

Naples Reduced *ad absurdum*: Sergio Corbucci's *La mazzetta* (*The Payoff*, 1978)

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Abstract

Adapted from the first novel by Raymond Chandler's Italian translator Attilio Veraldi, *The Payoff* (*La mazzetta*, 1978) is a relatively unusual attempt at hybridization between crime (mainly hard-boiled) fiction and comedy, made at a time when Italian cinema industry was drastically changing. My paper starts off with an analysis of the film's adaptation strategies, then moves on to focusing in particular on the peculiar way the city of Naples appears in the film and on its implications for the private/public dichotomy explored by the film as well as by Chandler's novels. Thereby, and by referring briefly (in order to better frame *The Payoff* historically) to *Neapolitan Mystery* (*Giallo Napoletano*, 1979), directed by Corbucci in the wake of *The Payoff*'s success, I will try to identify the film's oblique relation to crime genre, and particularly to the hard-boiled genre Veraldi had tried to replicate in Neapolitan territory.

Keywords: Hard-Boiled; Naples; Porosity; Bar; Public.

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1 Introduction

In 1980, 240 million tickets were sold in Italian movie theatres: less than half of the tickets sold in 1970 (525 million) (Bondanella and Pacchioni 2017: 516). During that decade, “the Italian market lost its clout and began, more and more, to be just another consumer of cinema and television produced in the United States” (Brunetta 2009 [2003]: 169). This very deep crisis of Italian cinema industry which started to be felt during the 1970s “had an especially devastating effect on the Italian genre cinema, which lost most of its public with the growth of commercial TV” (Nicoli 2017: 216).

Crime fiction was no exception. Two crime films by genre master Sergio Corbucci, *The Payoff* (*La mazzetta*, 1978) and *Neapolitan Mystery* (*Giallo napoletano*, 1979), are particularly indicative of how rapid and how radical the changes of national film industry had been in those years: although they were made little more than one year apart, they seem to belong to different historical eras altogether.

This paper will focus almost exclusively on *The Payoff*; *Neapolitan Mystery* will only be described in broad brushstrokes to suggest how different it is from the other film. By analysing *The Payoff* and cursorily considering *Neapolitan Mystery*, my goal is to show that the former (an adaptation of the eponymous novel by Attilio Veraldi, released two years before) can be regarded as an unusual, tentative attempt to cope with the then-dawning crisis of Italian genre cinema by doing with a specific genre (crime fiction) something relatively unusual and off-the-beaten-track, before the industry (as *Neapolitan Mystery* shows, or begins to show) became something too different from what it used to be for that same genre (as well as genre in general) to be adopted, used and explored in similar or even just comparable ways.

2 *The Payoff*: from book to film

Authored by one of the most respected translators of Raymond Chandler’s works into Italian, *The Payoff* is unsurprisingly a Chandlerian pastiche, particularly reminiscent of *The Big Sleep* (Chandler 1939) because of its narrative thickness, not to say outright obscurity (Jourdan 2018: 103-4). Like many novels by the American writer, *The Payoff* revolves around moneyed elites’ dark private/family underside, as investigated by a private eye (Alessandro “Sasà” Iovine) who, however, unlike Chandler’s Philip Marlowe, is a semi-impromptu accountant and an amateur detective. Iovine is hired by businessman Michele Miletti to find his young daughter, who eloped along with some compromising documents on him and Nicola Casali, his business partner whom he was trying to scam. Turbid family intrigues are discovered along with systemic corruption in the construction industry – which, however, remains unsanctioned.

Marlowe has often been depicted as the twentieth century version of a knight in shiny armour, i.e. as a neo-romantic idealist hopelessly fighting a crooked world that cannot be defeated, and that he is nonetheless variously part and parcel of (not least because of his penchant for violent methods). Iovine gives up Marlowe’s idealism and ethics (Carloni 1999: 50-1), and partakes in the corruption of the world he investigates: all he is after is the money he can wring out of Miletti and Casali, with no real moral qualms and no real interest in restoring justice. Still, as a small fish among much bigger ones, he does not break the law that much, and thus he turns out to be not at all an unsympathetic character, much like the imperfect but very humane characters of *commedia all’italiana*. The casting of *commedia all’italiana* axiom Nino Manfredi (a Roman actor who had already played a character epitomizing Neapolitan-ness in *Treasure of San Gennaro* [*Operazione San Gennaro*, Dino Risi, 1966]) as Iovine is, in this sense, somewhat revealing.

Veraldi’s and Corbucci’s versions differ most notably in the portrayal of Luisella, Iovine’s fiancée. Her depiction in the book is one-sidedly misogynistic: therein, Luisella is little more than a whiny and cheaply manipulative young woman, showing up first nearly 100 pages into the book. In the film, Luisella appears even before Iovine does. The first scene of Corbucci’s version is nowhere in Veraldi’s, and has been invented during the adaptation process as a way to swiftly introduce the characters: late in the morning, Iovine lies in bed while Luisella takes care of household matters (opening the windows, fixing the phone, tidying up etc.) and scolds him for having missed an appointment which could have gotten him a steady job. Iovine is portrayed as a lazy good-for-nothing who can stay afloat only because he is a little shrewd. Way more proactive and resourceful than Iovine, and even an active helper of his investigations, Luisella comes across, as both characters put it,

as his *nanny*. However, the more she follows her partner in his centrifugal trajectories (particularly so in the Calcata-set climactic showdown with the villain's henchmen), the more the weak, naïve and fearful sides of her character start turning up, making her look more and more like the Luisella *in the book*. Far from being an inconsistency in her characterization, this is a sign that the latter is strictly dependent on *spatial* criteria: a queen within the household, she starts losing part of her control (which, however, she largely holds when compared to the book version of herself) the farther she gets from it. Conversely, after having been depicted as powerless in his own home (in which unwanted strangers enter more than once), the farther Iovine gets from familiar territory, the more credibility he gains as a hard-boiled detective. The shift in his characterization is thus indirectly enhanced by the opposite shift in Luisella's, both inversely owing to the centre/periphery, *private/public* axes.

That the private/public dichotomy turns out to be central in a Naples-set film is no surprise. One of the most famous and oft-quoted pieces ever written on city, Walter Benjamin's and Asja Lacis's essay on Naples revolves around the concept of "porosity". Neapolitan "private life" is "dispersed, porous and commingled" (Benjamin and Lacis 1986 [1925]: 171). "What distinguishes Naples from other large cities is something it has in common with the African *kraal*; each private attitude or act is permeated by streams of communal life. To exist, for the Northern European the most private of affairs, is here, as in the *kraal*, a collective matter" (171). There is no such thing as a neat border between public and private, but only thresholds that are never not precarious, frail, easily interpenetrable - like the balconies, windows, arches etc. making Naples a quintessentially theatrical city.

Surprisingly though, this porosity is almost completely absent from the film. In point of fact, not much of Naples can be seen in the film at all. On the credits, a single pan ties the grandiose, wide spaces of Piazza del Plebiscito to the tiny, narrow alleys of Quartieri Spagnoli, but this visual statement about the city's well-known urban heterogeneity is just about the only thing that Corbucci shows about Naples (whereas, for instance, the aforementioned *Treasure of San Gennaro's* engagement with the porous, intricate spaces of the city was incomparably greater, particularly in its long chase scene). As Marlowe zigzags across the many neighbourhoods of a notoriously centreless city like Los Angeles (Babener 1984: 133-4), Veraldi and Corbucci have their Iovine travel back and forth from the heart of Naples all the time. Naples, however, is no Los Angeles, so Iovine's constant centrifugal moving around leads him perforce outside Naples' municipality (Mount Faito, where one of Miletti's houses is), province (Mondragone) and even region (Formia, Rome and Calcata, all of them in the Lazio region). As a result, a comparably short amount of screen time is devoted to Naples, and then again mostly for interiors (Iovine's and Miletti's homes; the hospital where Miletti is kept), a couple of customary shorelines, and a few action scenes where the city is a fairly indifferent backdrop. Tellingly, in a scene set in the Parco Persichetti area, Miletti shows Iovine a huge apartment building he has recently built; the camera, however, only frames the two men talking, never the building in front of them. When Iovine runs away from Miletti's uphill mansion, chased by the latter's henchmen, the visual emphasis is not only on the bends and the slopes of the spacious, empty streets he is riding on, but also on the vertical trajectory of one of the thugs falling down from atop the hill and dying; since the uphill/downhill divide is, in Naples, oftentimes an outright social matter, with the wealthier living in airy areas on the hills while the poorer dwell in cluttered spaces closer to sea (Gendrault 2017: 67-80), the point being visually made here by way of *mise en scène* has to do with class, as is so often the case in Chandler's literature.

Thus, *The Payoff's* spatiality owes considerably to Chandler's, particularly because of Iovine's constant to-and-fro movements outside Naples and back. Still, in order to properly frame *The Payoff's* spatial dimension, it should not be forgotten that Chandler's and film noir universes very large overlap, but do not perfectly coincide. Scholars generally agree that the hard-boiled tradition was but one of the components of film noir - if a very important one to be sure. "Chandler did not form this cinematic style, but he contributed significantly to it" (Luhr 1991: 5). Hard-boiled has influenced film noir greatly, but those two are not exactly the same thing. *Murder My Sweet* (Edward Dmytryk, 1944) for instance, while a noir classic through and through, "destabilises Chandler's world, undercutting the comparative detachment and superiority that Marlowe preserves in the text through verbal wit" (Horsley 2001: 36). In his book on how "centripetal and centrifugal space, tendencies toward concentration and dispersal, recur and often overlap throughout film noir" (2004: 18), Edward Dimendberg credits Chandler in particular with having "chronicle[d] the centrifugal identity of southern California" (168) while still keeping Los Angeles as a centre; in *The Payoff*, Corbucci borrows (from Veraldi) Chandler's

centripetal-centrifugal movements to *avoid* dealing with the city, thereby eschewing noir genre altogether. Many reasons could be cited (besides the somewhat obvious hybridization between crime fiction and comedy the film patently pursues) for *The Payoff* not being a noir, but suffice it to mention that while “the noir city is a realm in which all that seemed solid melts into the shadows” (Krutnik 1997: 103), there is neither shadow nor darkness in Corbucci’s clear, sunny Naples. The latter showcases virtually no dark side harbouring vices, sins and secrets, because they are (like Miletti’s unwanted relatives) simply displaced far away from the city’s perimeter.

3 *The Payoff*’s ending: porosity regained

There is, however, one crucial exception to the film’s absence of porosity, namely its last scene. A dialogue takes place between Iovine and police commissioner Assenza, who investigates on the matter more officially than Iovine and often functions as Iovine’s superego figure of sorts given how questionable Iovine’s morality and honesty are. The two bitterly agree that crime does pay: like in Chandler’s novels, corruption is rampantly widespread and largely unpunished. Miletti dies in hospital, killed by his own entourage out of vengeance, but Casali gets completely away with it, as he has Assenza transferred to another city thanks to his political connections. Unlike the book, however, the film sets this dialogue in a *bar* in downtown Naples. Much to the detectives’ amused dismay, a number of people around them (mostly bar customers, casual passers-by, inhabitants of the houses nearby) at that very moment are chatting on the streets about the very crimes they have been investigating all along. Everybody seems to be overly familiar with them even before anything hit the newspapers; everybody is sure that no crime will be sanctioned. Thus, no better use is left for those important documents in Iovine’s hands, attesting to Miletti’s and Casali’s illegal practices, than being put under a coffee table leg so as to steady it.

The pervasiveness, endemicity and impunity of corruption are of course among the main tenets of hard-boiled literature (Cawelti 1976: 147). Yet whereas the consciousness of the hard-boiled detective typically stands proudly against corruption, this is not the case in *The Payoff*, a film in which corruption is not really in the foreground: the postwar Neapolitan system of protections granted by the local political class to a clique of unlawful entrepreneurs is dealt with in little more than a few dialogue lines, rather than recreated with painstaking, inquiry-based realism like in the *denuncia* films by Francesco Rosi (e.g. *La sfida*, 1958, or *Hands over the City*, *Le mani sulla città*, 1963). The detective/hero’s individual, idealist consciousness is replaced by a *collective* consciousness held by the people as a whole, fully aware of the pervasiveness, endemicity and impunity of corruption, and resignedly tolerating these for lack of any better option - although in the film’s climax Iovine all of a sudden starts to fight for justice against Miletti, thus abruptly and unannouncedly acquiring a moral standing that he hitherto did not have at all (and that is nowhere to be found in the book either), arguably in order to keep a minimum of viewers’ identification. The protestant, moralist individualism of hard-boiled tradition is replaced by a quintessentially mediterranean kind of fatalism, utterly disenchanted with the open omnipresence of evil.

From the beginning, according to Grazia Misano (1988: 240-4), Italy’s crime fiction has shown how deeply Italian culture is rooted in a *cultura dell’omertà* (that is, a mindset hinged on the code of silence): since corruption is everywhere and everybody knows it, why should one bother denouncing it and fighting it? Still, what matters most is not the content of the scene per se, but rather its *place*: a bar. While in the book Iovine does have an office, in the film he does not: his office is the bar. In a scene absent from the book, Iovine heads to his usual bar in the morning to carry out some dubious networking and take care of his daily shady business (e.g. selling false licenses). In the Rome-set part of the film, another bar appears where a nosy customer goes out of his way to listen to Iovine speaking on the phone, thereby clarifying what is at stake in the other bar scenes in Naples: *the tension between the public dimension and the private dimension*, where the former disappears behind the latter.

Fredric Jameson pointed out that Chandler’s offices are special places. “The twin possibilities by certain characters (most notably Marlowe himself) of both an office and a private dwelling” is a “dominant symbolic expression” of “the thematics of private and public” (Jameson 2016: 47). Chandler’s novels showcase different permutations of the house-office scheme (e.g. some characters have a home and an office, some others have

their offices inside their homes, some others have no office at all etc. [Ivi: 47-8]), each of which corresponding to a certain sociological articulation of the public-private divide. A number of instances “of a vacancy, of an empty space” (Ivi: 67) serve as office space: the “vacant murder cabin” in *The Big Sleep* or *The Lady in the Lake* is “a kind of figurative office in its own right – the ‘office’ of those in flight” (Ivi 68). The bar regularly attended by officeless Iovine can be regarded as a surrogate office similarly standing for a certain articulation of the public-private divide, namely one in which what should allegedly be kept private and secret, i.e. all kinds of fishy, not-so-legal or outright illegal practices, is in fact on full display, carelessly public. Society, as it were, disappears behind a never-ending, unceasingly in-progress, informal, private networking activity of a less than legal kind. What should be concealed is *hidden in plain sight*.

This leads us to another important change of Veraldi’s original story. As is well known, the history of crime fiction virtually begins with a document hidden in plain sight: in Edgar Allan Poe’s seminal “The Purloined Letter” (1844), all characters are at some point after a letter that is (and/or has been snatched) right before their eyes. In the book, Iovine finds the folder allegedly containing the compromising documents (and in fact, completely empty) only during his second inspection of Miletti’s house (in the first one, he found his wife’s corpse along with her lover’s). “When I reached the last steps of the staircase I saw it lying a few yards ahead of me on the floor. I’d been near it at least three times, when I came in, when I went out, when I came back to the house, and I hadn’t noticed” (Veraldi 1978 [1976]: 30). However, nowhere else the book reproduces a similar hidden-in-plain-sight kind of situation, whereas the film includes at least three such situations. Thus, in Corbucci’s hands, it becomes a leitmotiv. In one scene, the fatal folder is on a table between Assenza and Iovine, ignored by both. In another, a corpse is lying on a couch; for forty long seconds, Iovine cannot see it because it lies behind his back, but spectators can, as they have optical access to a master shot of the entire room, where both Iovine and the dead body are. Most relevantly, as we have seen, the last thing we see before the end credits is Iovine hiding those important documents in plain sight, i.e. under the coffee table. By reiterating thrice a hidden-in-plain-sight kind of arrangement which is only featured once in the book, the film stresses much more forcefully the interpenetration of public and private: no secret is a real secret, but just an open secret.

Naples’s trademark porous borders between public and private, overlooked by Corbucci in favour of a properly Chandleresque back-and-forth spatiality (so much so that Iovine’s and Luisella’s characterizations, as we have seen, strictly depend on neat distinctions between public and private on one side and centre and periphery on the other), disposing of the need to portray the city in the first place and thus making the film something other than a noir, returns with a vengeance through this “hidden in plain sight” leitmotiv, and especially so in the ending.

In this scene, “rhyming” with the second scene of the film (introducing the same bar as Iovine’s “office”) and similarly implying that nothing can express the essence of Naples better than a bar can (which makes it unnecessary to show much else of it), the camerawork and editing themselves seem to mimic the city’s porosity. After a few classically-filmed lines of dialogue between Iovine and Assenza, more and more people overhear and unceremoniously enter the initially-private conversation, forcing the camera to sprawl in all directions to follow the increasingly large set of participants: first a street peddler next to Iovine, then a couple of customers behind him, a traffic warden in front of the bar, a valet, a random woman passing by, a couple of other women on their balconies in the vicinity, a tv repairer on the bar’s roof, a waiter inside the bar. As this network gets formed, what initially was a private matter is revealed as completely public.

4 What price localness?

Corbucci was ultimately not interested in Veraldi’s mannerism. He did not want to produce a faithful copy of Chandler’s hard-boiled aesthetic. This is why his film ruled out several Chandlerian elements featured in Veraldi’s book. In the latter, Miletti’s mountain mansion is as kitsch as the houses of Los Angeles’ nouveaux riches (Babener 1984: 134-5), but in the film its architecture is rather ordinary. Like Marlowe oftentimes (Cawelti 1976: 146), Veraldi’s Iovine is indirectly involved in the crime from the very beginning (Miletti’s daughter’s boyfriend, found dead in Miletti’s living room short after she disappeared, had previously been warned by Iovine on Miletti’s payroll to stay away from her), but not so Corbucci’s. The director asked Luciano De Crescenzo and

Elvio Porta to write a second draft of the script (the first one was written by Massimo De Rita and Dino Maiuri) to take some hard-boiled aesthetic away from it and add more Neapolitan-ness to it (Caldiron 1993: 91). But whilst this is confirmed by a number of clichéd details (e.g. the shoeshiner, the illegal car parking attendant, and the like), it should not be overlooked that De Crescenzo himself has declared (Jelardi 2022) that he and Porta were careful not to overdo local folklore.

One notable exception is the film's most celebrated scene, when Casali and his henchmen torture Iovine by forcing him to eat an enormous amount of squid ink spaghetti. It is tempting to read this scene as a combination of imported hard-boiled tradition (Marlowe too gets very often beaten up and sometimes tortured as a result of his unwanted investigations [Cawelti 1976: 143]) and local context. Yet despite the reference to something as clichéd as pasta might echo the stereotypical emphasis on mediterranean food that, in more recent decades, can be found in several instances of the subgenre of crime fiction that many call "Mediterranean noir" (Cánovas 2005: 49), the rest of the film suggests that Veraldi's and Corbucci's interest in the local dimension was limited at best. For example, they were not really interested in the localness of the criminal scene. Miletti and Casali are two private, individual entrepreneurs who are forced to stick together for a time while still competing with one another by means that are sometimes illegal. Their complicity with political powers covering them notwithstanding, there is no trace of *organized crime* in *The Payoff*: all that there is, is private, individual economic agents who play their own game and whom capital *spontaneously* interconnects beyond legality, much like American businessmen in hard-boiled literature. Neither Veraldi nor Corbucci are trying to depict a specifically Neapolitan kind of illegality, and while it is true that they tried to transplant an American model in a different context, the temptation to regard these two components (that is, the American model and the local context) as somehow symmetrical should be resisted.

It would be misleading, in other words, to look at *The Payoff* with contemporary eyes, inevitably conditioned by decades in which crime fiction in particular (Dall'Asta, Levet and Pagello 2021) has robustly relied on various kinds of negotiation between the local and (among other similar categories) "Transnationalism, Copopolitanism and Glocalization" (Roudometof 2005). What Corbucci did in *The Payoff* with the local and the non-local (i.e. the hard-boiled tradition) is something quite different, and resembling if anything a *reductio ad absurdum*. While recognizable traits of Neapolitanness are very much there (albeit kept squarely under control by Porta and de Crescenzo), particularly in the comedic hero (albeit partly de-Neapolitanized by being played by a quintessentially Roman axiom of *commedia all'italiana* like Manfredi), Naples's *spatiality*, i.e. its porosity, has been completely replaced by a Chandleresque back-and-forth-movement (overlapping with the public/private dichotomy and thereby going as far as underlying the very characterizations of Iovine and Luisella), leaving the few instances of significant interpenetration between public and private (e.g. the first bar scene, right after the incipit in Iovine's apartment) somewhat at the margins of the film qua sparse symptoms of that exclusion, until the porous borders between public and private regain abruptly the foreground in the bar-set ending. Also because of a fundamental mismatch between the city and genre frameworks (as we have seen, the relative absence of a full-fledged representation of the city depends as much on the film belonging to the hard-boiled tradition as it does on it *not* belonging to noir), the city's spatiality turns out to be something that cannot *not* be there, i.e. something that is bound to turn up even when the film actively discards it.

As to why Corbucci embraced this curious approach vis-à-vis genre and space at that particular historical moment, it is useful to take a look at *Neapolitan Mystery*.

5 Neapolitan Mystery

In a well-known article outlining the differences between "Neo-television" (Italian TV from the 1980s onwards) and "Paleo-television" (Italian TV before the 1980s), Umberto Eco remarked that, whereas generations of cinephiles had to work hard to discover the cinematic gems hidden in film libraries, "Neo-TV gives us Toto, and early Ford and perhaps some Méliès all in one evening" (Eco 1990 [1983]: 252). The background of *Neapolitan Mystery*'s credits is a poster showcasing Totò and Alfred Hitchcock: a rather blatant declaration of intents for a film trying to replicate *The Payoff*'s commercially successful blend of crime fiction and comedy. The following scene, showing Marcello Mastroianni playing a mandolin in a portside restaurant, is no less unambiguous in

signalling that *Neapolitan Mystery* plays with clichés with a lot more postmodern-leaning self-awareness than *The Payoff*. Indeed, many of the differences between the two films come down to the Paleo- vs. Neo-television divide. However far-reaching is *The Payoff*'s genre hybridization, it is never inconsistent: even when Corbucci injects a tinge of *poliziottesco* by portraying Marullo, Miletti's right-hand man, as a much meeker and more innocent character than he is in the book until he takes justice in his own hands and guns down his boss, the hard-boiled logic that informs the overall film is never broken.

Paradoxically, *Neapolitan Mystery* is much closer to a noir than *The Payoff* is: oftentimes lit in the 1979 film according to the genre's conventions (Jourdan 2018: 249), noir streets are typically "transformed into the privileged mise-en-scène of the masculine unconscious" (Naremore 2008: 44), in that they materialize the psychic impasses of men in crisis through a grey, indetermined area between objective reality and subjectivity, and indeed there is something of the twisted, dreamlike logic of that genre in the hero and the villain being the mirror image of one another (both limp, both are musicians, both lives are heavily affected by unsolved father-son issues). But as hapless Mastroianni is involved in increasingly haphazard, far-fetched and outright random plot complications (including a renowned Swiss conductor, a *giallo*-esque haunted house and a denouement based somewhat tritely on a love triangle having nothing to do with the city, and stretching somewhat implausibly to the Holocaust no less), no narrative logic can be said to inform consistently the film from beginning to end, except a sheer principle of accumulation (frequently by way of repetition: every few minutes, someone falls from a window) *ad nauseam* of mixed, and even wildly heterogeneous elements (Sineux 1981: 74). Much like TV "Hold-all programmes" (Eco 1983: 247), whose only rule is that anything goes, *Neapolitan Mystery* is a patchwork of fragments, where action/suspense scenes are squeezed arbitrarily with little to no narrative motivation just to unabashedly prevent tension from deflating too much, and several breaks are taken from the investigation (and from crime genre altogether) to enable lengthy romantic duets between Mastroianni and young starlet Ornella Muti, or farcical ones between him and legendary Neapolitan comedian Peppino de Filippo. As a result, rhythm is loose and uneven, echoing Neo-TV's mix between American TV's "jazz-type" pacing "and home-made (or Third World, e.g. Brazilian) material that has an archaic rhythm" (Eco 1983: 253), whereas *The Payoff*'s rhythm was much more compliant with hard-boiled genre's conventions, its hybridization with comedy notwithstanding. This patchwork effect extends to the locations, ostensibly more numerous than *The Payoff*'s, more wildly disparate (a few of them are faux Neapolitan locations filmed in Rome) and sometimes displaying kitschy, campy, artfully all-over-the-place décors that are not without foreshadowing a hint of the queerness of part of 1990s New Neapolitan Cinema (Marlow-Mann 2011: 132-158). Invariably linked together by car rides, *Neapolitan Mystery*'s locations come across less as reciprocally porous than as fragments stitched together; on the whole, then, porosity applies less to Naples internally than to the borders between it and the rest of the world: a number of actors and/or characters are foreign (Michel Piccoli, Zeudi Araya) or non-Neapolitan (Renato Pozzetto, not to mention Mastroianni and Muti themselves) stars. As Mirco Melanco (1994: 156-157) rightly observed, the non-negligible presence, in the film, of cocaine (whose main global trafficking hubs included Naples with increasing intensity in those years) enhanced the feeling of connectedness between the city and the global dimension already implied by the international cast.

6 Conclusion

While withdrawing from Veraldi's mimetic mannerism, Corbucci found a different way to be faithful to Chandler and his hard-boiled aesthetics by emphasizing, through the adaptation process, the centrality of a certain articulation of the public/private dichotomy. Despite *The Payoff*'s lack of a Marlowe-esque wannabe-knight-in-shiny-armor (replaced by a collective awareness of the pervasiveness of and universal involvement in corruption), Naples and Los Angeles, both much zigzagged upon, are much less separated by their respective concrete features than linked by what they abstractly stand for, namely a grey area where public law and private transgressions no longer clash with one another.

After much "Marlowesque" back-and-forth, inevitably hitting the outside of as vertiginously sprawling a city as Naples, the film centripetally ends not in a place customarily standing for the city's geographical centre (e.g. Piazza del Plebiscito, showed in the opening credits), but in the public space virtually metonymically replacing the city as such, namely that non-geographical centre that the bar is, a place not belonging to a specific area of Naples (though actually randomly and interchangeably placed near Porta Capuana) but embodying the

grey area between public and private, lawfulness and lawlessness, which in Chandler's novels rather tended to come to the fore through the office-home dichotomy. On one side a centreless metropolis of phony surfaces hiding a rotten morality (Babener 1984: 128), on the other side a city whose centre is revealed as the non-geographical, generically public space where rotten morality simply reaches the surface and gets hidden in plain sight: in this light, the latter (Naples) does not come across as something completely different from the former (LA), but rather as an *intensification* thereof, or a different, *porous* permutation of the same thing.

Indeed if, on the one hand, both Corbucci's Naples and Chandler's LA are the embodiment of a fundamental condition of late capitalism, namely the inoperativeness of law, rendering corruption structural and turning the supposedly autonomous public and private dimensions upside down, on the other hand the difference between them, which stands out precisely by pretending that Naples can be filmed as if it were LA, is that its porosity resurfaces even when it is overlooked. This happens, as we have seen, specifically when a nosy crowd gathers around the bar in the last scene, possibly bringing along a certain *consolation* that can be read between the lines: if public and private are porous, this means that some kind of public dimension exists after all, whereas in Chandler the public dimension is, more than anything, consistently suspected as absent behind its dubious façade. After all, *The Payoff* is also, and very deliberately, a comedy, so its consolatory side should not come as a surprise.

But even more than on the explicit hybridization between crime and comedy, *The Payoff*'s oblique attitude vis-à-vis genre ultimately depends on its unusual handling of localness, in that Naples's porous spatiality is first overlooked and then restored *in extremis*, in ways that are unmistakably distinct from any kind of negotiation between the local and the non-local (whether global, transnational or whatever else). Readily explainable by recalling that, in those years, the previously genre-based national industry (however famously unorthodox and multifarious Italian movie industry's approach to genre may have been) was heading toward a time of radical and even traumatic changes, as well as by the ensuing need to try out something different without giving up the soundness and consistency of the genre's inner workings (as will be the case only a few months thereafter in *Neapolitan Mystery*, much more attuned to the then-impending Zeitgeist and in which the logic of the genre vanishes in a purely cumulative addition of fragments), *The Payoff*'s obliqueness makes it quite unique compared to the cinematic crime fiction produced in Italy before and after it, and thus deserving to be studied also, on top of whatever analytical framework (historical, genre-related or else) might prove suitable, as a singularity in its own terms.

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