore, the style of the film is fragmented into many other sub-plots and styles, some of them suggesting a possible ambiguous reading of the film in terms of homosexual hints. Finally I explored Visconti's tale within the European tradition of the literature about the stranger and the flâneur.

In chapter 5, I have contextualised the representation of crime and social order in *The Postman Always Rings Twice* within the Hollywood studio system, stressing its financial structure and how this influences the nature of its films. I have identified a major tradition of storytelling, based on linearity and seamlessness, while posing gangster films and film noir against it. I have

introduced a brief account of crime films in the thirties, and explained the extent to which film noir inherits the role of portraying crime and social order in the next decade. I have contextualised the story of Cain's novel within the most important social events of the time when it was written, and explained the influence of the particular Hollywood studio (MGM) in turning a Depression-era tale of doom and dust into a glamour portrait of a murdering and adulterous couple. The issue of eroticisation and glamour brought me to the notion of the political ambiguity of film noir, its extreme flexibility and adaptability to a conservative agenda. And a comparison with other noir narratives of the same period helped to stress the conformism and conservative agenda of the film. A final description of the style of lighting in film noir and its articulation in *The Postman Always Rings Twice* allowed me to explain the extent to which film noir is a counter tradition of storytelling in Hollywood, and how it is related to a group of European film directors and technicians who emigrated to America.

I have successively hypothesised that the dialogue between different traditions present in a cultural practice reveals political agendas and social forms of subjugation at work in a system of representation. Similarly, when we compare one cultural practice with another, it becomes easier to find out what the execution of a certain performance lacks as contrasted with another.

Finally, in the last chapter, I have developed the notion of the Unconscious from psychoanalysis, since in different chapters 2 and 3 of my thesis I had introduced psychoanalytical concepts without explaining their meaning in full. This concept, of the Unconscious, originally articulated by Freud, was successively developed by Jacques Lacan, in a shift from a biological concept into a linguistic one. I have emphasised how, in this new form, it expresses a struggle in psychological (and linguistic) terms between what should stay hidden and what should be expressed, and how this concept has been used in conjunction with notion of the mirror stage to convey the impossibility to express a part of ourselves, the emotional sphere, through language. Despite the limitations of the structuralist movement, within which Lacan originally operated, this theoretical framework has been widely popular in film studies and has been a theoretical step in developing, at a later stage, a communicative base for the Unconscious. From this theoretical perspective, I have introduced the notion of fantasy and its relation to the formation of sexuality. At

the same time I have established some assumptions underpinning a study of cinema and creativity, based on the possibility that film provides its spectators with mechanisms of identification, or recollection of past events. Thus I have used a practical example from the film *Citizen Kane* as a visual embodiment of a primal fantasy of innocence. Furthermore this film has been useful in exemplifying the relationship between fantasy and unconscious memories and their relationship to hallucination as a form of satisfaction of unconscious desires. In this respect the film is based on a traumatic story of loss and separation, which finds a solution in a hallucinated form, both for the protagonist in the film and for the spectator. The film on fact is based on mechanisms of psychological identification and hallucinatory states of mind, more than action and adventure.

Using the childhood enigma in the film, I have recapitulated the psychological processes involved in both cinema and dream, in order to introduce the concept of figurality of language. To introduce the Unconscious, which is unrepresentable, language must rely on the ambivalence of its sources of inspiration and on the hallucinated forms of memories and dreams, in order to solve that enigma of childhood, which is at the basis of our human adventure. A further examination of *Ossessione* and *The Postman Always Rings Twice* has been carried out in the light of these last notions, before closing the chapter on a call for a multidisciplinary approach in the study of crime and culture.

America and Europe, in film noir, have each developed the repressed side of the other, by giving visibility to marginal ethnic groups, social tensions and cultural practices and thus challenging social hierarchy and moral conformism. I learned through these films that there is always a hidden dimension to uncover between two (or more) nations, or at the margins of a major tradition, and that this liminal space is a repository for expanding a discipline's imaginative scope, as much as for expressing utopian longings.

According to a scholar, "The study of an aesthetic form … can be useful in situating ourselves. Aesthetic forms are means for interpreting and making sense of experience. Any partial rewriting of cultural history must be a rethinking of how we make sense of our lives, of the successive episodes in the enterprise of *homo significans*, of man as a creator of sense-making sign-system" (Brooks, 1995, 206). Writing this dissertation somehow has helped me to find a part

of myself, as well as to understand the terms of my engagement with subjects of cinema and criminology. Some parts of my dissertation might not have expressed in full the challenge involved in this work. But the magnitude and quality of personal change involved in this project have certainly made the journey worthwhile.

Appendix 1
Films quoted in Chapter 4

Ossessione	1943	Luchino Visconti	Italian Noir
Il Bandito	1947	Alberto Lattuada	Italian Noir
Cronaca di un amore	1950	Michelangelo Antonioni	Italian Noir
Le Dernier Tournant	1939	Pierre Chenal	Poetic Realism
Pépé le Moko	1936	Julien Duvivier	Poetic Realism
Gueule d'Amour	1937	Jean Grémillon	Poetic Realism
La Bête Humaine	1938	Jean Renoir	Poetic Realism
Le Quai des Brumes	1938	Marcel Carné	Poetic Realism
Le Jour se Léve	1939	Marcel Carné	Poetic Realism

Appendix 2
Films quoted in Chapter 5

The Public Enemy	1931	Warner Bros	Gangster
Little Caesar	1931	Warner Bros	Gangster
Scarface: The Shame of the Nation	1932	Howard Hughes (United Artists)	Gangster
Double Indemnity	1944	Paramount	Noir
Detour	1945	Producers Releasing Corporation	Noir
The Postman Always Rings Twice	1946	MGM	Noir
Gilda	1946	Columbia Pictures	Noir
Force of Evil	1948	MGM	Noir
Crossfire	1947	RKO Radio Pictures	Noir
The Naked City	1948	Universal Studios	Noir
Sunset Boulevard	1950	Paramount Pictures	Noir
In a Lonely Place	1950	Columbia Pictures	Noir
The Woman in the Window	1945	RKO Radio Pictures	Noir
Casablanca	1942	Warner Bros	
Destination Tokyo	1943	Warner Bros	
To Have and Have Not	1944	Warner Bros	
Grand Hotel	1932	MGM	
Red Dust	1932	MGM	
China Seas	1935	MGM	
The Awful Truth	1937	Columbia Pictures	

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