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European Crime Cinema and the Auteur.

Crime narratives have always featured prominently in European "auteur" cinema. From Michelangelo Antonioni and François Truffaut to Pedro Almodovar and Michael Haneke, the fascination with stories of detection, mystery, and murders has been deeply intertwined with the directors' vision and reflection on matters pertaining to the cinematic gaze, the portrayal of social issues, and the understanding of filmic conventions.

This essay will offer an overview of the ever-changing relationship between the crime genre – understood as a global, transnational phenomenon – and European art cinema, with its national specificities. By looking at the mode of production and circulation of contemporary European crime cinema, the goal is to grasp the shifts occurring in this relationship, so understanding both the role played by the "auteur" label in the distribution, commercialisation, and appreciation of European crime cinema and how easily marketable crime storylines promote the creation of new modes of authorship.

After a brief overview of the historical nexus between crime genre and the commercialisation of authorship, this essay will engage with the case studies of Spain and Northern Ireland to argue how the problematic location of the idea of “Europe” and European cinema fits in this debate.

For a politiques des auteurs of crime films

Crime was among the key film genres leading to the first debates of the *politiques des auteurs*. The high regard of the critics of the *Cahiers du cinéma* for the work of directors such as Howard Hawks, Alfred Hitchcock, and Fritz Lang, including their generic production, generated not only a novel understanding of these figures as *auteurs*, but also a new appreciation and “cultural

capital” for the genre itself. It is significant that the same critics turned directors at the dawn of the *nouvelle vague* immediately engaged with crime storylines for their first films (See Vincendau in European Film Noir). The influence of American crime film on the Nouvelle Vague is perhaps clearest in Jean-Luc Godard's debut *Breathless* (1958), but its traces can be found in the works of many key French directors of the period, such as Louis Malle's *Elevator to the Gallows* (1958), Truffaut's *Shoot the Piano Player* (1960), Jacque Rivette's *Paris Belongs to Us* (1961), among others.¹

The fascination of European auteurs with crime narratives in fact predates the emergence of the Nouvelle Vague, as exemplified works by Jean Renoir and Luchino Visconti. On the other hand, the long-lasting impact of the *nouvelle vague* and its *politiques des auteurs* on European cinema established early on a reflection on crime as an integral part of a certain kind of artistically ambitious cinema, linking it to generic narratives. This happened in Italy with the *Rashomon*-style detection featured in Bertolucci's *The Grim Reaper* (1962) in Czechoslovak new wave, with *Fruit of Paradise* (1970) an avant-garde drama film directed by Věra Chytilová, and in Germany with Fassbinder with his gangster trilogy (*Love is Colder than Death* 1969, *Gods of the Plagues*, 1970, *The American Soldier*).

Arguably, the relationship between crime and the European New Waves developed because of three key reasons, which will also characterise more broadly auteur cinema's engagement with the genre. The first is the urban dimension of crime-associated genres such as noir and gangster films. As Tweedy argued, there is a strong connection between the emergence of new wave cinema and the investigation of the modernisation and commercialisation that occurred in the city (Tweedy 2013). The desire of the new waves to show the Lefebvrian urban revolution (Lefebvre 2003) found in the crime tradition the perfect vehicle to reveal the radical changes then occurring in the urban social geography.

Second, and connected to the previous point, is the challenge for the first generation of cinephile directors to tackle codes and conventions of one of the main international genres. Albeit easily associated with Hollywood, a crime tradition in truth was also present in different national cinematographies within popular frameworks (like French poetic realism), and the new auteurs used it as a canvas to develop a new idea of cinema, building personal style and vision on a series of well-understood thematic *topoi* like that of detection and investigation (Kovács 2008: 99)

Finally, crime is, along with drama, the genre where realism features more prominently and offers an opportunity to reflect on social issues, ethical dilemmas, and the depth of the human condition. Such realism is, arguably, what separated crime from other genres in relation to "quality" and cultural capital. It is also what made crime narratives so compelling for many protagonists of the European art cinema of the 1960s and 1970s. Films such as Visconti's *Rocco and His Brothers* (1960), Antonioni's *Blow Up*, Kostas Gravas' *The Sleeping Car Murders* (1970), Polanski's *Knife in the Water* (1962) and *Repulsion* (1965) blend generic features with a clear authorial presence and "vision".

It is also noteworthy how the auteur framework became the main critical framework, pushing to the background matters related to national cinema and genre. As Thomas Leitch succinctly points out, 'The immediate effect of auteurism was to stifle any systematic analysis of popular genres' (Leitch 2002: 59).

A fragmented approach focusing on the auteurs' works was given priority over an overarching regrouping by genre belonging and territorial labelling. The already mentioned Fassbinder's "gangster trilogy", for instance, was not critically understood in relation to "European gangster films" or even German crime cinema, as the authorial dimension was considered overwhelmingly present. As we shall discuss more in depth later, the authorial view became so dominant

that whenever directors managed to distinguish themselves within a particular genre, their oeuvre became “detached” from the development of the genre in favour of a retroactive authorial understanding.

From an industrial perspective, then, such a tendency corresponds to the paramount role played by the name of the auteur over that of genre as both label and marketing tool.

The understanding of the contemporary relationship between auteur cinema and crime narrative is indeed particularly revealing if we approach it from a commercial point of view.

In 1990, Timothy Corrigan addressed the need to consider the persistency of the auteur in critical reception by recontextualising it within ‘industrial and commercial trajectories’ (Corrigan, 1990: 46). In particular, that entailed the consideration of the commercial dimension of the auteur’s name, not unlike that of stardom.

What is interesting in the context of European crime cinema is how the business of being an auteur increasingly functioned as the main vehicle for a film’s reception and cross-border distribution. As such, the importance of the auteur became increasingly detached from the textual analyses of the films and associated with the commercialisation of a recognisable directorial figure. The cosmopolitan quality of art cinema became associated with the marketing framework of the auteur/star, which takes place in an extra-textual dimension ‘in which their commercial status as auteurs is their chief function as auteurs’ (Corrigan 1990: 48).

Arguably, such a cult of the director’s personality worked in two ways: it set a series of expectations for the reception of the films, but also transformed the cultural capital of directors strongly associated within a particular genre (see for instance Mark Betz 2013), retrospectively problematising questions of “high” and “low” culture.² The move toward the extra-textual dimension of the authorial approach also led to a detachment from the stylistic (and arguably cinephilic) reworking of the genre.

The authorial figure became a catalyst for national and transnational public financial support to the production, in particular regarding ambitious co-productions and cross-border collaborations and prestigious products through programmes such as Creative Europe-MEDIA and Eurimages.

From this perspective, the auteurs/stars managed to transcend their national connotation and consequently contributed to the cross-border distribution of European crime cinema, decontextualising it from the national labelling.³

The role played by the auteur's name in the cross-border distribution of films is even more significant considering their presence on the festival circuit, which is central to the distribution, promotion, and cultural capital of European cinema.

The quality crime film.

The relationship between film genre and auteur cinema is even more fragmented and problematic in the contemporary production landscape, particularly following the changes in cultural policies as a response to the financial crisis of 2008.

While the ubiquitous presence of crime narratives in contemporary European TV productions attracted wide critical attention and scholarly investigations, crime cinema has struggled to get systematically into the cultural spotlight. That does not mean that there isn't a healthy production of European crime films, but, generally speaking, crime narratives seem to better dwell in the format of TV serialisations, which travel across borders and generate the kind of critical debates that we have witnessed in this conference and the overall Detect Project.

The absence of crime film at the top of the European box office is conspicuous. In Tim Bergfelder's recent analyses of the status and understanding of European popular cinema in the 2000s, the landscape is still dominated by comedies, grossing well at the local level, and heritage films, including nostalgia and historical films (Bergfelder, 2015). Other trends underlined

by Bergfelder include the dominant transatlantic co-productions, the new development of parody films, the affirmation of animations and productions aimed at the family market, the central role played by middlebrow films, thanks in particular to their ability to gather supranational and national financial support.

Therefore, despite the critical and box-office success of films such as *Gomorra* (Matteo Garrone 2008), *In Bruges* (Martin McDonagh, 2008), *A Prophet* (Jacques Audiard, 2009), *Easy Money* (Daniel Espinosa, 2010) *Victoria* (Sebastian Schipper, 2015) etc., the role of crime films is still marginal and of difficult categorisation, underlying more the permeability between art-house and mainstream (in a way not dissimilar from middlebrow productions like heritage or historical films) than presenting a clear generic identity.⁴ This is even more relevant considering the move away from the national context to consider a European approach. While there are examples of genre-fication at the national level (from German's *krimis* to French *polar* and Italian mafia films) it is also true that those phenomena are increasingly rare in contemporary European cinema.

As other popular genres, crime films overall struggle to make a theatrical impact beyond their national markets, in particular when not associated with an established authorial figure. As soon as they manage to cross the national borders their cultural capital changes, entering the realm of specialist cinemas, with their festivals, art-cinema theatres, and late-hour TV broadcasting. From this perspective, I argue that crime cinema is revealing of some of the most significant tendencies of the contemporary European productions, in terms of state support, relations between local representations and global influences, commercial and artistic aspiration etc.

A quick overview of the contemporary crime film production in Europe reveals three inter-linked aspects:

First, the auteur increasingly works as a label. The prestige of the director is very much present within the genre which, in many cases, as we shall discuss later, represents a starting point of

their career (this is the case of Danny Boyle and Alejandro Amenábar, for instance). However, we are witnessing a lesser degree of experimentation in terms of textual innovation, with the director's name working as a marketing tool for distribution deals, festival runs, and to attract financial support.

Second, crime films dwell between national cinema and Hollywood cinema. While crime narratives consistently appear in the work of recognisable European auteurs, significantly more than other genres, the cultural reference of crime films continues to be Hollywood. This is particularly interesting, on the one hand, because of the persistent association between auteur and national cinema. On the other hand, the Hollywood references underline the struggles to establish a supranational, "European" tradition within the genre.

Third, the emergence of "quality crime". The central role played by national broadcasters in the production of European films arguably led to the offer of "quality crime films", understood here as commercial productions with auteurist ambitions.⁵

Quality crime and new forms of authorship within the genre: Spain

Spanish contemporary cinema represents an excellent example of the shifting relationship between the crime genre and the auteur label in a national context. Such shift can be understood as a change of policies and state intervention in support of filmmaking, which led to a new generation of directors using the crime genre as a vehicle for authorship, and the consequent focus on "quality" commercial productions.

Critics and scholars did not fail to notice the increasingly prominent role played by crime (and its subgenres) within the contemporary Spanish production landscape and its relationship with matters about the new auteur figures and national cinema.

Ann Davis (2005), for instance, engages with contemporary Spanish thriller films by looking for the presence of national features in a genre dominated by Hollywood productions. She maintains that recent crime films and thrillers challenge the persistent separation between a Spanish national cinema critically understood for its artistic merits and the commercial nature of a genre which was critically considered alien in respect to the national production. However, Davis argues ‘for the need and value of tackling the thriller when theorizing about national cinema’ (Davis, 2005: 175). On the one hand that can be obtained by considering markers of Spanishness in the plot and settings. On the other hand, however, it is important also to consider the ‘ability of the Hollywood thriller to enter Spanish national space’ (Davis 2005: 177) and how that can lead to its “naturalisation”. This asks for an approach towards national cinema which focuses on its porosity; on the ability to open and adapt to external influences more than being crystallised and presented in a vacuum.

In this context, I would argue that matters of territorialisation come into play, not only in films that reflect on the liquidity of the national borders but also in the representation of different regional contexts and identities. The Hollywood thriller format, therefore, is adapted and localised, while it stresses different tensions between local and global, resulting in ‘an inflexible understanding of the concept of national cinema and how genres operate within a process of continuous transnational cross-fertilisation and evolution’ (Beck and Rodríguez Ortega 2008: 12).

I would argue that such transnational cross-fertilisation is present also at the regional level, embedded in a production system increasingly dominated by the competitiveness of the location markets and the access to regional funding.

The contemporary development of Spanish crime cinema allows us also to grasp the ways the art–commerce dichotomy is framed within the context of a national cinema. Carmen Herrero (2011), for instance, considers from this perspective the recent development in the Spanish

subgenre of rural thrillers. Herrero aims to do so by following the critical model on Spanish cinema proposed by Beck and Rodríguez Ortega, which suggests considering ‘the interrelationships between national cinemas, transnational media flow and genre as discursive frameworks for constructing meaning’ (Beck and Rodríguez 2008: 18).

Looking at films from debutant directors such as *Night of the Sunflowers* (Sánchez-Cabezudo, 2006), *The King of the Hill* (López- Gallego, 2007) and *The Backwoods* (Serra, 2007) Herrero points out ‘the different strategies they have used to negotiate their 'intermediate status' between genre and European art film as a plausible model’ (Herrero 125)

It can be argued that those strategies occur in the overlapping of different levels, those of text, production, circulation, and cultural capital.

The textual level pertains to the presence of an authorial style within the use of genre-based stylistic and narrative features. The production level (that we shall discuss later) regards instead the kind of nation and transnational support that these crime films receive, showing not only different degrees of ambition (with the employment of internationally recognisable stars, for instance) but also the direct link with the level of circulation, that is the ability of crime film to reach a global audience, albeit through specialised channels.

Herrero argues that the wide film festival presence of the three rural thrillers she analyses led to international distribution. For instance, she underlines how ‘the successful distribution abroad of Koldo Serra's *The Backwoods* is linked to its exhibition at international festivals’ (Herrero 2011: 132). However, according to the European Observatory, the film had a limited theatrical run outside of Spain, which is surprising considering it is a tripartite co-production with France and the UK, featuring an international cast; it is also however revealing of the position of contemporary crime cinema in the international market, considering that the three films analysed by Herrero met the same fate.

Such position overlaps once again with the authorial ambitions of the films and the "commercial" nature of the genre and, looking at the distribution, manifests itself in three ways.

Firstly, crime films are generally strong within a national market in spite of their international framework of references, more important to meet a national audience accustomed to Hollywood crime movies than to appeal to foreign audiences.

Secondly, the main chance for European crime films to cross the national borders is through the festival circuit. When they travel theatrically, they mainly do so through art-cinema networks. The festival run adds prestige and cultural capital to the production, further establishing it as "quality cinema", therefore contributing to the creation of new national auteur figures, which then function as a recognisable label.

Finally, and as previously mentioned, to be successful in international distribution European crime films need to be associated with a well-established auteur. Such authorial figure not only works as a catalyst for a transnational production (able to attract regional, national and supra-national support) but offers to the film a cultural, marketable capital supporting a wider international distribution.

Leaving for a moment the Spanish case study, we can see examples in other European countries. Italian director Garrone's early neo-noir *The Embalmer* (2002), for instance, had a very limited foreign distribution despite its selection by the prestigious *Quinzaine des Réalisateurs* at the 2002 Cannes Film Festival. However, his later film *Dogman* (2018), which to some extent recalls the crime narrative development of *The Embalmer*, obtained a capillary theatrical distribution in every European country.

While this argument is predictable, considering that the watershed film for the marketability of Garrone was the global hit *Gomorrah*, once again it confirms the centrality of the director's name for a crime film's ability to cross national borders.

A Spanish case study: Marshland

Within the Spanish context, Valeria Camporesi and Jara Fernández Meneses' work (2018) help to understand from a production perspective the drive toward quality crime films. Looking at three Spanish films by Alberto Rodríguez – (*Group 7*, 2012), *Marshland*, 2014 and *El hombre de las mil caras* (Smoke and Mirrors, 2016) - they engage directly with some of the features I have argued so far.

According to them, the work of the independent production company Atipca Film, in particular in its collaborations with Rodríguez, is revealing of the role played by a certain “genre cinema” in “the overall picture of quality films in the Spanish film industry of the new millennium” (Camporesi and Fernández Meneses 2018: 203).

Camporesi and Fernández Meneses contextualise Atípica productions against the various changes occurring during the 1990s within the Spanish system of support for the cinema. On the one hand, such changes dictated a shift of the criteria to award state aid from quality to commercial cinema, shrinking the support and leaving the productions to deal with the competition of the global industry; on the other hand, with the law 22/1999 compelling private and public television companies to invest 5–6% of their annual income in film production, they tied the fate of the film industries to the needs of the broadcasters.

The legislation and industrial changes occurred in the 1990s led therefore to a new interest in genre cinema as a vehicle for the promotion and affirmation of authorial figures and to offer good production values.

Marshland is a good example of such quality genre production which manages to be commercially viable. Costing slightly under €4 million, *Marshland* was commercially very successful at the box office earning €7,800,000 for 1,300,000 viewers in Spain (Camporesi and Fernández Meneses 2018). According to the European Audiovisual Observatory, it was also widely distributed in Europe, adding further 576.000 admissions in its theatrical run in eighteen countries.

For the production of Rodriguez films, Atípica relied on the collaboration with television partners by teaming up with Canal Sur and Atresmedia Cine (the film production branch of the multimedia conglomerate Atresmedia, which also owns the private television companies Antena 3 and La Sexta) which provided 50% of the budget, designed the marketing campaign and guaranteed national and international distribution (Bronte 2015). In Spain, the film was distributed by Warner Brothers España, which again features as a recurring partner in collaboration with Atípica film.

However, it is noteworthy that, unsurprisingly, *Marshland* received also national and regional support, amounting respectively to the 30% of the budget through the Instituto de la Cinematografía y de las Artes Audiovisuales (ICAA) while and 5% were the contributions at the subnational level, through the Andalusia film commission.

The film obtained a plethora of national and international awards (including the European Film Academy People's Choice Award for Best European Film in 2015) participation in the film festival circuits, and authorial recognition for its director (with critics underlying thematic and stylistic features).

What I would like to draw attention to is the marketing shift occurring in such generic productions. Arguably, European generic productions crossing borders tend to experience a change in their cultural value, even simply because subtitled films are mainly screened in art-cinema circuits, thus promoting a different reception, audience expectations and understanding of the product itself. Therefore, the marketing strategy usually changes from a primary objective of a target audience attracted by the genre to an audience of cinephiles, with crossing borders as a secondary objective.

However, for a case like *Marshland* the marketing strategy moved differently. As Cristina Sutherland of Atípica films explains:

We always have a primary objective and a secondary objective. [...] You have to identify a target and then design a strategy to reach that other secondary target. In the case of Marshland, Alberto already had a name among the most cinephile people, so the goal was that: a more adult audience, a movie lover, urban. But later it became a more mass phenomenon (Cristina Sutherland in Bronte, 2015, my translation)

From its conception, the marketing strategy of the film did not prioritise the crime element and the genre belonging. The authorial art-house dimension of the film was a marketing vehicle, leaving the generic nature of the film to be exploited at a second stage, aiming at a younger audience, once the film established itself in the media.

What is particularly relevant considering both the genre belonging and the vast portfolio of films supported by the Andalusia film commission is that Marshland is the only contemporary film present in the Andalusia tourist board website to directly promote the tourism in the area, with a dedicated map of a route featuring the film locations.

While discourses about the territory underline the national belonging of the film and, again, link it to a national cinema of quality, critics in and out of Spain did not fail to draw connections between the film and foreign influences. Spanish reviewers tend to apply an authorship approach to the film while international reviews focus mainly on the historical settings; there is a consistent reference to an HBO series like *True Detective*, both in the choice of characters and the “deep south” location.

What is interesting here is again the need to reframe a European production within American references, virtually moving from very regional and national contextualization to a global cultural horizon that completely bypasses Europe and its long tradition of auteur-crime production/“quality crime”.

This is particularly important as the critical failure to do so means a missed opportunity to create the kind of links, connections and transnational influences which would allow an understanding and a conceptualisation of crime film as part of a European popular cinema.

In this way, again crime is understood within an authorial framework and against the backdrop of global/North American influences.

Crime film and a small nation cinema: Northern Ireland.

The production shift witnessed in Spain can be also seen, in different degrees, across European cinematographies, following the increased involvement of broadcasters in film production and the renewed centrality of film festivals as a way to access foreign markets. (Footnote on the recurring presence of crime across European festivals).

Germany, Denmark, Italy, Belgium, and France, among others, have shown similarities with the production and cultural context described in relation to Spain. Crime not only frequently recurs in the transnational work of established auteurs (Claire Denise, Lars Von Trier, Haneke etc.) but is also a commercially conscious first step in the career of promising debutants. The crucial involvement of broadcasters at the early production stage, alongside pre-sales agreements and the reliance on soft money (in particular at national and regional levels), made the genre as the most viable encounter between commercial sustainability and artistic ambition, reshaping some of the debates surrounding an understanding of national cinema within Hollywood influence.⁶

In this scenario, I would argue that the case of Northern Irish Cinema is noteworthy as it offers a different perspective on such debates, in particular in relation to Spain.

Very different in size of the population and cinematic outputs, the Northern Ireland screen industries experienced a quick development thanks to the country's ability to attract inwards investment and runaway productions. Within a few years, the small country hosted a series of productions such as *City of Ember* (Gil Kenan, 2007) and HBO's *Game of Thrones* (2009-2019), which allowed the expansion or creation of studio facilities, the showcase of a wide array of locations and the possibility of training local crews to meet the skill-sets demands of the globalised industry.

The national film commission (Northern Ireland Screen) managed, through a series of ambitious strategic plans, to put the small country on the global production map by offering a series of pull factors based on locations, studio space, and funding. As John Hill argues, The Northern Ireland Film commission 2001 strategy document entitled "The most powerful industry in the world" made clear that the core policy objectives were industrial in character (Hill, 2006: 182) aiming at creating new jobs, attracting investments and shaping a positive image for NI in a way that can contribute to building confidence in all sectors.

Those production policies work alongside the 2007 introduction of a Cultural Test for British films to access the generous tax relief scheme. Such test, according to Hill, arguably marked the shift from cultural to economic objectives as its definition of "national" (based on a point system, looking at the crew, story, settings, language, etc.) encourages the presence in the territory of transnational Hollywood productions.

The result of pull factors and production policies in Northern Ireland creates a general uncertainty around the development of indigenous production and the definition of a Northern Irish cinema. On the one hand, the inward investments and its economic returns led to political support for the industry, considered as an economic driver. Moreover, the unprecedented development of infrastructures and local-crew skillsets is sure to be attributed to the successful estab-

lishment of the country as a production hub. On the other hand, the presence of runaway productions in represents an impossible competition that indigenous independent productions have to face to access crew and resources.

The strategy of Northern Ireland Screen, in this regard, seems to build an industry to develop on top of a national cinema. To do that, development funds are crucial to foster local writers and directors who, according to the Head of Production Andrew Reid, is what national cinema is really about.⁷

In this context, it is interesting to address the presence of crime narratives as a strategic basis for the establishment of a viable national cinema. Among the projects awarded by NIS development fund, two crime films in particular have been supported by the film commission from the early inception up to the final stages of production. These, I argue, set the tone of the kind of indigenous cinema the small country can aspire to.

Bad Day for the cut (2017), directed by Chris Baugh, is based on a screenplay written by Chris Baugh and Brendan Mullin with the support of Northern Ireland Screen, which also contributed financially to the production. The low-budget film tells the story of a farmer living a peaceful life with his mother until she is savagely murdered. Shot in Northern Ireland with a local crew, *Bad Day for the Cut* had an international film-festival run and was picked by Netflix at the Sundance Film Festival. Arguably, it is now one of the more easily accessible Northern Irish films around the world.

The universal “revenge” story, alongside the Irish settings, allowed the film to strike a balance between a production able to transcend the national borders (albeit giving up theatrical distribution ambition) and quickly recouping its small budget.

While *Bad Day for The Cut* establishes a standard for a successful indigenous production, *A Patch of Fog* (2015) represents a clearer ambitious attempt to promote a marketable auteur.

Written by John Cairns and Michael McCartney and developed thanks to the support of NIS (which again was involved in the production), the thriller is the first feature film directed by Michael Lennox.

Lennox can be considered as one of the most promising Northern Irish directors, following his Oscar-nominated short film *Boogaloo and Graham* which was awarded as best short film at the BAFTA. *A Patch of Fog* tells the story of an acclaimed Northern Irish novelist who is blackmailed into an unwanted friendship by a security guard.

A true indigenous production (written and directed by local talents, shot with mainly local crew) *A Patch of Fog* premiered at the 2015 Toronto Film Festival and enjoyed limited theatrical release. It was mainly shot in Belfast, in less than a month, between the 21st of November and the 19th of December 2014, showcasing a series of key cityscape landmarks mixing the modern and “traditional” sides of the city.

What is noteworthy is that both films are set in contemporary times and move away from storylines dominated by The Troubles.

Albeit in this case the production was not financially aided by broadcasters or significant pre-sale agreements, these films present a similar trajectory to the Spanish cases: “quality” films, showcasing a degree of national features and international influences, able to travel mainly through festival circuits or broadcasters.

Conclusions: “Europe” in European crime cinema.

The difficulty in defining film noir because of its textual and extratextual connotations, can easily be applied to the more general crime category, in particular in the European context.⁸

A definition of “crime film” can follow that employed by Naremore for film noir inviting to consider it as an intellectual category (Naremore 1998).

A category that in the European film landscape manages to be ubiquitous and absent at the same time, its presence being constantly overshadowed by matters regarding Art and commerce, Hollywood and Nation.

However, crime presence at the centre of such debates makes it a crucial element in textual generic innovations and production and distribution practices. The European dimension is visible only in the art-cinema framework when the genre is associated by a well-established auteur able to transcend national connotations and to find an international theatrical distribution beyond the festival circuits.

What is increasingly missing is a European and “popular” designation of the genre. While scholarly works have been generally focussed on the need for auteur cinema to “adapt” to rules of commerce to become sustainable, little attention has been given to the genre’s requirement to aim for a “quality” status, to travel. The result is a problematic genrefication of European crime cinema away from its “popular” nature, a change in cultural capital that occurs even at the production stage and contributes to the difficult definition of the genre in a European context.

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¹ On French Film Noir and its influence see Vincendeau (2006)

² In European crime film that was the case of Dario Argento, for instance.

³ A contemporary example is the authorial figure of Michael Haneke and the crime narratives that dominate films such as *Funny Games* (1997) and *Hidden* (2005).

⁴ See for instance Geoff King’s Analysis of *In Bruges* (2011).

⁵ On quality film see King (2016)

⁶ On the Hollywood influences on the understanding of national cinema, see Schlesinger (2000)

⁷ Interview with the author, 2015

⁸ On the film noir as a “conceptual black hole” see Andrew Spicer (2006)